

CODICOLOGICAL EVIDENCE OF READING IN
LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND, WITH
PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO PRACTICAL
PASTORAL VERSE

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Thesis approved for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English,
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2016

ABSTRACT:

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This study advances and adds detail to our history of the reading of verse in England c.1350–1500. Scholarship has established major twelfth- and thirteenth-century changes in reading, and linked these changes to manuscripts containing the modern Middle English verse canon. Historians of early modern reading have also argued for distinctive changes in their own period. But the examination of reading between these two clusters of change has been limited. This study therefore asks how later medieval Middle English verse was read.

The surviving copies of *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae*, two hugely successful religious instructional poems, form the primary body of evidence. This body is augmented by reference to hundreds of other manuscripts containing Middle English verse. Together, these can reveal much about what was normal and abnormal in reading. They are also an important part of the context for the reading of more canonical Middle English verse. Manuscript studies often proceeds through case studies of individual books and unusual evidence such as marginalia. This thesis turns to codicology to understand more widespread evidence for reading, combining qualitative case studies with quantitative techniques borrowed and developed from continental scholarship.

The first chapter examines evidence of provenance, revealing that both *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae* were read by an impressive range of people and remained current into the sixteenth century. The second chapter considers the navigational aids used in copies of both poems. Reading in this period has been characterised as ‘discontinuous’, but it could be discontinuous in diverse ways, and readers also read continuously. The third chapter is a large-scale study of books’ size and shape, showing how these features can reveal books’ reading histories, sometimes in counterintuitive ways. The fourth chapter contends that readers in this period attended closely to rhyme and probably read for balanced rhyme structures. The fifth chapter uncovers the ways in which these poems were rewritten for new readers and investigates the composition of the Southern Recension of *The Prick of Conscience*, arguing that this new text was partly a formalist intervention. The conclusion summarises the new ‘baseline’ history of the reading of Middle English verse which is offered here, and gestures towards implications for our reading of the Middle English poems which are canonical today.

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Finally, I am very, very grateful to my parents for their encouragement and their willingness to act as sounding boards and to help with proofreading.

Conventions and Short Forms

Conventions

Manuscripts are identified in their first appearance by place, library and shelfmark, but I omit place when this is clear from the library's name (for example, 'Leeds University Library'). Subsequent references usually take the form of the shelfmark alone, but other information may be included when the shelfmark is not distinctive ('MS 423', for example). Copies of *The Prick of Conscience* are accompanied on their first appearance by the number that Lewis and McIntosh assigned to them, for example 'MV52' for 'Main Version 52' or 'SR12' for 'Southern Recension 12'. Manuscripts which I have not consulted are preceded in my bibliography by an asterisk.

When referring to evidence within manuscripts I give folio numbers followed, if necessary, by line numbers within the page, numbering from the page's first line (excluding headers) rather than from the beginning of the text. When giving line numbers for evidence on folios containing multiple columns I use lower-case letters before numbers to distinguish between columns; 'b26-7', for example, refers to the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh lines of the second column on the page.

In transcriptions I retain manuscript word division and scribes' use of the graphs **v** and **u**. Expanded abbreviations, including superscript marks, are italicised. Where the distinction is relevant to my discussion, text copied in red ink by the scribe is bold. I transcribe *punctus* as full stops. Graphs deleted by scribes using any method are enclosed in square brackets ([]). Graphs inserted above the line are enclosed in carets (^). Conjectured graphs which are now unreadable due to damage are enclosed in angle brackets (< >). I use the stroke (/) for virgules and the vertical bar (|) for line breaks in short verse quotations.

Unless otherwise stated, line numbers given for quotations from *The Prick of Conscience* are taken from *Morris*, and line numbers given for quotations from *Speculum Vitae* are taken from *SVRE*. Unattributed translations are my own. When texts have titles in languages other than English but are written in English, I capitalise their titles according to conventions for English titles. Editions are referenced and sorted by the names of their editors because most of the texts involved are anonymous and I often reference editions primarily for their editors' practices and theoretical statements. When referring to books published in the United States I omit state from location except when there is a clear risk of ambiguity (e.g. 'Cambridge' and 'Cambridge, MA'). Tables of quantitative evidence are grouped in a numbered sequence in Appendix 1 and referred to by number (e.g. 'Table 2') in the main text.

In the electronic version of this thesis for deposit in the Oxford Research Archive the two manuscript images have been removed. Almost all of the arguments were deliberately written without relying on images with the expectation that this would happen, so I hope the thesis will remain readable in this state.

Short Forms

Add.	Additional
BL	London, British Library
<i>BPP</i>	Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall, eds, <i>Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375–1475</i> (Cambridge, 1989)
BodL	Oxford, Bodleian Library
CUL	Cambridge, University Library
<i>DG</i>	Robert E. Lewis and Angus McIntosh, <i>A Descriptive Guide to the Manuscripts of the 'Prick of Conscience'</i> , Medium Aevum Monographs, n.s., 12 (Oxford, 1982)
<i>DMLBS</i>	R. E. Latham and others, <i>Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources</i> (Oxford, 1975–2013)
EETS	Early English Text Society
GCC	Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College
HEHL	San Marino, Henry E. Huntington Library
<i>IMEV</i>	Carleton Brown and Rossell Hope Robbins, <i>The Index of Middle English Verse</i> (New York, 1943); and Rossell Hope Robbins and John Levi Cutler, <i>Supplement to the Index of Middle English Verse</i> (Lexington, 1985)
<i>IPMEP</i>	Robert E. Lewis, N. F. Blake and A. S. G. Edwards, <i>Index of Printed Middle English Prose</i> (New York, 1985)
LPL	London, Lambeth Palace Library
<i>NIMEV</i>	Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards, <i>A New Index of Middle English Verse</i> (London, 2005)
<i>MED</i>	Robert E. Lewis, gen. ed., <i>Middle English Dictionary</i> , < http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med >
Misc.	Miscellaneous
<i>MLGB</i>	N. R. Ker, <i>Medieval Libraries of Great Britain: A List of Surviving Books</i> , 2nd edn (London, 1941; 1964)
<i>MMBL</i>	N. R. Ker and A. J. Piper, <i>Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries</i> , 5 vols (Oxford, 1969–2002)

<i>Morris</i>	Ralph Hanna and Sarah Wood, eds, <i>Richard Morris's 'Prick of Conscience': A Corrected and Amplified Reading Text</i> , EETS, o.s., 342 (Oxford, 2013)
n.s.	New Series
o.s.	Original Series
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> , < http://www.oed.com >
<i>PBE</i>	Alexandra Gillespie and Daniel Wakelin, eds, <i>The Production of Books in England 1350–1500</i> , Cambridge Studies in Palaeography and Codicology, 14 (Cambridge, 2011)
Rawl.	Rawlinson
SJC	Cambridge, St John's College
SJO	Oxford, St John's College
<i>SVRE</i>	Ralph Hanna, ed., <i>Speculum Vitae: A Reading Edition</i> , EETS, o.s., 331 and 332, 2 vols (Oxford, 2008)
s.s.	Supplementary Series
TCC	Cambridge, Trinity College
TCD	Dublin, Trinity College
TCO	Oxford, Trinity College
TNA	National Archives, < http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk >

Illustrations

Figure 1	BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 139, f. 45 ^r	2
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Introduction

How was English verse in manuscript read in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England? It is customary to begin a doctoral thesis with a quirky piece of evidence that raises relevant questions, but I would like to start with a seemingly boring piece of evidence. Figure 1 is a fairly typical page of Middle English verse in manuscript.¹ It is typical in part because it contains little immediate, striking evidence of reading: there are no convenient marginalia recording readers' reactions, and there are not even any marginal notes transmitted as a guide with the text. All we have to work with are the material of the parchment, the page's size and shape, the ruling, the script, the text of the poem itself and, if we collate them, that text's relationships with other witnesses' texts. Most of the other pages in the manuscript are similarly unpromising.² We do not know who copied this manuscript, who owned it, who read it or where these things might have happened. Nevertheless, people probably did read it. And in fact, the vast majority of the pages in the vast majority of surviving manuscript copies of Middle English poems resemble this one, in that they offer no convenient evidence for the ways in which they were read.

So: how to tell how English verse in manuscript was read in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England? Faced with such seemingly uninformative pages, how to begin answering this question in a way that does justice to relevant manuscripts which

¹ BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 139 (MV82), f.45^r.

² MS Rawl. poet. 139 contains just one marginal note, which simply reads 'Indulgencia' and sits next to the beginning of the poem's discussion of pardon, on f.48^v, l.3. There are also a few runs of marginal numbering in Roman numerals: for example, for the list of topics in Part V, f.51^r, l.25 to f.51^v, l.5; and for the fourteen pains of hell, ff.83^v–90^v.

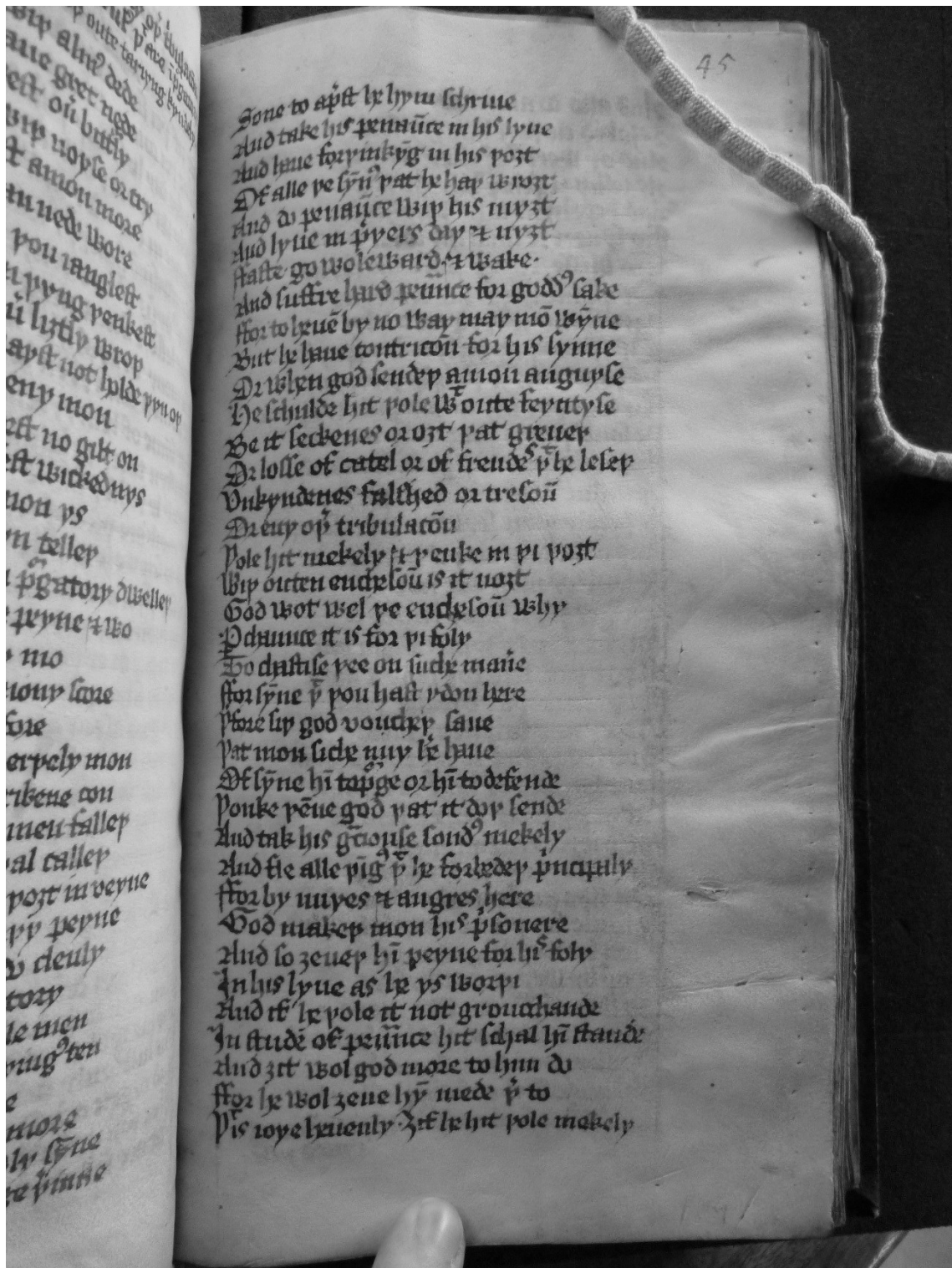


Figure 1

BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 139, f. 45^r: a typically 'boring' manuscript page. Approximately 75% of actual size.

are not as exceptional as the Ellesmere Chaucer—which is to say nearly all the manuscripts? There has been useful research on which books were read, where and by whom.³ However, detailed studies of how reading happened have been limited in number and scope. This is a study of the *how* of reading, a study which particularly focuses on religious instructional verse in Middle English.

More than two decades ago Robert Darnton surveyed work in the history of reading and identified some avenues for further investigation.⁴ There have been some general treatments of the subject, with varying attention to reading before the early-modern period.⁵ Some of Roger Chartier's broad, provocative studies of writing and reception are pleasingly attentive to pre-modern readers.⁶ Paul Saenger has used the

³ For example: David N. Bell, *What Nuns Read: Books and Libraries in Medieval English Nunneries* (Kalamazoo, 1995); Philippa Hardman, 'Domestic Learning and Teaching: Investigating Evidence for the Role of "Household Miscellanies" in Late-Medieval England', in *Women and Writing, c.1340–c.1650: The Domestication of Print Culture*, ed. by Anne Lawrence-Mathers and Philippa Hardman (Woodbridge, 2010), 15–33; Julia Boffey, *Manuscript and Print in London, c.1475–1530* (London, 2012); and Kathleen L. Scott, 'Past Ownership: Evidence of Book Ownership by English Merchants in the Later Middle Ages', in *Makers and Users of Medieval Books: Essays in Honour of A. S. G. Edwards*, ed. by Carol M. Meale and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge, 2014), 150–77. Susan H. Cavanaugh, 'A Study of Books Privately Owned in England, 1300–1450' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1980), and the continuing *Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues* project are key resources for the study of who read what.

⁴ Robert Darnton, 'History of Reading', in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. by Peter Burke, 2nd edn (Pennsylvania, 1992; 2001), 157–86.

⁵ Shafquat Towheed and others, eds, *The History of Reading*, 3 vols (Basingstoke, 2011) begins at 1500. Two excerpted chapters in Shafquat Towheed and others, eds, *The History of Reading: A Reader* (London, 2010) are relevant to the period: they are taken from Paul Henry Saenger, 'Silent Reading: Its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society', *Viator*, 13 (1982), 367–414; and Armando Petrucci, *Writers and Readers in Medieval Italy: Studies in the History of Written Culture*, trans. by Charles M. Radding (New Haven, 1995). Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, eds, *A History of Reading in the West*, trans. by Lydia G. Cochrane and Andrew Winnard (Cambridge, 1999) is the collection of essays on the topic with the most thorough treatment of the Middle Ages. See also Andrew Taylor, 'In His Secret Chamber: Reading and Privacy in Late Medieval England', in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. by James Raven and others (Cambridge, 1996), 41–61.

⁶ Roger Chartier, *L'ordre des livres: lecteurs, auteurs, bibliothèques en Europe entre XIVe et XVIIIe siècle* (Aix-en-Provence, 1992); Roger Chartier, *Forms and Meanings: Texts, Performances, and Audiences from Codex to Computer*, trans. in part by Lydia G. Cochrane (Philadelphia, 1995); and Roger Chartier, *Inscrire et effacer: culture écrite et littérature (XIe–XVIIIe siècle)* ([Paris], 2005).

evidence of word division in manuscripts to track the shift toward silent reading in the earlier Middle Ages.⁷ In a similar vein, Malcolm Parkes described how changes in word division and glossing reveal changes in early medieval reading, and laid out the rise of organisational help for readers on the page, and of a compiling approach to the organisation of whole books, two shifts which accompanied the rise of scholastic reading.⁸ He also traced the development of punctuation marks and some other features of page organisation such as lineation, and the ways in which they guided reading processes.⁹ Richard and Mary Rouse, meanwhile, picked out the development and standardisation of organisational tools and techniques for books in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.¹⁰ More recently, Lesley Smith has offered accounts of the increasing technical sophistication of on-page Bible commentary and of books used in higher education in this period.¹¹

⁷ Saenger, 'Impact'; and Paul Henry Saenger, *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford, 1997).

⁸ M. B. Parkes, 'The Influence of the Concepts of *Ordinatio* and *Compilatio* on the Development of the Book', in *Scribes, Scripts and Readers: Studies in the Communication, Presentation and Dissemination of Medieval Texts* (London, 1991), 35–70.

⁹ M. B. Parkes, 'Reading, Copying and Interpreting a Text in the Early Middle Ages', in *A History of Reading in the West*, ed. by Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier (Cambridge, 1999), 90–102; *Scribes, Scripts and Readers: Studies in the Communication, Presentation and Dissemination of Medieval Texts* (London, 1991), 1–18 and 35–70; M. B. Parkes, 'Punctuation and the Medieval History of Texts', in *Pages from the Past: Medieval Writing Skills and Manuscript Books*, ed. by P. R. Robinson and Rivkah Zim (Farnham, 2012), VI, 265–77; M. B. Parkes, 'Medieval Punctuation and the Modern Editor', in *Pages from the Past: Medieval Writing Skills and Manuscript Books*, ed. by P. R. Robinson and Rivkah Zim (Farnham, 2012), VII, 337–49; and M. B. Parkes, '*Folia librorum quaerere*: Medieval Experience of the Problems of Hypertext and the Index', in *Pages from the Past: Medieval Writing Skills and Manuscript Books*, ed. by P. R. Robinson and Rivkah Zim (Farnham, 2012), X, 23–50; and M. B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (Aldershot, 1992).

¹⁰ Richard H. Rouse and Mary A. Rouse, *Preachers, Florilegia and Sermons: Studies on the 'Manipulus florum' of Thomas of Ireland* (Toronto, 1979), 3–36.

¹¹ Lesley Smith, *The 'Glossa ordinaria': The Making of a Medieval Biblical Commentary*, Commentaria, 3 (Leiden, 2009), especially 108–14; and *Masters of the Sacred Page: Manuscripts of Theology in the Latin West to 1274*, The Medieval Book, 2 (Notre Dame, 2001).

There has been useful work on early-modern reading practices. Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, for example, produced a now-classic discussion of both the process of reading and its contexts for one early-modern Englishman.¹² Both printed and handwritten marginalia in early-modern books have received monograph-length studies.¹³ Heidi Brayman Hackel has studied material evidence for reading with attention to more ‘normal’ readers.¹⁴ Meanwhile, engaging in a debate among early-modernists about changes in reading in their period, and the reappearance of continuous reading—that is, reading from books’ beginnings straight through to their endings—Peter Stallybrass has offered a usefully long view of discontinuity and continuity in reading.¹⁵ Looking backward to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, he concludes that discontinuous reading was the norm in this period.

There are, then, histories of reading which identify significant changes both before the later medieval period and after it. But between the persuasive histories offered by Parkes, Rouse and Rouse, Chartier and Saenger on the one hand and the work of early-modernists such as Stallybrass on the other there is, if not a gap, then at least a dip in the level of detail in our history of reading. For example, a recent broad and useful survey of information management and reading from antiquity to the early-

¹² Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, “‘Studied for Action’: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy”, *Past and Present*, 129 (1990), 30–78.

¹³ Evelyn B. Tribble, *Margins and Marginality: The Printed Page in Early Modern England* (Charlottesville, 1993); William W. E. Slights, *Managing Readers: Printed Marginalia in English Renaissance Books* (Ann Arbor, 2001); William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia, 2008); Stephen Orgel, *The Reader in the Book: A Study of Spaces and Traces* (Oxford, 2015).

¹⁴ Heidi Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England: Print, Gender, and Literacy* (Cambridge, 2005).

¹⁵ Peter Stallybrass, ‘Books and Scrolls: Navigating the Bible’, in *Books and Readers in Early Modern England: Material Studies*, ed. by Jennifer Lotte Andersen, Elizabeth Sauer and Stephen Orgel (Philadelphia, 2002), 42–79.

modern period leaps straight from thirteenth-century changes to the impact of print in the later fifteenth century.¹⁶ It seems unlikely that the period *c.* 1350–1500 was a time of universal and undifferentiated discontinuous reading conducted in the scholastic mode and assisted by full programmes of navigational aids. How total in effect were the changes of the tenth to the thirteenth centuries? If there were no great shifts in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, what did reading look like during this period of consistency? If the period saw no paradigm shifts in reading practice, then we should add detail to our existing history.

There have been some specific useful studies of reading practices in this period.¹⁷ Yet it is striking how much we do not know about quite basic questions. One example of such a question might be: in England in, say, 1420, was it more natural to open an unfamiliar book at the front or at the back? Intuitively, the front seems a more probable answer, for however discontinuously someone might read they would have read from left to right unless they were reading Hebrew. However, fourteenth-century and fifteenth-century English bindings have straps or clasps which close from the front board to the back board. In the fourteenth century, straps which fastened and unfastened in the middle of the back board were the norm.¹⁸ Early in the fifteenth century a new

¹⁶ Ann M. Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven, 2010), 11–46.

¹⁷ For example, Vincent Gillespie, “‘*Lukyng in haly bukes*’: *Lectio* in some Late Medieval Spiritual Miscellanies”, in *Looking in Holy Books: Essays on Late Medieval Religious Writing in England*, Brepols Collected Essays in European Culture, 3 (Turnhout, 2011), 113–44; Jennifer Bryan, *Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 2008); and the focused study of possible intentions in one compilation in Amanda Moss, “‘*Þat þine opun dedis be a trewe book*’: Reading around Arundel’s Constitutions”, in *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. by Kantik Ghosh and Vincent Gillespie, *Medieval Church Studies*, 21 (Turnhout, 2011), 395–412.

¹⁸ See for example the fastening remains on the bindings of BodL, MSS Laud Misc. 169 and Laud Misc. 372.

layout, with straps or metal clasps fastening at the edge of the back board emerged, and gradually replaced the earlier arrangement.¹⁹ Opening these bindings while they were face up would have been difficult, because their fastenings were on their rear boards. Opening the bindings of larger books with straps fastening in the middle of the rear board while they were face up would have been impossible.²⁰ And this might have held true for many lighter books too: for instance, the surviving limp parchment binding of one notebook full of information and prompts for confessors retains horn button fastenings in the middle of its back cover, as though it too was opened from the back rather than from the front.²¹ David Rundle has proposed that a habit of opening books from the back explains why fifteenth-century cataloguers sometimes record *secundo folio* phrases from texts later in books.²² Furthermore, texts are frequently only titled in their explicits, as though these were more likely to be readers' first points of contact. This is not to say that books were certainly opened from the back, but the balance of evidence suggests that books might have been more normally investigated 'backwards' from a modern point of view, even though individual texts within them would still be read forwards.

¹⁹ J. A. Szirmai, *The Archaeology of Medieval Bookbinding* (Aldershot, 1999), 251–61. I believe, from conversations with other scholars, that the idea that the clasps on English bindings required that they be opened from the back might have originated with Parkes.

²⁰ See for example the remains of the fastenings on the binding on the large missal BodL, MS Laud Misc. 302.

²¹ SJC, MS S.35; and Alexandra Gillespie, 'Bookbinding', in *PBE*, 150–72 (161–62).

²² David Rundle, 'Lectio probatoria, cave lector', *Bonae litterae: Occasional Writing from David Rundle, Renaissance Scholar*, 19 March 2013 <<http://bonaelitterae.wordpress.com/2013/03/19/lectio-probatoria/>> [accessed 19 August 2014]. See also James Willoughby, 'The *Secundo Folio* and its Uses, Medieval and Modern', *The Library*, 12th series, 3 (2011), 237–58.

So we currently do not know enough to be able to say which way of entering an unfamiliar book felt more natural to readers in the period (if one way did; if all readers felt the same way; and so on). This issue might seem narrow and unimportant but it particularly affects the history of the reading of compilatory, segmented texts such as *The Canterbury Tales*, and complicates studies of compiled books or booklets, studies which sometimes assume that readers would think of books or booklets in a linear, front-to-back manner.²³ More important is the point that if such an argument is plausible, whether or not it is right, then reading in this period had complexities which deserve closer investigation and taxonomy than is possible in the available histories of earlier and later changes. There is still so much that we do not know.

What kinds of evidence does the period offer for an investigation of reading? Historians of reading in later periods have examined readers' own marginalia.²⁴ However, while marginalia offer some insight into the reactions of some readers to some books, the study of marginalia inevitably obscures readers who did not leave reactive annotations or did not leave marginalia at all; it also privileges texts which were more likely to elicit annotation. Polemical writing read by adversarial scholars tends to feature heavily in such studies. Furthermore, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries

²³ For example, John Finlayson, 'Reading Romances in their Manuscript: Lincoln Cathedral Manuscript 91 ("Thornton")', *Anglia*, 123 (2005), 623–66 (644–66); and Arthur Bahr, *Fragments and Assemblages: Forming Compilations of Medieval London* (Chicago, 2013), 105–54, 209–54. Compare Derek Pearsall's wander through the maze of miscellany theory in 'The Whole Book: Late Medieval English Manuscript Miscellanies and their Modern Interpreters', in *Imagining the Book*, ed. by Stephen Kelly and John J. Thompson, *Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe*, 7 (Turnhout, 2005), 17–29; Pearsall sounds a note of caution about the act of anthologising itself, and the thought of readers opening books from the back might perhaps suggest similar caution about the ways in which we imagine readers reading these manuscripts as anthologies.

²⁴ H. J. Jackson, *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* (New Haven, 2001); H. J. Jackson, *Romantic Readers: The Evidence of Marginalia* (New Haven, 2005); Sherman, *Used Books*; Orgel.

many readers did not leave helpful marginal reactions. A few fifteenth-century readers in England annotated extensively and illuminatingly as they read: identified examples include John Shirley and William Worcester.²⁵ But these were exceptionally bookish readers, influenced in some cases by humanist thought and practice, and therefore the marginalia they left are, while valuable and worthwhile objects of study, not representative. Leaving aside unusually prolific and personal annotators such as Shirley and Worcester, more rote and unexciting annotations in manuscripts from later medieval England have also received substantial studies. The topical and source notes found in copies of some Chaucer texts have received particular attention in recent decades.²⁶ Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and others, meanwhile, have examined marginal notes (and in some cases, illustrations), often those left by those she terms ‘professional readers’.²⁷

²⁵ Margaret Connolly, *John Shirley: Book Production and the Noble Household in Fifteenth-Century England* (Aldershot, 1998); Catherine Nall, *Reading and War in Fifteenth-Century England: From Lydgate to Malory* (Cambridge, 2012), 72–74; Daniel Wakelin, *Humanism, Reading, and English Literature 1430–1530* (Oxford, 2007), especially 93–125.

²⁶ Notably in Graham D. Caie, ‘The Significance of Marginal Glosses in the Earliest Manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales*’, in *Chaucer and Scriptural Tradition*, ed. by David Lyle Jeffrey (Ottawa, 1984), 75–88; and Susan Schibanoff, ‘The New Reader and Female Textuality in Two Early Commentaries on Chaucer’, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 10 (1988), 71–108; and as a model for textuality, in Martin Irvine, ‘“Bothe text and gloss”: Manuscript Form, the Textuality of Commentary, and Chaucer’s Dream Poems’, in *The Uses of Manuscripts in Literary Studies: Essays in Memory of Judson Boyce Allen*, ed. by Charlotte Cook Morse and others, *Studies in Medieval Culture*, 31 (Kalamazoo, 1991), 81–119. See also the more comprehensive study addressing one text in Stephen Partridge, ‘Glosses in the Manuscripts of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*: An Edition and Commentary’ (unpublished PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 1992).

²⁷ Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, ‘Professional Readers at Work: Annotators, Editors and Correctors in Middle English Literary Texts’, in *Opening Up Middle English Manuscripts: Literary and Visual Approaches*, ed. by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Maidie Hilmo and Linda Olson (Ithaca, 2012), 207–44; Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Denise Despres, *Iconography and the Professional Reader: The Politics of Book Production in the Douce Piers Plowman* (Minneapolis, 1999); Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, ‘Professional Readers of Langland at Home and Abroad: New Directions in the Political and Bureaucratic Codicology of *Piers Plowman*’, in *New Directions in Later Medieval Manuscript Studies: Essays from the 1998 Harvard Conference*, ed. by Derek Pearsall (York, 2000), 103–29; and the essays collected in Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo, eds, *The Medieval Professional Reader at Work: Evidence from Manuscripts of Chaucer, Langland, Kempe, and Gower*, *English Literary Studies*, 85 (Victoria, 2001).

These studies frequently orbit a relatively small collection of marginal notes: it is striking that several studies characterise glosses, at least, as largely an absence, not a presence, in the manuscript record.²⁸ Indeed, in most manuscripts containing Middle English verse, marginal notes are rare. Those which are present were often transmitted with the text rather than being thrown onto the page by a reactive reader, and they are often banal and hard to interpret individually.²⁹ This may account for the intensive, meaning-thirsty cast of some studies.³⁰ I think there are more sixteenth-century marginalia by readers in copies of *The Prick of Conscience* than there are from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries combined. Ryan Perry has tentatively noted, during a specific reception-study, that a pen at hand might itself have altered the reading

²⁸ Alastair Minnis, *Translations of Authority in Medieval English Literature: Valuing the Vernacular* (Cambridge, 2009), 17–37; and Andrew Galloway, ‘Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, the *Prick of Conscience*, and the History of the Latin Gloss in English Literature’, in *John Gower: Manuscripts, Readers, Contexts*, ed. by Malte Urban, Disputatio, 13 (Turnhout, 2009), 39–70. Galloway’s attention to the glossing of *The Prick of Conscience* is mostly confined to the extensive glosses in Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale Albert I, MS IV 998 (MV4), which are interesting but not, as he implies, at all standard: this is the only copy which preserves them and may be the only copy which ever contained them. Since they are unique, they are really evidence for the paucity of glossing for Middle English verse, not evidence for a lost potential tradition of extensive glossing, as Galloway argues. For further discussion of some of the glosses which we do have, see Jane Griffiths, *Diverting Authorities: Experimental Glossing Practices in Manuscript and Print* (Oxford, 2014).

²⁹ Marginal notes, many of this sort, have recently been explored as guides or instructions rather than as individual objects of interpretation in Daniel Wakelin, ‘Instructing Readers in Fifteenth-Century Poetic Manuscripts’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 73 (2010), 433–52.

³⁰ See the strikingly detailed taxonomy of marginal annotations in Carl James Grindley, ‘Reading *Piers Plowman* C-Text Annotations: Notes toward the Classification of Printed and Written Marginalia in Texts from the British Isles 1300–1641’, in *The Medieval Professional Reader at Work: Evidence from Manuscripts of Chaucer, Langland, Kempe, and Gower*, ed. by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo, *English Literary Studies*, 85 (Victoria, 2001), 73–141. See also Tanya Schaap, ‘From Professional to Private Readership: A Discussion and Transcription of the Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Marginalia in *Piers Plowman* C-Text, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 102’, in *The Medieval Reader: Reception and Cultural History in the Late Medieval Manuscript*, ed. by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, 3rd series, 1 (2001), 81–116; and the essays gathered in Sarah Larratt Keefer and Rolf H. Bremmer Jr, eds, *Signs on the Edge: Space, Text and Margin in Medieval Manuscripts* (Paris, 2007).

process.³¹ Before the sixteenth century, reading with an inclination to add responsive marginalia, perhaps even reading with writing materials to hand, might have been unusual activities for most readers. I suspect that they were.

That said, we are not without evidence of reading practices. Many other things that book producers did anticipated or shaped reading. They made choices, though not necessarily conscious ones, about, for example, page size, scripts, the emphasis given to titles and quotations by use of different inks or different scripts or both, and binding. While we have few new markings made during the process of reading, we do have the artefacts—materials and markings—that were present from the outset of, and initiated, that process. Later readers' actions also affected reading: for example, (re)binding books, placing them in certain contexts (such as chained libraries), leaving them in particular combinations to particular people, or adding their own finding aids. It seems a shame to limit ourselves to one kind of evidence in the face of this wealth.

Much of this evidence has, however, presented interpretative problems. It is difficult to approach it as though it was meaningful in the way in which much of the evidence adduced in English studies is meaningful. It is difficult to say with any confidence that a quirk in ruling signifies something, or that a set of paraps have an identifiable effect on readers.³² What is different about this evidence? Two key qualities distinguish it: first, it is frequently produced and understood in unconscious ways;

³¹ Ryan Perry, “‘Some sprytull matter of gostly edyfycacion’: Readers and Readings of Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*”, in *The Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ*, ed. by Ian Johnson and Allan F. Westphall, *Medieval Church Studies*, 24 (Turnhout, 2013), 79–126 (93, 106 and 112–13).

³² Derek Pearsall notes the risks involved in this kind of interpretation in ‘The Organisation of the Latin Apparatus in Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*: The Scribes and their Problems’, in *The Medieval Book and a Modern Collector: Essays in Honour of Toshiyuki Takamiya*, ed. by Takami Matsuda and others (Woodbridge, 2004), 99–112 (112).

second, its meaningfulness is often materially determined rather than arbitrary or, in other words, it is often not amenable to the semantic interpretation usual in literary criticism and in works subject to the ‘interpretative turn’ in social sciences.

Derek Pearsall’s evocation of ‘the world of Hard Work’ captures the first quality: many of the actions taken by book producers and by readers are driven by habit rather than conscious thought.³³ This does not mean that they are not intentional, it just means that they are unconsciously intentional actions—the actions of scribes trying to get through the day, and of readers trying to organise their texts. This awkward quality of much manuscript evidence has been noted before: Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe well describes such evidence as ‘certainly not conscious, but just as certainly habitual’.³⁴ But English as a discipline does not always cope well with banality.

The second problematic quality of this kind of evidence is its materially determined nature, which makes it ill-suited to the kind of interpretation used for arbitrary signifiers. A book communicates with readers by (for example) being copied in more laborious scripts, by having an impressive binding or simply by being large or small. These features are thus meaningful, but not in the arbitrary way in which linguistic signification is arbitrary. That the Middle English syllable *tre* should signify a tree is arbitrary, and the exact shapes of the bastard anglicana graphs which form one execution of ‘tre’ might be arbitrary. However, the greater amount of labour involved in writing ‘tre’ in dressy bastard anglicana with a large module as opposed to in rapid cursive anglicana with a small module (but perhaps lateral extension thanks to speed) is

³³ Pearsall, ‘Scribes and their Problems’, 112.

³⁴ Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe, *Visible Song: Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 4 (Cambridge, 1990), 1.

in no way arbitrary. Rather, the greater amount of labour is required by fundamental rules about physical action.³⁵ The set script will always be more laborious, whatever arbitrary, historically contingent set of shapes it happens to involve. This meaningfulness is materially determined and not a kind of meaningfulness that is easily expounded through literary criticism.

Yet while this evidence is awkward, it could add much to our history of reading if considered alongside more textual evidence. Manuscript studies might be expected to offer an appropriate methodology with which to approach evidence which was often produced in habitual, materially determined ways. But manuscript studies often at present involves the study of things in manuscripts rather than the study of manuscripts. Often the evidence used in recent studies is textual or else it is interpreted as if it were textual and meaningful semantically (as noted above) rather than materially. Manuscript studies could benefit from grappling in a more total way with the material aspects of the objects it addresses.

Archaeology and anthropology can offer more total conceptions of materiality which might usefully be borrowed.³⁶ A tradition of media and technology studies going back at least to the middle of the twentieth century takes material things' power and influence seriously.³⁷ More recently Alfred Gell has outlined an anthropological theory

³⁵ Peter Stallybrass touches on this in relation to later medieval Bibles: 'Nothing could radically reduce the major expense of copying long texts', and 'there was no significant way of speeding up the process of writing an ecclesiastical manuscript in a clear professional script': 'Epilogue', in *Form and Function in the Late Medieval Bible*, ed. by Eyal Poleg and Laura Light, *The Manuscript World*, 4 (Leiden, 2013), 379–94 (388–89).

³⁶ Not an original manoeuvre: a similar approach is signalled by the layer metaphor in Gumbert's use of the word 'stratigraphy': J. P. Gumbert, 'Codicological Units: Towards a Terminology for the Stratigraphy of the Non-Homogenous Codex', *Segno e Testo*, 2 (2004), 17–42 (18).

³⁷ For example, Jacques Ellul, *La technique; ou, L'enjeu du siècle*, 2nd edn (Paris, 1954; 1990), 1st edn translated as *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York, 1964).

of art, which approaches art not ‘in terms of symbols and meanings’ but ‘as a system of action, intended to change the world rather than encode symbolic propositions about it’.³⁸ Nicole Boivin, too, has argued that searches for the meaning of material objects sometimes miss the point by separating those objects from their meanings in the first place: in fact, she suggests, objects often mean through their physical being, rather than because of an interpretative process.³⁹ She suggests that the dominance of textual and linguistic models has sometimes resulted in an unhelpful focus on interpretation in the study of non-textual objects.⁴⁰ This is the struggle with habitually created and materially determined evidence seen from an archaeological perspective. From within English studies, meanwhile, Karin Littau has argued that the conception of reading in material terms is a long-standing tradition which can usefully be revived.⁴¹ My end goal here is to enhance our understanding of the history of reading in this period, but in order to properly take into account some of the decidedly non-textual evidence for that history I will follow these theorists’ lead and try to understand certain material aspects of manuscripts without expecting them to signify.

Fortunately, codicology offers a cluster of methods which can cope with this evidence appropriately. I take codicology to mean the study of codices with attention to,

³⁸ Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford, 1998), 6. Warren Boutcher, ‘Literary Art and Agency? Gell and the Magic of the Early Modern Book’ in *Distributed Objects: Meaning and Mattering after Alfred Gell*, ed. by Liana Chua and Mark Elliott (New York, 2013), 155–75 is an experiment in the more systematic adoption of Gell’s theory for early-modern books and letters as objects carrying delegated agency across distances.

³⁹ Nicole Boivin, *Material Cultures, Material Minds: The Impact of Things on Human Thought, Society, and Evolution* (Cambridge, 2008).

⁴⁰ Boivin, *Material Cultures*, 10–23.

⁴¹ Karin Littau, *Theories of Reading: Books, Bodies and Bibliomania* (Cambridge, 2006).

ideally, all their aspects and, practically, as many aspects as possible.⁴² Perhaps it is the pre-print equivalent (or subdivision?) of the ‘analytical bibliography’ identified by Darnton as one area of research important for the history of reading.⁴³ In England the tradition of thought which might be called codicological manifested first as a by-product of the act of cataloguing. A lineage can be sketched. Three centuries ago Humphrey Wanley was arguing that his cataloguing was better because he had physically handled the books concerned.⁴⁴ Henry Bradshaw’s published work focused more on print bibliography than on manuscripts, but as Paul Needham has demonstrated his notes reveal an impressive knowledge of manuscripts, and he may have been the first scholar to recognise the prime importance of books’ physical structure.⁴⁵ Bradshaw’s legacy can be traced down to the second half of the twentieth century in the work of M. R. James, N. R. Ker and Malcolm Parkes. By studying pages’ organisation, Parkes in particular worked on one of the aspects of codicological evidence most closely linked to reading.

On the continent, meanwhile, there is a tradition of codicology with a much stronger emphasis on quantitative study, an approach which, used cautiously, may be

⁴² This is close to the picture of codicology proposed by A. Gruys as, in the strict sense, an empirical, archaeological investigation of all aspects of books which inevitably generates, in a wider sense of the word, exploration of books’ contexts: ‘Codicology or the Archaeology of the Book? A False Dilemma’, *Quaerendo*, 2 (1972), 87–108 (104–5). I respectfully dissent from the terminology—but not the methodological thrust—of T. J. Brown, ‘Latin Palaeography since Traube’, in *Codicologica: Towards a Science of Handwritten Books / Vers une science du manuscrit / Bausteine zur Handschriftenkunde*, ed. by A. Gruys and others (Leiden, 1976–80), I, 58–74 (60). See also the flashpoint for this discussion, François Masai, ‘Paléographie et codicologie’, *Scriptorium*, 4 (1950), 279–93.

⁴³ Darnton, 175–76.

⁴⁴ P. L. Heyworth, ed., *Letters of Humphrey Wanley: Palaeographer, Anglo-Saxonist, Librarian, 1672–1726: With an Appendix of Documents* (Oxford, 1989), letter 94, 206.

⁴⁵ Paul Needham, *The Bradshaw Method: Henry Bradshaw’s Contribution to Bibliography* (Chapel Hill, 1988), 10–12.

able to make sense of evidence produced by habitual action across many manuscripts.⁴⁶ A few pieces of Anglophone scholarship have experimented with quantitative methods.⁴⁷ Parts of this study use quantitative surveys cautiously to pull together evidence from many manuscripts and to isolate particularly interesting cases. The aim is to bring non-signifying aspects of a book's existence into discussion by attending to what is most normal, everyday and typical in many books. That can help to reveal what is abnormal and why it is abnormal, but it can also and equally importantly, reveal what is normal. Understanding what is normal is valuable in itself. As Nicholas Dames has recently argued, identifying specific 'innocuous' reading practices—what he calls 'protocols'—is a way to put detail into the gap between the amorphous, endless historical topic of 'reading', in general, and the pinpointed microhistorical event of 'a reading'.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the extraordinary needs the ordinary in order to be extraordinary: more knowledge about the reading of normal Middle English verse c.1350–1500 in manuscript allows for a clearer understanding of what we already know about extraordinary English verse. Drawing on many measurements and observations across a large corpus can render the non-signifying comprehensible. When this work is combined with particular manuscript case-studies and with close reading, it is possible

⁴⁶ Surveyed in J. P. Gumbert, 'Fifty Years of Codicology', *Archiv für Diplomatik*, 50 (2004), 505–26.

⁴⁷ Murray J. Evans, *Rereading Middle English Romance: Manuscript Layout, Decoration, and the Rhetoric of Composite Structure* (Montreal, 1995); Charles F. Briggs, *Giles of Rome's 'De regimine principum': Reading and Writing Politics at Court and University, c.1275–1525* (Cambridge, 1999), 26–29; Orietta Da Rold, 'Fingerprinting Paper in West Midlands Medieval Manuscripts', in *Essays in Manuscript Geography: Vernacular Manuscripts of the English West Midlands from the Conquest to the Sixteenth Century*, ed. by Wendy Scase, *Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe*, 10 (Turnhout, 2007), 257–71; and Daniel Wakelin, *Scribal Correction and Literary Craft: English Manuscripts 1375–1510* (Cambridge, 2014).

⁴⁸ Nicholas Dames, 'On Not Close Reading: The Prolonged Excerpt as Victorian Critical Protocol', in *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience & Victorian Literature*, ed. by Rachel Ablow (Ann Arbor, 2010), 11–26.

to uncover more details about the ways in which manuscripts were read, and designed to be read, and thus to extend our general history of reading in the period.

This procedure carries risks. It is impossible to become a fifteenth-century reader and intuitive judgements from twenty-first-century readers may be unreliable. Few or perhaps no readers in the period handled as many copies of the same texts as modern scholars can. True, reading, as well as copying, Middle English texts may have been ‘something of a fanatic’s occupation’, so that at least some readers remembered multiple copies of some texts.⁴⁹ But even a fanatical reader with wide access would probably not have had any opportunity or motivation to consult ninety copies of the same vernacular poem. These differences in access and perspective mean that, bizarre as the statement may initially sound, for certain kinds of evidence abstract measurements and counts are in some ways more reliable than experience of the manuscripts themselves. Quantification can offer helpful detachment.

On the other hand, although numbers are sometimes involved, this study is not a piece of work in the digital humanities, except in the ways that all scholarship is now digital. It does at points contain calculations but it does not use a ‘big data’ approach. When it comes to Middle English manuscripts the amount of data available may simply not be big enough: the *New Index of Middle English Verse* lists around 2700 separate surviving witnesses for Middle English verse, the vast majority being manuscripts.⁵⁰ This is an awkward number, a great many for one person to see, but not that much evidence compared to the amounts used in statistical studies. Even if we had enough

⁴⁹ Ralph Hanna, ‘Problems of “Best Text” Editing and the Hengwrt Manuscript of *The Canterbury Tales*’, in *Manuscripts and Texts: Editorial Problems in Later Middle English Literature*, ed. by Derek Pearsall (Cambridge, 1987), 87–94 (88–89).

⁵⁰ *NIMEV*, 289–323.

data to apply network diagrams and algorithms, they might not produce particularly useful answers to questions in the history of reading. And, as some writers have pointed out, complex statistical or mathematical operations can confuse and complicate as well as clarify, perhaps particularly in the hands of scholars in the humanities.⁵¹ Counts and averages are prone to ambiguity, something J. P. Gumbert notes when summing up quantitative methods' combination of power and uncertainty.⁵² We can, for example, find the mean average number of columns across a corpus of manuscripts, but we will never find any specific manuscripts copied in 1.6 columns. Moreover both quantitative codicology and, more broadly, the process of considering a great many manuscripts risk obscuring the very real differences in place, time and text that can separate manuscripts of the same poem. There can be striking contrasts between the likely production and reception contexts of two different copies. For example, Bodleian MS Digby 99 is a canon's idiosyncratic user-produced copy of *The Prick of Conscience* from the end of the fourteenth century, while St John's College, Oxford, MS 57 contains *The Prick of Conscience* copied by the so-called 'Beryn scribe' in perhaps the middle of the fifteenth century, alongside, among other things, a copy of *The Parliament of Fowls* by the same scribe.⁵³ Both manuscripts contribute data to some of the exercises below, but many

⁵¹ As is argued in cautionary studies such as J. A. Dane and Rosemary A. Roberts, 'The Calculus of Calculus: W. W. Greg and the Mathematics of *Everyman* Editions', *Studies in Bibliography*, 53 (2000), 117–28. Matthew Wickman has suggested that exercises in the use of 'big data' and 'distant reading' in fact still depend on the categorisations and reactions we make while close reading: 'Robert Burns and Big Data; or, Pests of Quantity and Visualization', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 75 (2014), 1–28.

⁵² Gumbert, 'Fifty Years', 525.

⁵³ On user-produced manuscripts see Eric Reiter, 'The Reader as Author of the User-Produced Manuscript: Reading and Rewriting Popular Latin Theology in the Late Middle Ages', *Viator*, 27 (1996), 151–69. On the Beryn scribe, see Linne R. Mooney and Lister M. Matheson, 'The Beryn Scribe and His Texts: Evidence for Multiple-Copy Production of Manuscripts in Fifteenth-Century England', *The Library*, 7th series, 4 (2003), 347–70.

normal studies of manuscripts would, rightly, never consider them to be particularly similar.

The very same widespread and varied production that makes these corpora exciting thus flattens out individual witnesses' particularity. To some extent some flattening can be prevented by including specific manuscript case-studies and by qualifying generalisations. I have also included a short initial chapter which attempts to contextualise what follows by sketching some of the demographic, chronological and topographical variety in these manuscripts' contexts. Beyond that, however, I believe that the potential benefits of studying a mass of books outweigh the risks: taken together, these manuscripts offer us a broad insight into scribes' and readers' unconscious assumptions about how books containing Middle English should look and how they should be read—what could be called the period's codicological imaginary.

Many studies of manuscripts have focused on copies of canonical texts, very reasonably: there is more interest in them, they are surrounded by more of the scaffolding of previous descriptions and studies and they are more likely to be available in facsimile. Scholars in English have become good at studying specific manuscripts or small groups of them. But there are around 2700 manuscripts. Manuscripts containing prose and verse by Chaucer, the manuscripts most central to the modern Middle English canon, only constitute between five and six percent of that total. This study focuses primarily on an almost entirely different set of manuscripts, which together make up slightly more than six percent of the surviving evidence: the many copies of *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae*.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ As noted above, a copy of *The Prick of Conscience* and a copy of *The Parliament of Fowls* share SJO, MS 57 (MV85), but this is a rare exception

One reason to examine these poems is simply that there are many copies of both, allowing for the maximum amount of cross-comparison and numerical recording: *The Prick of Conscience* is the Middle English poem with the most surviving witnesses. One hundred and nineteen manuscripts and fragments of manuscripts of the Main Version and Southern Recension of the poem are known to me, alongside two copies of a verse redaction, one of a prose redaction and six of a translation into Latin.⁵⁵ *Speculum Vitae* is another successful northern poem: forty-eight witnesses are presently known.⁵⁶ Throughout the study *Speculum Vitae* serves as a foil for its more successful predecessor. Because they are so numerous, the surviving copies of *The Prick of Conscience* in particular offer the largest body of material evidence of reading practices associated with any single Middle English poem. The poem may have been sufficiently widespread that for at least some readers it helped to define what English poetry was like. Some authors who are now part of the modern Middle English canon knew these

⁵⁵ The most current published list of witnesses is in *Morris*, 378–83. I know of one further set of fragments, surviving as stubs in the (English) bindings of three volumes of one copy of *Operum reverendi et clarissimi theologi, D. Ioannis Brentii, praepositi Stutgardiani*, 8 vols (Tubingae, 1576–90): Cambridge, Queens’ College, rare books M.4.19, M.4.20 and M.4.22, and four disbound fragments with no shelfmarks. See Daniel Sawyer, ‘Rediscovered Manuscript Fragments of *The Prick of Conscience* in the Library of Queens’ College, Cambridge’, *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 15.5 (2016), 515–40. The count of extracts in Hanna and Wood is significantly larger than that in Lewis and McIntosh because the former include *Speculum Christiani*. See also Michael Sargent, ‘What Do the Numbers Mean? A Textual Critic’s Observations on Some Patterns of Middle English Manuscript Transmission’, in *Design and Distribution of Late Medieval Manuscripts in England*, ed. by Margaret Connolly and Linne Mooney (York, 2008), 205–44 (214–17). Other fragments and extracts probably await discovery.

⁵⁶ Forty-five of these are described in *SVRE*, I, xvi–lix. For two further fragments see Ralph Hanna, ‘Two New Manuscript Fragments of *Speculum Vitae*’, *Journal of the Early Book Society*, 16 (2013), 193–98. A third is reported in Erik Weiskott, ‘Another New Fragment of *Speculum Vitae*’, *Journal of the Early Book Society*, 17 (2014), 357–60.

poems themselves, and many of their readers probably did too.⁵⁷ We might learn something from comparing the surviving copies of *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae* to more well-studied manuscripts.

It might be argued that these texts survive in disproportionately high numbers due to their worthy subject matter and their length—in other words, that they are less important than the sizes of their surviving corpora suggest.⁵⁸ However, few copies of either poem are in well-decorated or impressive books which might have seemed worth preserving for their value. Furthermore, while these poems' subjects might have encouraged their preservation and transmission initially, such obviously unreformed material was unpalatable after the Reformation. Granted, some Protestant readers had a quasi-curatorial attitude to later medieval books, and some texts could be repurposed.⁵⁹ But religious instructional poems such as *The Prick of Conscience* were never going to be assimilated by these new kinds of reader in the ways that *Piers Plowman* might be. In at least three copies of *The Prick of Conscience* some of the references to purgatory

⁵⁷ Langland read and borrowed from *Speculum Vitae*: Ralph Hanna, 'Speculum Vitae and the Form of Piers Plowman', in *Answerable Style: The Idea of the Literary in Medieval England*, ed. by Frank Grady and Andrew Galloway (Columbus, 2013), 121–39 (122–25). Wakelin, *Scribal Correction*, 33–34, suggests that Chaucer may have known *The Prick of Conscience*. Kate Oelzner Petersen, *The Sources of the Parson's Tale*, Radcliffe College Monographs, 12 (Boston, 1901), 13, n.1 and 14, n.1, picks out minor possible connections between *The Prick of Conscience* and the Parson's Tale.

⁵⁸ As Derek Pearsall, *The Canterbury Tales* (London, 1985), 8, implies.

⁵⁹ See for example the case of Stephan Batman, discussed in M. B. Parkes, 'Stephan Batman's Manuscripts', in *Medieval Heritage: Essays in Honour of Tadahiro Ikegami*, ed. by M. Kanno and others (Tokyo, 1997), 125–56; A. S. G. Edwards and Simon Horobin, 'Further Books Annotated by Stephen Batman', *The Library*, 7th series, 11 (2010), 227–31; and Simon Horobin, 'Stephan Batman and His Manuscripts of Piers Plowman', *Review of English Studies*, 62 (2011), 358–72.

or to pardons have been crossed out.⁶⁰ The use of some fragments of one copy of *The Prick of Conscience* to bind a set of the works of the reformed theologian Johannes Brenz captures the poem's fall from currency.⁶¹ Jean Preston has argued that similar sensitivities about the poem's content may be reflected in its short history in early print.⁶² These factors suggest that the large size of these poems' surviving corpora are not an overrepresentation.

However, despite their significance, neither of these poems has received much scholarly attention until recently. The first printed edition of *Speculum Vitae* was published only in this century, while *The Prick of Conscience* was first edited in 1863—

⁶⁰ HEHL, MS HM 128, ff.21^v–24^v, 33^r–37^v and 38^v–42^r. (The quires are bound out of order. Did the defacer skip f.38^r accidentally?) Someone also crossed out the word 'purgatorie' at f.34^r, l.19; two lines on bishops' power to pardon sins and the subtitle 'Of pardon what it auailleþ to þe soule' at f.40^v, ll.7–8 and 15; and the phrase 'pope bereþ þe keies' at f.41^r, l.10. SJC, MS B.7, f.33^r, l.33; f.47^v, ll.7–16. JRL, MS English 50 (MV54), p.11 (manuscript is paginated). *MMBL*, III, 402, notes this deletion and the wholesale removal of most of Part IV of the poem, which Ker suggests may have been prompted by the same sensitivity about purgatory.

⁶¹ Cambridge, Queens' College, rare books M.4.19, M.4.20 and M.4.22, and disbound fragments with no shelfmarks; Sawyer.

⁶² Jean F. Preston, 'The *Pricke of Conscience* (Parts I–III) and its First Appearance in Print', *The Library*, 6th series, 7 (1985), 303–14 (312–14). Robert Wyer printed parts of *The Prick of Conscience* twice: the fourth part as *Here begynneth a lytell boke, that spekethe of purgatorye* ([London], [1532?]), STC 3360; and then the first three parts as *Here begyneth a newe treatyse deuyded in thre parties* ([London], [1542?]), STC 24228. Unusually, Wyer's exemplar survives as HEHL, MS HM 130 (SR18); even more unusually it has a fifteenth-century binding, so it remains something very close to the object that passed through Wyer's hands. See also H. C. Schulz, 'Manuscript Printer's Copy for a Lost Early English Book', *The Library*, 4th series, 12 (1941), 138–44; and 'A Middle English Manuscript Used as Printer's Copy', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 29 (1966), 325–36.

but not again until 2012 and 2013.⁶³ Further investigation of the manuscripts of *The Prick of Conscience* has been described as ‘a major *desideratum* in the field’.⁶⁴ The surviving copies of *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae* therefore constitute a good body of evidence for a codicological investigation of the history of the reading of later Middle English verse. The aim is not, though, to give a thorough history of their circulation and reception in their own right—important though these poems are—but to use them as case-studies for exploring the history of reading practices through codicological evidence. To that end, the study of their manuscripts is supplemented at times by reference to copies of other comparable texts: a broader network of substantial Northern Middle English religious instructional texts such as the Northern Homily Cycle, *Cursor Mundi* and *Handlyng Synne*. These texts too have not received much attention despite the success some had in spreading from the North through England and sometimes beyond, and despite the fact that this flourishing of northern Middle English writing which produced them immediately preceded the appearance of more famous works. But the primary aim of this study is to enhance our history of reading.

The argument is primarily focused on how these manuscripts were read rather than on who read them or on the devotional or instructional context for reading them.

⁶³ *SVRE*; Richard Morris, ed., *The Pricke of Conscience (Stimulus Conscientiæ): A Northumbrian Poem by Richard Rolle de Hampole* (Berlin, 1863). The other editions are James Morey, ed., *Prik of Conscience* (Kalamazoo, 2012), a single-manuscript edition based on New Haven, Beinecke Library, MS Osborn a.13 (MV57); and Morris. A single-manuscript edition of the Southern Recension edited by Jean E. Jost is forthcoming. An edition of the fifth book of the Southern Recension exists as Stacy Waters, ‘The *Pricke of Conscience*: The Southern Recension, Book V’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1976). Thomas Hearne printed a passage from the copy of *The Prick of Conscience* in BodL, MS Rawl. A.366 as part of his gloss on Middle English ‘hell’ in *Peter Langtoft’s Chronicle (as Illustrated and Improv’d by Robert of Brunne): From the Death of Cadwalader to the End of K. Edward the First’s Reign*, 2 vols (London, 1725), II, 582–84. The equivalent passage in Morris is ll.6433–88.

⁶⁴ Sargent, 217.

The codicological approach and the nature of the evidence being considered raise certain questions. I have already referred to pre-existing discussions in scholarship of the contrast between continuous and discontinuous reading, and to the problem of distinguishing deliberate choices from habitual choices. We might also ask: which changes in books' forms did readers perceive and respond to consciously, and which changes provoked habitual responses only? Implicit in this question is a further one about readers' own agency: to what extent were books formed to shape reading (or readers), and to what extent did reading (or readers) shape books? Or, in other words, did codicological features condition reading or did readers' demands condition books? These questions lie behind many of the specific discussions that follow.

Alongside agency, the concept of responsibility offers a useful way to think about some of the evidence found in manuscripts.⁶⁵ Specifically, it seems useful to ask of any given book whether certain elements of reading are assumed to be the reader's responsibility or alternatively the responsibility of the scribe or the author. The changes in books preceding this period can be framed as a shift from books which placed a great deal of responsibility on the reader to books which placed more responsibility on the compiler and the scribe. Earlier books present pages with undivided or only loosely divided words and little to distinguish texts or make the book navigable beyond large initials. Later books, or at least those examples with full programmes of navigational apparatus, guide readers around using tables of contents, indexes, running headers,

⁶⁵ I was originally prompted to consider responsibility by John Hinds's chapter 'Writer versus Reader Responsibility: Towards a New Typology', in *Writing across Languages: Analysis of L₂ Text*, ed. by Ulla Connor and Robert B. Kaplan (Reading, MA, 1987), 141–52; more recently discussed by Victor Mair, 'Is English a "writer-responsible language" and Chinese, Korean, and Japanese "reader-responsible languages"?' , *Language Log*, 8 September 2014
<http://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=14467> [accessed 9 September 2014].

marginal section numbering, consistent word division, punctuation and paraps within the text.⁶⁶ In these books, the reader is no longer expected to be so responsible for discerning the text's structure. Analogous shifts in Latin grammar might also have placed more responsibility on writers.⁶⁷ Responsibility offers a different perspective on the characterisation of reading in this period as more active and as something organised in more sophisticated ways: active reading probably imposed a higher 'cognitive load', but, nevertheless, it was more passive in its reliance on distinctions and signposts created by others.⁶⁸ So: who took responsibility for what in the reading of verse in Middle English at this time?

Although this study is a history of reading, it is important to state that it is not primarily a study of depictions of the act of reading in the period, though that would be very interesting.⁶⁹ Nor is it primarily about who read these books, or where they were read. And it is not primarily about the devotional or educational reading experiences of the people who read these texts.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the first and shortest chapter does survey what we know about the origins and dissemination of both poems in order to

⁶⁶ Naturally the most prototypical examples are copies of the Bible such as BodL, MSS Auct. D. 3. 6, Laud Lat. 13, Lyell 7 and Kennicott 16; and copies of scholastic texts such as the that of works of John of Wales in BL, MS Harley 632. Compare, for example, the lack of help for readers in the sixth- or seventh-century Gospels of St Augustine, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 286.

⁶⁷ Paul Saenger, 'Reading in the Later Middle Ages', in *A History of Reading in the West*, ed. by Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier (Cambridge, 1999), 120–48 (130–31).

⁶⁸ Reading which navigates within and between texts probably makes the brain work harder: Naomi Baron, *Words Onscreen: The Fate of Reading in a Digital Age* (New York, 2015), 172–74; and Diana DeStefano and Jo-Anne LeFevre, 'Cognitive Load in Hypertext Reading: A Review', *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 23 (2007), 1616–41.

⁶⁹ See the studies gathered in Albrecht Classen, ed., *The Book and the Magic of Reading in the Middle Ages*, Garland Medieval Bibliographies, 24 (New York, 1999).

⁷⁰ Studies of reading and the idea of reading in medieval England include Elisabeth Salter, *Popular Reading in English c.1400–1600* (Manchester, 2012); and Katharine Breen, *Imagining an English Reading Public, 1150–1400* (Cambridge, 2010).

contextualise what follows. This chapter is necessarily less rich in new conclusions than the others, but some do emerge. Broadly speaking both poems were owned and therefore probably read by a wide range of people, both lay and clerical. Readers who also accessed humanist writing and readers of Tyndale are among some of the more surprising figures who appear. Some details of dissemination without ownership also emerge: as we might expect, there is evidence that these texts were lent out, and read aloud to groups.

The second chapter investigates the navigational organisation found in copies of these poems. It begins by considering the primary texts themselves to draw out their internal structure and the navigational aids that they offer to readers. *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae* are structured quite differently: *Speculum Vitae* seems to have been organised in a way that readers found more complete; *The Prick of Conscience*, meanwhile, had a less programmatic internal organisation, and less helpful navigational apparatus, which seems to have suffered more in transmission. *The Prick of Conscience* also prompted navigationally useful additions from a number of readers. The surviving evidence suggests that some readers accepted and reinforced the poem's septenary division while others created their own finding aids for more precise reading. The differences discussed in this chapter demonstrate that within the broad category of 'discontinuous reading' which is used to describe reading in this period, multiple kinds of discontinuity can be distinguished in the reading of these poems; and that continuous reading remained an option.

The third chapter revolves around books' size and shape. Can we draw conclusions about the kinds of reading manuscripts received, or the kind of readers they had, or the conditions in which they were read from such mute and material

measurements? This chapter argues that, with qualifications, we can. A survey of size and shape in many manuscripts suggests that some scribes, binders and owners may have varied the shape of the books they produced depending on the nature of the texts within—a habitual and unconscious practice which nevertheless constitutes both a reaction to, and an indication for readers of, the form of the material being copied. Besides drawing some conclusions about how copies of these poems were or were not read, this chapter also offers some provisional methodological remarks about how we might study these aspects of manuscripts in general.

Another aspect of form, rhyme, is the fourth chapter's dominating concern. It investigates how scribes used punctuation—largely a habitual aspect of book production—to mark out units of rhyme in the primary texts and some related verse. The first half of the chapter examines what scribes did when copying verse in unusual lineation, circumstances which could and in fact usually did drive scribes to take more responsibility for clarifying rhyming relationships. The chapter's second half investigates the practice of rhyme bracing. A detailed study of rhyme bracing reveals that the people responsible for braces were often more precisely attentive to rhyme in their readings of their material than some mechanical models of book production suggest. Both halves of the chapter present evidence that readers in this period habitually read rhyming verse as blocks of rhyme rather than as a series of individual lines, or in other words that the reading of verse in this period was sensitively attuned to this aspect of form. I also argue that readers, and at least one poet, habitually read rhyme as a series of balanced structures, a finding which has implications for our understanding of unbalanced stanza forms such as rhyme royal. Besides these broader findings, this chapter also demonstrates that, whatever present-day readers might make

of *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae*, fourteenth- and fifteenth-century readers read them in ways which were at least in some facets firmly formalist. They did this, I suspect, because for them these poems' forms and their ultimately salvific utility were inextricably linked.

The fifth and final chapter, borrowing some techniques from textual criticism, investigates rewriting as evidence of reading. Both poems were sometimes rewritten, in whole or in part, and these rewritings offer two layers of evidence about reading: they preserve details of the reading which rewriters had to conduct in the course of their interventions, and they indicate the kinds of reading which rewriters anticipated or sought to encourage. Much as the second chapter takes the broad-brush understanding that reading in this period was often discontinuous and finds different kinds of discontinuity, the fifth chapter takes the broad-brush understanding that rewriting was a common phenomenon in this period and finds different kinds of rewriting. A wide variety of approaches to rewriting emerges, serving a wide variety of expected kinds of reading. In an echo of the fourth chapter, several people seem to have read and rewritten these texts in formalist ways, and the single most significant act of rewriting considered, the Southern Recension of *The Prick of Conscience*, turns out to be in part a large-scale stylistic revision.

1. Diverse Folk

In 1528 one John Hacker testified that he had lent a copy of the ‘pryck of conscyence’ to a baker, John Pykas of Colchester. Hacker gave his evidence during an investigation into heresy: he and his associates held heterodox opinions, and a mixture of orthodox and heterodox texts circulated among them, alongside Tyndale’s New Testament.¹ One of Hacker’s contacts, a Witham tailor, had a servant who ‘rede well’ and was ‘a great Reder amonges them’.² *The Prick of Conscience* was not heretical, and seems to have been brought up during an investigation because of the particular people who were reading it rather than because it itself was suspicious; this had happened a number of other times.³ This testimony does not, therefore, undermine the orthodoxy of *The Prick of Conscience*, but it does demonstrate the poem’s surprising longevity and the fact that it reached the hands of a very wide range of readers, including—eventually—heterodox bakers.

The long and wide dissemination of *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae* is this chapter’s topic. The later chapters sometimes necessarily flatten out

¹ BL, MS Harley 421, f.12^r, ll.22–23; f.18^v, l.8; and f.11^r, l.20. See Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford, 1988), 464–65 and 474–79.

² MS Harley 421, f.11^v, l.5. On the investigation, see Craig W. D’Alton, ‘Cuthbert Tunstal and Heresy in Essex and London’, *Albion*, 35 (2003), 210–28.

³ BL, MS Harley 1731 (SR8) was surrendered in 1473 to the Commissary General of the Diocese of Winchester by a Richard Reder, who was accused of heresy: Hope Emily Allen, *Writings Ascribed to Richard Rolle Hermit of Hampole and Materials for his Biography* (New York, 1927), 387; and Hudson, 205, n.175. Richard Colins of Berkshire was accused c.1521 of having various English books, including a copy of the poem (Allen, *Writings Ascribed*, 386; and Hudson, 263–64). Allen suggested (387–88) that the authorities might have become suspicious about the poem; the evidence discussed in this chapter suggests rather that heretics often owned copies because copies were ubiquitous. Note also the account of the 1384 examination and approval of *Speculum Vitae* at Cambridge University which survives with the copies of the poem in CUL, MS Ii.i.36; GCC, MS 160/81; and BodL, MS Bodley 446. Hanna, *SVRE*, I, lxiii, suggests that this examination never happened, and that the story was invented in the fifteenth century to shield the text.

diachronic and diatopic distances between manuscripts, so to counteract that flattening effect this chapter sketches the reading topography and chronology for these poems. Such an investigation must draw extensively on pre-existing scholarship, but it does generate a few new identifications, and summarising and extending what is known will also generate some conclusions about reading itself.

The available evidence has limitations. Guy Trudel has observed that the history of argument about the likely audiences for Middle English religious instructional texts from the evidence of ownership and co-texts is really a history of increasing doubt.⁴ But this is not a justification for ignoring what evidence we do have. That evidence suggests that most kinds of people who could read read these texts, but also that many who could not read might have come into contact with them.

Early dissemination

The Prick of Conscience is a poem of around 9600 lines, divided into a prologue, an epilogue and seven parts, which treat in turn life's unpleasantness, the world's instability, death's unpleasantness, purgatory, the day of judgement, hell and heaven. Criticism has often focused on its terrifying and gruesome content, but the poem itself describes this content as a means to an end: it only creates a reading experience of 'right drede' so that 'of þat drede may a lofe bygyn' (ll.342, 345).⁵ *Speculum Vitae* is a poem

⁴ Guy Trudel, 'The Middle English *Book of Penance* and Readers of the *Cursor Mundi*', *Medium Aevum*, 74 (2005), 10–33 (10).

⁵ Howell Chickering, 'Rhetorical Stimulus in the *Prick of Conscience*', in *Medieval Paradigms: Essays in Honor of Jeremy DuQuesnay Adams*, ed. by Stephanie Hayes-Healy (New York, 2005), 191–230; and Bryan, 62–64. Moira Fitzgibbons has argued that the poem is not without psychological subtlety: 'Enabled and Disabled "Myndes" in *The Prick of Conscience*', in *Medieval Poetics and Social Practice: Responding to the Work of Penn R. Szittyá*, ed. by Seeta Chaganti (New York, 2012), 72–94.

of around sixteen thousand lines, arranged in a septenary scheme around the text of the Pater Noster, which is used as an organisational key to numerous subdivided lists, offering an exhaustive taxonomy of sin and virtue. It is a more directly optimistic poem: although it discusses sins at length, it also promises the chance to identify ‘what remedy es þaregayne’ in each case (l.16049).

These two poems tackle different tasks. Both take those tasks, their organisation and much of their content from models in other languages.⁶ Nevertheless, both also borrow aspects of their approach from previous English models, including, in *Speculum Vitae*’s case, *The Prick of Conscience*. Both poems can be categorised as *pastoralia*, and they represent the fourteenth-century Middle English continuation of, or descent from, the vast, varied wealth of texts in that category. The production of these texts was stimulated by the renewed emphasis on the cure of souls in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a trend focused and given force by the Fourth Lateran Council. By the fourteenth century English writers were producing substantial religious instruction in

⁶ *Speculum Vitae* is an adaptation of the French *Somme le roi*, borrowing the structure of a much shorter Latin text derived from *Somme*, the ‘Tabula de utilitate oracionis dominice’: *SVRE*, I, lxx–lxxiv; *SVRE*, II, 631–38, includes a text of the ‘Tabula’, primarily from BodL, MS Rawl. C.72, ff.137^v–154^v. For *Somme* itself, see Édith Brayer and Anne-Françoise Leurquin-Labie, eds, *La ‘Somme le roi’ par Frère Laurent* (Paris, 2008). The single most important source for *The Prick of Conscience* is the Anglo-Norman *Les Peines de Purgatorie*, though the poem as a whole is not nearly as reliant on *Les Peines* as *Speculum Vitae* is on the *Somme le roi*: Morris, lii–lxi. This source was first identified in Allen, *Writings Ascribed*, 378–79. *Les Peines* has been edited in Robert Relihan, ‘A Critical Edition of the Anglo-Norman and Latin Versions of *Les Peines de Purgatorie*’ (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Iowa, 1978).

English, usually translating from Latin and French or Anglo-Norman sources.⁷ Most English examples of this period were written in the North of England.⁸ They often have self-reflexive prologues which are not mirrored in their sources.⁹ Although these prologues have been mined for their ‘idea of the vernacular’, and although they do seem to be a distinctively English tradition, they claim to value English merely for its utility—because it is universally understood—and in some cases they imply that they represent an alternative to romances.¹⁰ When this body of northern religious writing has been noticed as a tradition, outside Ralph Hanna’s work, it has often been regarded as something which ‘anticipates’ later southern Middle English writing.¹¹ But if Middle English literature is not viewed solely through the time and place of Chaucer and his successors, this looks like a viable, important cluster of works in its own right.

⁷ Leonard E. Boyle, ‘The Fourth Lateran Counsel and Manuals of Popular Theology’, in *The Popular Literature of Medieval England*, ed. by Thomas J. Heffernan, Tennessee Studies in Literature, 28 (Knoxville, 1985), 30–43. For histories and valiant attempts to taxonomise the variety of material available see: H. G. Pfander, ‘Some Medieval Manuals of Religious Instruction in England and Observations on Chaucer’s Parson’s Tale’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 35 (1936), 243–58; W. A. Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1955), 189–262; G. H. Russell, ‘Vernacular Instruction of the Laity in the Later Middle Ages in England: Some Texts and Notes’, *Journal of Religious History*, 2 (1962–63), 98–119; and C. A. Martin, ‘Middle English Manuals of Religious Instruction’, in *So Meny People Longages and Tonges: Philological Essays in Scots and Mediaeval English Presented to Angus McIntosh*, ed. by Michael Benskin and M. L. Samuels (Edinburgh, 1981), 283–98.

⁸ On pastoral work in the North see Helen Birkett, ‘The Pastoral Application of the Lateran IV Reforms in the Northern Province, 1215–1348’, *Northern History*, 43 (2006), 199–219.

⁹ Richard Morris, ed., *Cursor Mundi (The cursor o the world): A Northumbrian Poem of the XIVth Century in Four Versions, Two of Them Midland*, 7 vols, EETS, o.s., 57, 59, 62, 66, 68, 99 and 101 (London, 1874–93) ll.1–270. *SVRE*, ll.1–114; compare the *Somme le roi*, which dives straight into ‘Le premier commandement que Dieu commande’: Brayer and Leurquin-Labie, eds, 99. Morris, ll.1–369.

¹⁰ Morris, ed., *Cursor Mundi*, ll.1–32; *SVRE*, ll.35–48. On precursor French texts and the relationship between *pastoralia* and romances, see Daniel Reeve, ‘Romance and the Literature of Religious Instruction, c.1170–1330’ (unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2014).

¹¹ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and others, eds, *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280–1520* (Exeter, 1999), 267.

Earlier *pastoralia* were often explicitly written for a clerical audience, but these English examples are deliberately, even loudly, non-specific about their readership—though they too must initially at least have been primarily for clerical readers or mediators. In the event, as will be seen below, *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae* were both probably disseminated initially by ecclesiastical readers, but were also in lay hands before the end of the fourteenth century. English-language religious writings were increasingly put to use in ways probably not foreseen by their authors, as lay readers living the active life became more engaged and sought out suitable informative and devotional reading.¹² There is evidence for the reading and excerpting of *The Prick of Conscience*, in particular, in a more devotional and less instructional way.

Who wrote these poems and when did they do so? *The Prick of Conscience* probably dates to the middle of the fourteenth century, while *Speculum Vitae* was written by someone who had read *The Prick of Conscience*, and probably dates to the

¹² Vincent Gillespie, 'Vernacular Books of Religion', in *Looking in Holy Books: Essays on Late Medieval Religious Writing in England*, Brepols Collected Essays in European Culture, 3 (Turnhout, 2011), 145–73.

third quarter of the fourteenth century.¹³ The authors of both texts remain anonymous.¹⁴ Hanna has reported a suspicion that a Dominican in the city of York wrote *The Prick of Conscience*.¹⁵ Did one author write both poems? They share nearly identical closing couplets, the earlier poem was clearly known to the author of the later poem, and, curiously, the best surviving witness to each is in the same manuscript, in BL, MS Add. 33995.¹⁶ Christine Robinson investigated this possibility and found little to recommend the existing arguments in favour of common authorship, though she judged it impossible to exclude the scenario completely.¹⁷ So, then, reasonably specific

¹³ *Morris*, xxxv–xxxvi; and *SVRE*, I, lxi–lxiii. The key arguments on dating can be summarised: the *Speculum Vitae* refers to Rolle’s *Form of Living*, and was therefore written after the dissemination of that text in the middle of the fourteenth century. The earliest surviving copy of *Speculum Vitae*, in BL, MS Add. 33995, was produced in the second half of the fourteenth century, and Hanna dates it to c.1375. This places the composition of *Speculum Vitae* in the third quarter of the fourteenth century. Since *Speculum Vitae* also draws on *The Prick of Conscience*, its composition offers a loose *terminus ad quem* for the earlier poem. *The Prick of Conscience* itself draws on *Cursor Mundi*, which suggests that it probably could not have been composed earlier than the 1320s.

¹⁴ The ascription of *The Prick of Conscience* to Rolle in five manuscripts was accepted until examination by Hope Emily Allen, *The Authorship of the ‘Prick of Conscience’*, Radcliffe College Monographs, 15 (Boston, 1910), 115–70; and *Writings Ascribed*, 372–97. For the ascriptions see *DG*, 3–4. Wolfgang Riehle again raised the possibility of Rolle as the author in ‘The Authorship of *The Prick of Conscience* Reconsidered’, *Anglia*, 111 (1993), 1–18. Three copies of *Speculum Vitae* ascribe the poem to Rolle and two ascribe it to William of Nassyngton, but again these ascriptions have little to recommend them: Allen, *Authorship*; Hope Emily Allen, ‘*Speculum Vitae*: An Addendum’, *PMLA*, 32 (1917), 133–62; and *SVRE*, I, lx–lxiii.

¹⁵ Ralph Hanna, ‘Editing Texts with Extensive Manuscript Traditions’, in *Probable Truth: Editing Medieval Texts from Britain in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Vincent Gillespie and Anne Hudson, Texts and Transitions, 5 (Turnhout, 2013), 111–29 (127). This is a parenthetical remark, not a statement *ex cathedra*, and the idea is, notably, not raised in *Morris*.

¹⁶ *Morris*, ll.9620–21; *SVRE*, ll.16095–96. Common authorship (by Rolle) was proposed, inspired by the ascriptions in CUL, MS Ll.i.8, by J. Ullmann, ‘Studien zu Richard Rolle de Hampole’, *Englische Studien*, 7 (1884), 415–72; Allen disposed of the Rolle and Nassington connections but not the possibility of shared authorship (*Writings Ascribed*, 371–72); Derek Britton proposed that all four texts in MS Add. 33995 shared one anonymous author: Britton, ‘Unnoticed Fragments of the *Prick of Conscience*’, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 80 (1979), 327–34 (330–31, n.12).

¹⁷ Christine Robinson, ‘A Machine-Readable Edition of the Text of the *Speculum Vitae* as Attested in British Library MS. Additional 33995, with Introduction, Glossary and an Investigation of Claims for the Common Authorship of the *Speculum Vitae* and the *Prick of Conscience*’, 2 vols (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1987).

chronological ranges for these poems' composition can be established, but internal textual evidence offers little help in determining where in the North of England each poem was written or who wrote them.

The very early reading of *The Prick of Conscience* might be glimpsed through textual-critical evidence, which suggests that the poem was copied several times before the creation of the presumed common ancestor of all surviving copies.¹⁸ Perhaps, therefore, it circulated within a limited, coterie context before it reached—or was promoted to—a wider audience. If Hanna's suggestion that the author was a York Dominican is correct, then perhaps the Dominicans of York Friary and their audiences formed the poem's first group of readers and auditors. The Friary's position as the head of a whole visitation would have facilitated the distribution of new literature when the poem was 'released'. But this is speculation.

Other evidence besides these texts' co-location in BL, MS Add. 33995 also hints that to some extent their early dissemination was shared. Four manuscripts which probably originate in the same production context constitute the second major cluster of evidence for the early dissemination and reading of these texts.¹⁹ These manuscripts are connected by three scribes who appear in two manuscripts each, all using set hands, by

¹⁸ At points Hanna and Wood believe they can emend reconstructed readings from the archetype of all surviving copies (their siglum O') to readings from the author's own copy of the poem (their siglum O); and they are therefore cautious about the text they print at other points as a representation of the author's finished copy of the poem as opposed to the archetype of all the surviving copies: *Morris*, lxxii–lxxiii.

¹⁹ BL, MSS Cotton Galba E.ix, Cotton Tiberius E.vii and Harley 4196; and BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 175. The group was first identified in A. I. Doyle, 'A Survey of The Origins and Circulation of Theological Writings in English in the Fourteenth, Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries with Special Consideration of the Part of the Clergy Therein', 2 vols (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1953), II, 47–49; and is studied in Ralph Hanna, 'Some North Yorkshire Scribes and their Context', in *Medieval Texts in Context*, ed. by Graham D. Caie and Denis Renevey (London, 2008), 167–91.

features of decoration and by some similarities of large format.²⁰ Three of these books contain copies of *The Prick of Conscience*, and the fourth contains a copy of *Speculum Vitae*. Two of the copies of *The Prick of Conscience*, by different scribes, share an exemplar and duplicate that exemplar's page layout.²¹ From these manuscripts' size and standard of presentation the collaborative production context which produced them was reasonably well-resourced. Hanna suggests Ripon Minster and its associated religious communities as a likely concentration of expertise in the right place.²² Ecclesiastical dissemination seems to be the most likely scenario for the initial transmission of both of these texts.²³ Ecclesiastical dissemination does not mean purely clerical reading, but it does perhaps indicate an initial stage in which the poem was read by the people the poems call 'the learned', and experienced by the laity only as something heard, if not or not only in preaching, then in more informal ministry such as chaplaincy.

Numbers

The extraordinary number of later copies of these texts can reveal something about how they were read, if only in broad terms: large corpora suggest that these texts were read

²⁰ For the size of books, see Chapter 3.

²¹ MSS Cotton Galba E.ix and Harley 4196.

²² Hanna, 'North Yorkshire Scribes', 169. Gillespie has noted evidence for the existence of ecclesiastical systems, centralised at the diocesan level, for disseminating texts in this period: 'Vernacular Books of Religion', 146.

²³ Doyle suggests that the larger early northern copies of *Speculum Vitae* are 'designed to be recited, and inspected in churches or halls': 'Survey', 1, 84. Ralph Hanna suggests that poem's early transmission was institutionally controlled and almost certainly ecclesiastical: 'The Yorkshire Circulation of *Speculum Vitae*', in *Design and Distribution of Late Medieval Manuscripts in England*, ed. by Margaret Connolly and Linne Mooney (York, 2008), 279–91 (291).

widely. True, it is reductive to treat the number of surviving manuscripts as a direct index of a text's success; as the introduction above noted, we do not well understand which kinds of book were most likely to survive at different times. Moreover, owning a book and reading it are not absolutely connected—a qualification which applies to some other evidence in this chapter. That said, the numbers do suggest that these poems probably were widely read and disseminated, even if it is not clear whether we can therefore call them 'popular'.²⁴

Moreover, the evidence for widespread reading might be increased by a consideration of the possible number of lost copies. McIntosh attempted a rough calculation of the number of lost copies of *The Prick of Conscience* necessary to explain the textual variation in one group of four surviving manuscripts and one archetype.²⁵ He proposed that around twenty manuscripts might be supposed to have existed in the lines of transmission implied by the four survivors.²⁶ If—and this is speculative—the 119 surviving copies of the poem represent a roughly similar proportion of lost manuscripts in the transmission leading to them, then there were at least around 600 further copies of *The Prick of Conscience*.

McIntosh presented his method as an initial exploratory exercise, and when applied to the entire corpus it is a very blunt instrument. Sargent notes that the calculation of manuscript populations from textual variation, like recensionist editing, is

²⁴ On problems with 'popularity' see Leonard E. Boyle, 'Popular Piety in the Middle Ages: What is Popular?', *Florilegium*, 4 (1982), 184–93; and Sargent, 207.

²⁵ Angus McIntosh, 'Two Unnoticed Interpolations in Four Manuscripts of the *Prick of Conscience*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 77 (1976), 63–78. The four copies concerned are those in Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale Albert I, MS IV 998; Leeds University Library, MS Brotherton 500 (MV24); and BodL, MSS Digby 14 (MV63) and Laud Misc. 486 (MV72).

²⁶ McIntosh, 'Interpolations', 74.

prone to the problem of assumed bifidity, ‘in which every branching is bifurcate’.²⁷ But this methodological problem tends to cause underestimation, not overestimation. Since this number is estimated from the transmission of the surviving copies, it does not include cognate or direct copies which have no surviving descendants, so it is almost certainly smaller than the number of copies produced. Furthermore, by comparison, David d’Avray has proposed that the loss rate for friars’ collections of model sermons was very high indeed.²⁸ Not all copies of *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae* would have been as cheap and transitory as d’Avray’s material but an extraordinarily high loss rate for friars’ sermon collections might license a fairly high hypothetical loss rate for religious instructional verse. There were, certainly, lots of copies of these texts.

The reading of these copies can be considered diachronically. The rate of production of copies of *The Prick of Conscience* varied over time. Graphing largely palaeographical datings, as Sargent does, may be risky, but one of his findings which looks convincing is his observation that the production of copies of the poem seems to have fallen off significantly in the second half of the fifteenth century.²⁹ The same trend appears for *Speculum Vitae*: Hanna dates only three witnesses to the second half or the end of the fifteenth century, and in fact two of these are fragments in Scots.³⁰

²⁷ Sargent, 209.

²⁸ David d’Avray, ‘Printing, Mass Communication, and Religious Reformation: The Middle Ages and After’, in *The Uses of Script and Print, 1300–1700*, ed. by Julia Crick and Alexandra Walsham (Cambridge, 2004), 50–70 (52–61); and *Medieval Marriage Sermons: Mass Communication in a Culture without Print* (Oxford, 2001), 17–19.

²⁹ Sargent, 215–16.

³⁰ Edinburgh University Library, MS Laing II.318; BodL, MS Rawl. Q.b.4, items 91 and 92; and CUL, MS Ff.iv.9.

Does the decline in production indicate decreasing interest as the landscape of pious reading changed in the fifteenth century, with more precisely articulated religious compilations available and more texts explicitly written for those trying to combine devotion and instruction with mixed or active lives? *Speculum Vitae*, in particular, might have been less well-placed to weather fifteenth-century changes in reading habits because it is more compendious and all-encompassing, while *The Prick of Conscience* is more selective and varied in its topics.

Obsolescence is, however, not the only possible explanation for changes in the production rate. Sargent raises the possibility of saturated supply: since books outlasted their makers and passed into others' hands, production might have tailed off because eventually there were enough copies.³¹ A. I. Doyle has raised this idea with reference to *Speculum Vitae*, and Charles F. Briggs and Bozzolo and Ornato have posited similar scenarios with four other corpora.³² As will be demonstrated below, the evidence of provenance in many manuscripts certainly shows that one copy could pass through several generations of readers, and even offers hints that some parts of England, at least,

³¹ Sargent, 216.

³² Doyle, 'Survey', I, 83; Briggs, *Giles of Rome's 'De regimine principum'*, 21–22; Carla Bozzolo and Ezio Ornato, *Pour une histoire du livre manuscrit au Moyen Âge: trois essais de codicologie quantitative* (Paris, 1980), 93–95. Books' persistence over time and the resulting possibility of saturation are important in later dissemination systems: for example, see William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge, 2004), 29–34.

might have been saturated with copies of these texts. We might term this situation ‘exemplar wealth’.³³

The will of one layperson, Stephen Preston of Sylton, Dorset, might offer an example of exemplar wealth: he was lucky enough to own ‘ij bokes. called euery of them Stimulus consciencie’, which he left in his 1473 will to the London Minoresses.³⁴ Having two copies might have enabled Preston to lend one to others for reading or as an exemplar. Preston also bequeathed:

my byble, my Boke called Bonaventure. my boke called the pater noster. my boke called Boys de consolacione *philosophie*, [...] and all my other bokes of grammer. sophistrie. logyk. and lawe.³⁵

Here the ‘boke called the pater noster’ might be a *Speculum Vitae*.³⁶ It would seem that Preston was well-read—and well able to get hold of copies of these works.

So, then, the evidence suggests that these texts were very frequently and widely read indeed. The probability of second-hand use increases the amount of reading which each surviving and postulated copy of these texts might have undergone. The decline in the rate of production of copies by the later fifteenth century might suggest that there were simply enough copies already.

³³ I play here with the ‘exemplar poverty’ which has been proposed as a condition for much of the production of books containing Middle English literature by Ralph Hanna, ‘Miscellaneity and Vernacularity: Conditions of Literary Production in Late Medieval England’, in *The Whole Book: Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany*, ed. by Stephen G. Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel (Ann Arbor, 1996), 37–51 (47). Since submission I have learned of forthcoming research by Ryan Perry in which he proposes a similar idea with reference to Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (private communication; I am grateful to Ryan for generously sharing some of this work with me). Perry uses the phrase ‘exemplar superfluity’.

³⁴ Not in Cavanaugh; Doyle, ‘Survey’, II, 309–10; TNA, PROB 11/6/143. Preston owned Silton, Dorset and later also the manor of Cricket St Thomas, Somerset: R. J. E. Bush, ‘Cricket St Thomas’, in *The Victoria History of the County of Somerset*, ed. by William Page and others, 10 vols (London, 1906–2010), IV, 133–41 (135).

³⁵ TNA, PROB 11/6/143.

³⁶ Doyle, ‘Survey’, I, 88.

Diatopic dissemination

Geographical distribution is also important evidence that these texts were widely read. Some surviving copies of *The Prick of Conscience* can be associated with relatively far-flung places. Three copies of *The Prick of Conscience* survive which can be dialectally associated with Dublin and the Pale.³⁷ Another copy seems to have been in Killeen by the later fifteenth century, despite its North Lancashire scribal dialect.³⁸ Two copies dialectally localisable to Devonshire survive, as do two copies in language which suggests Sussex.³⁹ Lewis and McIntosh offer maps of the dialectal distribution of the witnesses to *The Prick of Conscience* and to the poem's Southern Recension known in 1982.⁴⁰ These maps convey the broad distribution of the former, and hint at a more limited spread for the latter, particularly concentrated around the Severn estuary, although Lewis and McIntosh propose that the Southern Recension might have originated in the Thames Valley.⁴¹

Richard Beadle has mapped the dialectal distribution of surviving copies of *Speculum Vitae* and describes the overall picture as one of 'a distribution similar to but more limited than the *Prick of Conscience*': the witnesses cluster in the North and the

³⁷ Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS F.iv.18 (MV7); TCD, MS 156 (MV20); and Manchester, Chetham's Library, MS 8008 (MV53). MS 156 is also connected to Dublin by the writ to the Sheriff of Dublin from the reign of Henry VIII copied onto f.78^r and the 1618 Dublin deed now serving as f.1^{r-v}.

³⁸ TCD, MS 158 (D.iv.15), ff.82^r–93^r; and *DG*, 54.

³⁹ The Devonshire copies are those in Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale Albert I, MS IV 998; and BodL, MS Digby 14. The Sussex copies are CUL, MS Dd.xi.69 (MV11); and Oxford, University College, MS 142 (MV90).

⁴⁰ *DG*, 169–73.

⁴¹ *DG*, 9.

Midlands, with some reaching down into East Anglia.⁴² As noted above, two fragments in dialects which have been localised to Scotland also survive. From dialectal localisation, it would seem that the poem did not travel all that far south: the southernmost dialects represented are those of Worcestershire, Cambridgeshire and Suffolk.⁴³ Of course, all these dialectal localisations must be treated with the usual qualifications about scribes' and copies' mobility: Stephen Preston's will, after all, mentions a book that might be a copy of *Speculum Vitae*, and he lived in the South West.⁴⁴ In any case, the overall picture is one of wide dialectal distribution, which we can observe without ruling out distribution to areas unrepresented in surviving copies.

Codicological trends

The codicological details of these manuscripts also reveal information about their production and reading. Perhaps the most important detail was driven by the poems' length. When copied as whole poems, both texts tend to be either the sole text, or the dominant text in a manuscript. Manuscripts were, so to speak, built around *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae*: these texts could stimulate or justify the creation of entire books. The main identifiable exceptions to this trend are the initial Yorkshire

⁴² Richard Beadle, 'Middle English Texts and their Transmission, 1350–1500: Some Geographical Criteria', in *Speaking in Our Tongues: Proceedings of a Colloquium on Medieval Dialectology and Related Disciplines*, ed. by Margaret Laing and Keith Williamson (Cambridge, 1994), 69–91 (84–85); Doyle judged that the *Speculum Vitae* enjoyed 'unrivalled success (ignoring the *Prick of Conscience*, of comparable pieces)'; Doyle, 'Survey', 1, 81.

⁴³ From the copies in BodL, MSS Hatton 19 and Eng. poet. a.1 (MV70) for Worcestershire; TCD, MS 423 for Cambridgeshire; and BodL, MS Hatton 18 for Suffolk. Doyle suggests that MS 423 was from a male religious house; 'Survey', 1, 86: given the Cambridgeshire scribal dialect, the copying of a stanza from Lydgate's *Life of Our Lady* onto f.103^v might suggest a house with connections to Bury St Edmunds.

⁴⁴ On localisation, see Bella Millett, 'Scribal Geography', *New Medieval Literatures*, 13 (2011), 183–97.

production of large compilations (discussed above), and the so-called ‘Vernon’ and ‘Simeon’ manuscripts.

Furthermore, in both cases the great majority of copies are the work of single scribes: forty of the forty-eight known witnesses to *Speculum Vitae* and 110 of the 119 known witnesses to *The Prick of Conscience*. I would tentatively suggest that the preponderance of single scribes reflects the fact that many of these manuscripts fall into one of two groups. The first group is composed of copies which are, while not normally extravagantly decorated, clean and relatively large. These tended to be copied by one scribe because the people who commissioned them could afford to pay him.⁴⁵ In some cases, particularly for the early northern manuscripts, the role of book production within or under the auspices of religious houses might be a factor. The second group is composed of manuscripts which are personal copies produced by their first owner and reader.⁴⁶ These tended to be copied personally, with the owner being the only labour force available. The first group might often have been the result of the sanctioned provision and dissemination of reading material; the second, the result of personal initiative, though they could sometimes have been descended from an exemplar of the first, institutional, group.

A kind of production which is for the most part missing from this corpus is rapid collaborative copying facilitated by splitting a single text up between multiple scribes. This mode is associated in present scholarship with professional scribes in London, cooperating to copy Ricardian and post-Ricardian poetry, and with some monastic

⁴⁵ Jaakko Tahkokallio has suggested (private communication) that medieval book commissioners felt that, *ceteris paribus*, a text copied by just one scribe was more aesthetically pleasing than one copied by multiple scribes.

⁴⁶ See Reiter.

settings.⁴⁷ By contrast, even when scribes collaborated to produce collections containing these Middle English religious poems, they rarely teamed up within the same text, which might indicate that they were not operating with the same time constraints, or that they were not working in collaborative conditions like those found in London.

One instance of a partial exception to this trend exists. *The Prick of Conscience* seems to have undergone at least one more period of collaborative organised dissemination, even something akin to mass production. Lewis and McIntosh identified a sub-group of Group IV copies which share a close textual relationship with the Vernon copy of *The Prick of Conscience* and suggested that one member of this group, BL, MS Harley 1205, may have itself been the progenitor of this ‘Lichfield group’.⁴⁸ They locate the scribal dialects of five of the seven members of the Lichfield group in the Lichfield area itself.⁴⁹ Subsequent research has drawn stronger connections between Vernon, Simeon, the Lichfield group and Lichfield itself, by the identification of shared scribes or decorators.⁵⁰ Simon Horobin has proposed from the differences between Oxford, Trinity College, MS 16B and BodL, MS Douce 156, which share production personnel,

⁴⁷ Originary discussion in A. I. Doyle and M. B. Parkes, ‘The Production of Copies of the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Confessio Amantis* in the Early Fifteenth Century’, in *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries: Essays Presented to N. R. Ker*, ed. by M. B. Parkes and Andrew G. Watson (London, 1978), 163–210; most recent detailed argument in Linne R. Mooney and Estelle Stubbs, *Scribes and the City: London Guildhall Clerks and the Dissemination of Middle English Literature* (Woodbridge, 2013). For an example copied for and possibly in a nunnery see Durham University Library, MS Cosin V.III.24.

⁴⁸ *DG*, 8. The ‘Lichfield group’ of manuscripts consists of Holkham Hall, Earl of Leicester’s Library, MS 668 (MV23); London, College of Arms, MS Arundel 57 (MV45, listed in *DG* as MS LVII); JRL, MS English 50; New Haven, Beinecke Library, MS Osborn a. 13 (MV57); BodL, MS Douce 156 (MV68); and TCO, MSS 16A (MV88) and 16B (MV89). These are not to be confused with the two Southern recension copies now held by Lichfield Cathedral Library, MSS 16 (SR6) and 50 (SR7).

⁴⁹ *DG*, 8.

⁵⁰ A. I. Doyle, *The Vernon Manuscript: A Facsimile of Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. a.1* (Cambridge, 1987), 7 and 13; Simon Horobin, ‘The Scribes of the Vernon Manuscript’, in *The Making of the Vernon Manuscript: The Production and Contexts of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. a.1* ed. by Wendy Scase, *Texts and Transitions*, 6 (Turnhout, 2013), 27–47 (38–39 and 44–46).

that Lichfield may have been the location of ‘the collaborative efforts of two scribes supplying copies of the *Prick of Conscience* in a standard layout but in varying decorative formats for customers with different budgets’.⁵¹ Finally, the hand of the John Scriveyn named in a marginalium in the Simeon manuscript may be linked, via documentary evidence, to three copies of *The Prick of Conscience*.⁵² From this evidence Horobin reasonably proposes that Vernon (and possibly therefore also Simeon) may be a product of Lichfield Cathedral.⁵³ Vernon and Simeon might have been the crowning results of a period of production of books containing what the Vernon manuscript’s English title calls ‘sowlehele’, including copies of *The Prick of Conscience*.⁵⁴ At the turn of the fifteenth century Lichfield diocese was one of the largest in England: it would have provided pastoral workers who might have been interested in copies of the poem, and also an organised, well-resourced institution to aid the text’s dissemination.

Otherwise, beyond this group, the manuscripts display a wide variety of perhaps often completely unrelated scribes. To draw further conclusions, it is useful to abandon the idea of scribes and to focus on decisions instead: each scribe’s work on each manuscript was after all a new set of choices (some of them habitual) about how the texts should be presented for reading. By my count the surviving copies and fragments

⁵¹ Horobin, ‘Vernon Manuscript’, 46.

⁵² A. I. Doyle, ‘Codicology, Palaeography and Provenance’, in *The Making of the Vernon Manuscript: The Production and Contexts of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. a.1*, ed. by Wendy Scase, Texts and Transitions, 6 (Turnhout, 2013), 3–25 (14–15). London, College of Arms, MS Arundel 57; JRL, MS English 50; and the possible progenitor of the Lichfield group, BL, MS Harley 1205 (MV31). See also *DG*, 72–74 and 92–93.

⁵³ Horobin, ‘Vernon Manuscript’, 46–47. Alternatively, Wendy Scase, ‘The Patronage of the Vernon Manuscript’, in *The Making of the Vernon Manuscript: The Production and Contexts of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. a.1*, ed. by Wendy Scase, Texts and Transitions, 6 (Turnhout, 2013), 269–93, proposes that Vernon’s production was linked to the household or affinity of William Beauchamp, brother of the twelfth earl of Warwick, and the London nexus of book production.

⁵⁴ MS Eng. poet. a.1, f.i^r, l.3.

of *The Prick of Conscience* preserve around 128 separate decisions about what kind of hand should be used to copy the poem.⁵⁵ Fifteen of the hands used are textualis; fifty-seven are anglicana formata; fifty-three are anglicana; and only three are secretary.⁵⁶ The *Speculum Vitae* corpus preserves around fifty-two decisions about the appropriate hand: three are textura; one is bastard anglicana; sixteen are anglicana formata; twenty-five are anglicana; six are secretary, and Hanna classifies one more as a mixture of anglicana and secretary. Not all the texts of *The Prick of Conscience* copied in set hands are in impressive manuscripts: some user-produced personal copies are copied in anglicana formata.⁵⁷ This may be because the clarity of the script was important, or because even though they were small copies there was an expectation that other people would use them, or because time and labour were less pressing considerations in their production. If a canon can do a little copying every day and the colleague who lent him his exemplar is not hassling him, he might feel able to give his work a little polish. As Sarah Wood has noted, copying and transmitting texts such as these may have been regarded as a quasi-devotional service in itself, which might also have encouraged those who had the time to apply some graphetic solemnity.⁵⁸

Shape and size might reveal something about how copies of these texts were read, but this topic is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. No one decided to illustrate either of these poems—although one copy of *The Prick of Conscience* seems to have

⁵⁵ If the same scribe contributes to two copies, I count these two contributions as two separate decisions about handwriting.

⁵⁶ Many of these hands might best be described as being modelled on these scripts, but I will be reductive in this holistic discussion.

⁵⁷ For example, the copy in BodL, MS Digby 99 (MV65).

⁵⁸ Sarah Wood, 'A Prose Redaction of *The Prick of Conscience* Part VI in Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 23', *Medium Aevum*, 80 (2011), 2–17 (14, n.32).

been prepared to contain an opening illumination, and there is a diagram at the beginning of the copy of *Speculum Vitae* in the Vernon manuscript.⁵⁹ Basic ink drawings, which were probably mnemonic rebuses, are also used in at least one copy of the prose *Myroure to Lewde Men and Wymmen* which was adapted from *Speculum Vitae*.⁶⁰ Rubrication is standard, though not universal, but decoration involving more than just red and blue ink is rare. Few readers would have encountered these texts in particularly opulent forms.

Ownership evidence

The surviving evidence of book ownership can reveal more about who read these texts, and therefore can hint at some of the ways in which they were read; it can also, in some cases, allow these texts to be placed in the context of other texts which were owned by the same readers. A. I. Doyle explored much of the evidence for ownership and circulation of *Speculum Vitae* in his still-current doctoral thesis.⁶¹ Following his example, I will combine the evidence of marks of provenance in surviving manuscripts together with the evidence offered by wills and inventories. Wills are troublesome: they

⁵⁹ BL, MS Egerton 3245, f.1^v contains a frame around an empty space, which Lewis and McIntosh suggest might have been intended for an image of the Trinity; *DG*, 62. MS Eng. poet. a.1, f.231^v; and Avril Henry, “‘The Pater Noster in a table ypeynted’ and Some Other Presentations of Doctrine in the Vernon Manuscript”, in *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, ed. by Derek Pearsall (Cambridge, 1990), 89–113.

⁶⁰ Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Library, MS Codex 198; for example, a drawing of a moneybag accompanies the discussion of avarice at f.62^r. The text has been edited in Venetia Nelson, ed., *A Myroure to Lewde Men and Wymmen: A Prose Version of ‘Speculum Vitae’ ed. from B.L. MS Harley 45* (Heidelberg, 1981).

⁶¹ Doyle, ‘Survey’. Identifying *Speculum Vitae* in records is difficult, but Doyle, ‘Survey’, I, 87, argues that the fairly frequently-mentioned ‘book of the Pater Noster’ in wills might often be the poem, with reference to the titles in CUL, MS Ii.i.8; BodL, MS Eng. poet. d.5; Princeton University Library, MS Taylor Medieval 11; and Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS McClean 130.

only directly record the texts that testators wanted to have recognised, not necessarily the texts that they were reading.⁶² However, this problem affects general surveys of reading habits much more than it affects specific surveys of the reading of a few texts. Testators would probably not list books which they did not own.

The broad conclusion suggested by the evidence is that literate people of all kinds owned these texts. Copies moved from religious owners to laypeople, but they also travelled in the other direction, in ‘the constant traffic throughout the fifteenth century between individual secular and lay owners, mutually’.⁶³ The two texts seem to have often been read by the same people. Another running trend in the evidence below, however, is the appearance of these texts in the hands of readers who were also engaged with material of other sorts, such as theology, *Piers Plowman*, religious plays, secular chronicles and, later, humanist writing. Religious instructional verse was owned by people who were reading all sorts of other things.

Parish churches, urban and rural, owned copies of *The Prick of Conscience*.⁶⁴ However, although the occasional copy preserves a pressmark, catalogues and inventories from religious institutions rarely record copies: as N. R. Ker observed from his study of medieval libraries, copies of Middle English verse, whether secular or

⁶² Cavanaugh, 8–19; and Joel T. Rosenthal, ‘Clerical Book Bequests: A *Vade Mecum*, but Whence and Whither?’, in *The Church and Learning in Later Medieval Society: Essays in Honour of R. B. Dobson*, ed. by Caroline M. Barron and Jenny Stratford, Harlaxton Medieval Studies, 11 (Donington, 2002), 327–43 (337–43).

⁶³ Doyle, ‘Survey’, I, 89.

⁶⁴ Pamela Robinson, ‘A “Prick of conscience cheyned”: The Parish Library of St Margaret’s, New Fish Street, London, 1472’, in *The Medieval Book and a Modern Collector: Essays in Honour of Toshiyuki Takamiya*, ed. by Takami Matsuda and others (Woodbridge, 2004), 209–2. The copy of *The Prick of Conscience* in CUL, MS Dd.xii.69 preserves (front flyleaf f.ii^v) an early fifteenth-century donation record indicating the gift of the book to the parish church of Shermanbury, Sussex, by one John Haynes.

pastoral, tended to be owned by individuals rather than institutions.⁶⁵ Hanna and Wood note a number of surviving copies of *The Prick of Conscience* containing evidence of institutional provenance but most of these copies were either definitely or probably personal copies owned by people living within institutions, rather than copies owned by institutions themselves.⁶⁶

Scholars have explored the Augustinians' role in transmitting texts practically useful in the *cura animarum*.⁶⁷ Some surviving copies of *The Prick of Conscience* offer possible evidence of Augustinian involvement.⁶⁸ The same is true for some copies of *Speculum Vitae*.⁶⁹ Another copy of *The Prick of Conscience* might also be linked to an Augustinian: the scribe and probable first user identifies himself as 'canonicus thetfordie', and although he has normally been localised to the Cluniac priory in

⁶⁵ The copy of *Speculum Vitae* in CUL, MS Ll.i.8, for example, retains a pressmark reading either 'K.14' or 'l.14', on f.1^r. N. R. Ker, 'The Migration of Manuscripts from the English Medieval Libraries', *The Library*, 4th series, 23 (1942), 1–11 (1). It is also possible that in a few cases these poems could be minor texts in manuscripts dominated by and catalogued by their Latin contents—if BL, MS Sloane 2275 (MV38), for example, was ever catalogued it could have been recorded as a copy of various works by John of Wales, despite the fact that it contains a copy of *The Prick of Conscience*.

⁶⁶ *Morris*, xxvi, n. 10.

⁶⁷ Ralph Hanna, 'Augustinian Canons and Middle English Literature', in *The English Medieval Book: Studies in Memory of Jeremy Griffiths*, ed. by A. S. G. Edwards, Vincent Gillespie and Ralph Hanna (London, 2000), 27–42; and Niamh Patwell, 'Canons and Catechisms: The Austin Canons of South-East England and *Sacerdos parochialis*', in *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. by Kantik Ghosh and Vincent Gillespie, *Medieval Church Studies*, 21 (Turnhout, 2011), 381–93.

⁶⁸ Lewis and McIntosh suggest that BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 138 (MV81) might be connected to the Augustinian Priory at Ulverscroft by the note on the bookmark attached to f.i^v. Ker expressed doubt about this: *MLGB*, 191. I find the writing on the bookmark so small and so faded that it is illegible. More solidly, a note at the end of the BodL, MS Bodley 423 (SR12) copy of *The Prick of Conscience* links it to the Augustinian Priory of St Mary Overy in Southwark (f.351^r; and *MLGB*, 180).

⁶⁹ Doyle suggested that CUL, MS Add. 2823 might be connected to the York Augustinians ('Survey', 1, 86). Ker proposed that MS Taylor Medieval 11 might have been at the Augustinian priory at Bolton in the West Riding of Yorkshire (*MLGB*, 11), working from a note on f.1^r, though Doyle has noted that Ker's first reading of the same note would suggest an unknown private chapel instead (private communication referenced in *SVRE*, 1, lvi).

Thetford, the concentration of pastorally relevant material in the book suggests that he might instead have been a canon at Thetford's Augustinian Priory of the Holy Sepulchre.⁷⁰ These texts also appear in relation to houses of other religious orders, both monastic and mendicant. Copies of *The Prick of Conscience* survive from the Yorkshire Cistercians at Fountains Abbey and Byland Abbey.⁷¹ One textually advanced late fourteenth-century copy of *The Prick of Conscience* which might have been copied in the Midlands found its way into the hands of a York Franciscan.⁷² Another book, this time containing both a copy of *The Prick of Conscience* and a complex text created from quotations from *Speculum Vitae*, travelled in the other direction: it was probably produced in Yorkshire but was owned by a Westminster monk by the late fifteenth century.⁷³ By the early sixteenth century one copy of *Speculum Vitae* was owned by the abbess at the community of Poor Clares at Denny, Elizabeth Throckmorton.⁷⁴ Few of this house's books are known, but the 1448 will of Agnes Stapilton leaves 'a book of

⁷⁰ MS Digby 99, f.156^v. Folios 1^v–8^v contain a set of synodal statutes copied by the same scribe, statutes which remark that priests should ensure their parishes' boys are educated 'ut sciant dominicam oracionem [...] et salutacionem de Virginis' [that they may know the Lord's Prayer and the greeting of the Virgin] (f.2^r, ll.23–24). A leaf from another book which has been bound into MS Digby 99 contains the Pater Noster, the Ave and a Creed, all in Middle English. The Augustinian priory, unlike the Cluniac one, had the pastoral responsibility for several churches: J. C. Cox, 'The Priory of the Holy Sepulchre, Thetford', in *The Victoria History of the County of Norfolk*, ed. by H. Arthur Doubleday and others, 6 vols (London, 1901–), II, 391–93. This would be an oddly pastoral book for Thetford's Cluniac Benedictines.

⁷¹ BL, MS Add. 24203 (MV41) and Wellesley College, MS 8 (MV96): *DG*, 74–75 and *Morris*, xxiv–xxvi.

⁷² This is the Arundel Castle copy, which has no shelfmark (MV2).

⁷³ LPL, Sion College MS Arch. L. 40. 2/E. 25 (MV49), f.134^r. For the most recent description, see *Morris*, xxxii–xxxiv.

⁷⁴ MS Hatton 18, f.210^v; and Doyle, 'Survey', I, 86. A further note on the same page claims that 'Hic fuit frater Iohannes Fakun' [This was Brother John Fakun's]]. Doyle proposes that this is the Fakun who was the last vice-warden of the Franciscans in Cambridge (Denny is about eight miles away from Cambridge on the Ely road). On Elizabeth Throckmorton's reading before the dissolution of Denny see Mary Carpenter Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2002), 106–11.

French' to Denny and, among other bequests, 'librum meum vocatum prik of conscience' to the Cluniac nuns of Arthington, West Yorkshire.⁷⁵ Denny also had a copy of the *Northern Homily Cycle* in the fifteenth century which, the available evidence suggests, had to be pawned in a period of financial distress and was never reclaimed.⁷⁶ One of the limited number of copies of *The Prick of Conscience* with a named scribe, meanwhile, was copied in the second half of the fifteenth century by Stephen Dodesham in the Charterhouse at Sheen, a place of royal patronage and cutting-edge religious thought.⁷⁷ The fact that *The Prick of Conscience* was still copied and read there in the late fifteenth century suggests that the poem had continued to be of interest to some well-informed readers, if perhaps only as a tool.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Bell, 134–135; Cavanaugh, 815–16; and J. W. Clay, *North Country Wills: Being Abstracts of Wills Relating to the Counties of York, Nottingham, Northumberland, Cumberland, and Westmorland at Somerset House and Lambeth Palace 1383 to 1558*, 2 vols, Surtees Society, 116, 121 (Durham, 1908–12), I, 48–49. Agnes also left a 'chastising of goddeschildern' to the Cistercian nuns of Esholt, Yorkshire, and a book called 'vice and vertues', which might just possibly be *Speculum Vitae*, to the Benedictine nuns of Nun Monkton, Yorkshire: Cavanaugh, 816.

⁷⁶ Bell, 134; and Katharine Leigh Geldenhuys, 'Suggestions Concerning Denney Abey's Use and Loss of MS. Cambridge, University Library, Additional 8335', *Scriptorium*, 60 (2006), 240–45.

⁷⁷ BL, MS Add. 11305 (SR11). See A. I. Doyle, 'Stephen Dodesham of Witham and Sheen', in *Of the Making of Books: Medieval Manuscripts, their Scribes and Readers*, ed. by P. R. Robinson and Rivkah Zim (Aldershot, 1997), 94–115. On Sheen, see Neil Beckett, 'Henry V and Sheen Charterhouse: The Expansion of Royal and Carthusian Ideals', *Die Ausbreitung kartäusischen Lebens und Geistes im Mittelalter*, ed. by James Hogg, *Analecta Cartusiana*, 63 (1990), 49–71; and Neil Beckett, 'Henry VII and Sheen Charterhouse', in *The Reign of Henry VII*, ed. by Benjamin Thompson, *Harlaxton Medieval Studies*, 5 (Stamford, 1995), 117–32.

⁷⁸ In addition, the copy of *Speculum Vitae* in BodL, MS Hatton 19 might have been produced in or spent time in a monastery: Doyle, 'Survey', I, 86, n.18, reads the damaged text on the rear board's exterior as something ending in 'monasterio'. A note (at f.84^v) in Tokyo, Toshiyuki Takamiya, MS 15 indicates that this book was at least intended to be taken by the Lichfield Franciscans in return for the singing of masses for the souls of 'Alice, Jocosa and Alan'. See Toshiyuki Takamiya, "'On the Evils of Covetousness': An Unrecorded Middle English Poem", in *New Science out of Old Books: Studies in Manuscripts and Early Printed Books in Honour of A. I. Doyle*, ed. by Richard Beadle and A. J. Piper (Aldershot, 1995), 189–206 (190–91).

Cathedral canons probably had personal copies of these texts. Doyle records one cathedral canon passing on a copy of *Speculum Vitae* to another priest.⁷⁹ Another, about whom some biographical details are known, is Thomas Harlyng, canon of Chichester, who died in 1422 or 1423 and bequeathed a copy of *The Prick of Conscience* to a Maurice Pomery in his will.⁸⁰ Harlyng held a portfolio of absentee positions and was reasonably wealthy and educated.⁸¹ Alongside the poem he also gave Maurice a roll of English chronicles in Latin, a book containing chronicles in French (or Anglo-Norman) and a text called ‘Lymage de la mounde’.⁸² If the evidence of his personal collection can be trusted, Harlyng read beyond the requirements of his vocation, and had a taste for secular history. That said, the books might also characterise Pomery’s tastes: I have found a ‘Maurice Pomery’ in some deeds relating to land near Chichester who was a member of the gentry and might have appreciated history himself.⁸³

For further evidence of lay readership we might compare the 1446 bequest of ‘vnum librum de oracione dominica & Stimulo conscientie in Anglica tractatum’ (‘one book about the Lord’s Prayer [potentially *Speculum Vitae*] and *The Prick of Conscience* written in English’) from William Revetour, a York chantry priest and eventually

⁷⁹ Doyle, ‘Survey’, I, 89; the testator is Thomas Mershe, attached to Wells, and the recipient is his godson Thomas Orchard.

⁸⁰ Cavanaugh, 399; the whole will in E. F. Jacob, ed., *The Register of Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1414–1443*, 4 vols (Oxford, 1937–1947), II, 244–47.

⁸¹ Jacob, ed., II, 657; see also Alison J. Macdonell, *Thomas Harlyng: Rector of Pulborough and Canon of Chichester* ([Pulborough], 1998).

⁸² Cavanaugh, 399. Jacob speculates that ‘Lymage’ is a French version of Honorius of Augsburg’s *De imagine mundi*: Jacob, ed., II, lvi.

⁸³ H. C. Maxwell Lyte, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Ancient Deeds in the Public Record Office*, 6 vols (London, 1890–1915), III, deed A.5979; IV, deed A.7406; V, deeds A.10478 and A.10508.

warden of that city's Guild of Corpus Christi, to Alice Bolton.⁸⁴ This copy of *The Prick of Conscience* has been linked to a window containing excerpts from the poem in All Saints Church, York. Bolton was related to one of the window's donor families, but both the bulk of Revetour's career and the will itself fall well after the proposed date of the window.⁸⁵ More intriguingly however, Revetour also left 'le Crede Play' and 'ludum de sancto Iacobo Apostolo' ('the play about St James the Apostle') to the Guild of Corpus Christi and to the Guild of St Christopher respectively.⁸⁶ These bequests offer firmer links between *The Prick of Conscience* and a form of religious instruction different to stained glass: here we see the poem being read by someone conversant with, perhaps even responsible for, English religious drama.⁸⁷ Revetour also bequeathed to various people a scientific text, a Bible with commentary, a biblical commentary in English and an English collection of gospels and hagiographies.⁸⁸ Here is another case, like that of Thomas Harlyng, in which religious instructional verse was probably read as part of a variety of genres.

⁸⁴ Alexandra F. Johnston, 'William Revetour, Chaplain and Clerk of York, Testator', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s., 29 (1998), 153–71 (161).

⁸⁵ Sue Powell, 'All Saints' Church, North Street, York: Text and Image in the *Pricke of Conscience* Window', in *Prophecy, Apocalypse and the Day of Doom: Proceedings of the 2000 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. by Nigel Morgan, Harlaxton Medieval Studies, 12 (Donington, 2004), 292–316; and E. A. Gee, 'The Painted Glass of All Saints' Church, North Street, York', *Archaeologia*, 102 (1969), 158–62. On Revetour's career, see Alexandra F. Johnston, 'The Plays of the Religious Guilds of York: The Creed Play and the Pater Noster Play', *Speculum*, 50 (1975), 55–90 (57–59).

⁸⁶ Johnston, 'Revetour', 163.

⁸⁷ The possibility that Revetour wrote these plays has been raised by James Raine: James Raine and H. C. Clay, eds, *Testamenta Eboracensia, or, Wills Registered at York: Illustrative of the History, Manners, Language, Statistics, etc. of the Province of York, from the Year MCCC. Downwards*, 6 vols, Surtees Society, 4, 30, 45, 53, 79 and 106 (London, then Durham, 1836–1902), II, 116–18; and in Johnston, 'Plays', 57.

⁸⁸ Johnston, 'Revetour', 162–64.

Secular parish priests also owned copies of these texts. One of the early copies of *The Prick of Conscience* associated with the circle of scribes which Hanna has argued operated in Ripon seems to have been owned later by ‘Thomas Gyll’, who may have been the man of the same name who was the incumbent priest at Adwick-le-Street in 1535 and chantry priest and schoolmaster in Wragby in 1548; if the identification is correct then this copy of *The Prick of Conscience* was perhaps being used by a priest more than a century after it was copied.⁸⁹ Gyll was probably closer to the coalface of pastoral care than readers such as Thomas Harlyng.

What about lay readers? A few of the laity have already appeared above, both as beneficiaries and as testators. Some lay owners of *The Prick of Conscience* were august mercantile or aristocratic figures.⁹⁰ On a slightly humbler plane, Agnes Paston had a copy of *The Prick of Conscience*, which seems to have been loaned for the long-term to her by a Great Yarmouth burgess.⁹¹ One manuscript, which might from its size, binding and second text (part of Gregory’s *Pastoral Care*) have originated as the user-produced book of a priest or other person with pastoral responsibilities, preserves a copy of a fourteenth-century birth record in a hand from the end of the fifteenth century or the

⁸⁹ MS Rawl. poet. 175, f.1^r; Doyle, ‘Survey’, II, 48; A. G. Dickens, ‘Robert Parkyn’s Narrative of the Reformation’, *English Historical Review*, 62 (1947), 58–83 (58, n.2); and A. F. Leach, ‘Schools’, in *The Victoria History of the County of Yorkshire*, ed. by William Page, 3 vols (London, 1907–25), I, 415–500 (476).

⁹⁰ Such as Thomas Roos, four times mayor of London, who bequeathed a copy—alongside a *Piers Plowman*—to his son Guy in his will, now London, Guildhall Library, MS 9171/3, pp.369–70 (manuscript is paginated; Cavanaugh, 749–50); William Smart, member (from 1495) and warden (in 1509) of the London Company of Grocers, who noted his ownership in HEHL, MS HM 130, p.240 (manuscript is paginated); and Henry lord Scrope, Knight of the Garter, executed in 1415 in the aftermath of the Southampton Plot, who left a copy ‘coopertum in albo corio’ [covered in white leather] to his sister Maud, who was by then a widow and a Franciscan nun in London (Cavanaugh, 775; and Doyle, ‘Survey’, II, 302–03).

⁹¹ Cavanaugh, 225–26.

beginning of the sixteenth.⁹² This looks like the preservation of family history in a lay household.⁹³ It is a salutary reminder that books which seem clearly designed for one category of reader did not always stay in the hands of that kind of reader. But lay ownership of these texts was not purely a fifteenth-century phenomenon: the 1399 will of Thomas de Roos details a copy of *The Prick of Conscience*, and Sir Thomas Molynton of Wem left a possible *Speculum Vitae* to John Bloxham, a secular priest, in 1408.⁹⁴ These instances show that these poems were in lay hands relatively early in their period of success.

Finally, it should be noted that even at the end of the period, these poems had readers who were also reading texts which were, teleologically speaking, forward-looking. The last abbess of the Poor Clares at Denny, Elizabeth Throckmorton, who owned a copy of *Speculum Vitae*, corresponded with Erasmus and read Tyndale's translation of Erasmus's *Enchiridion*; she may have been one of the first to read it.⁹⁵ Another surviving copy of *Speculum Vitae* might have been owned by someone else with humanist connections: the schoolmaster William Gonell, who was a friend of

⁹² BodL, MS Laud Misc. 486, f.175^v.

⁹³ Doyle has suggested that the copying of family history into manuscripts was sometimes part of an anxious assertion of ownership over books newly acquired from ecclesiastical sources; Doyle, 'Survey', II, 217.

⁹⁴ Cavanaugh, 748; Raine and Clay, eds, I, 251–53. The Roos family were gentry in Ingmanthorp and this Thomas de Roos should not be confused with the Thomas Roos of note 91 above. What little is known about Thomas is described by W. T. Lancaster, *The Early History of Ripley and the Ingilby Family; with Some Account of the Roos Family of Ingmanthorpe* (Leeds, 1918), 47–48. Doyle, 'Survey', I, 87; and TNA, PROB 11/2A/242.

⁹⁵ A. F. C. Bourdillon, *The Order of Minoresses in England (Beng a Thesis Presented for the Degree of M.A. in the University of Manchester)*, British Society of Franciscan Studies, 12 (Manchester, 1926), 80; David N. Bell, 'What Nuns Read: State of the Question', in *The Culture of Medieval English Monasticism*, ed. James G. Clark (Woodbridge, 2007), 113–33 (123); Erler, 106–7.

Erasmus and (for a time) a tutor in Thomas More's household.⁹⁶ A copy of 'Stimulus Consciencie' is the sole book mentioned in the will, proven in 1465, of a John Bateman, who has been tentatively identified as an English scribe who learned humanist scripts and was active in Italy for a time before returning to England. In Italy he signed two books: a collection of Cicero's philosophical works, and a collection of grammatical treatises.⁹⁷ These connections are few, and sometimes insecure, but they do suggest that at least some readers in the later fifteenth century and the early sixteenth century combined an appetite for older religious instructional verse alongside the work of humanist thinkers. The survival of *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae* in these circumstances, distant from their origins both chronologically and geographically, is a testament to their interest and also to readers' ability to assimilate older texts into contemporary reading.

Borrowers and auditors

Readers could encounter these texts without owning copies. We can access evidence for this by examining extracts. It would be strange for someone to copy an excerpt of a poem if he already owned a full copy; it is therefore likely that anyone who copied an

⁹⁶ GCC, MS 160/81; and Doyle, 'Survey', II, 83; Doyle's suggestion is based on the notes on the rear flyleaves. Hanna, *SVRE*, I, xxiv, proposes that the person responsible is a priest of the same name from the later sixteenth century.

⁹⁷ TNA, PROB 11/5/142: 'vnum librum qui vocatur Stimulus consciencie' [one book which is called *The Prick of Conscience*]. The suggestion is David Rundle's. I am grateful to him for sharing draft material from his catalogue of humanist scribes. The surviving manuscripts copied by Bateman—if he was the same man—are Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, MSS Reg. lat. 1469 and Vat. lat. 11493. For other English readers who engaged with the new learning but also read other kinds of texts see Daniel Wakelin, 'England: Humanism beyond Weiss', in *Humanism in Fifteenth-Century Europe*, ed. by David Rundle, Medium Ævum Monographs, 30 (Oxford, 2012), 265–305 (272).

extract from one of these poems into a personal collection of texts did not own a full copy of that poem at the time. Robert Thornton, for example, either read *The Prick of Conscience* and selected the extract he copied, or encountered and transmitted the extract after it had been excerpted by someone else, rather than owning a full copy.⁹⁸ Similarly, William Wymondham, a canon of the Augustinian Priory of St Peter at Kirby Bellars, probably had access to a copy of the text but did not own it, because he copied an extract into one of his books.⁹⁹ Again, a contrast suggesting a variety of readers is observable between Thornton, a member of the gentry, and Wymondham, an Augustinian. Similar inferences can be drawn from extracts in the illustrated Carthusian miscellany which has been ably studied by Jessica Brantley,¹⁰⁰ in the book which Lewis and McIntosh suggest is a priest's handbook with some connection to Hailes Abbey, Gloucestershire,¹⁰¹ and in a religious miscellany which they suggest, on somewhat weaker grounds, might be connected to a secular Yorkshire priest.¹⁰² These extracts themselves probably were later read by other people. We know that the third example certainly was, because it is either the originator or the earliest surviving example of a set of witnesses to the same extract.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 91 (E4), ff.276^v–277^r; Thornton transmits equivalent lines to *Morris*, ll.438–551.

⁹⁹ TCC, MS O.2.40 (E1), ff.104^r–105^r. Derek Britton, 'Manuscripts Associated with Kirby Bellars Priory', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 6 (1972–76), 267–84; and 'Unnoticed Fragments'. Wymondham was seconded for a time to St Mary's Abbey, Leicester, and also seems to have accessed books from St Andrew's Abbey, Owston; besides this manuscript he was also responsible for some of the writing in London, Lincoln's Inn, MS Hale 73, ff.1^v–3^v and 207^v–209^r.

¹⁰⁰ BL, MS Add. 37049 (E7), ff.36^r, 69^r and 72^r; and Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (Chicago, 2007), 147–52.

¹⁰¹ BL, MS Royal 17 C.xvii, ff.117^r–124^r (E5); *DG*, 153–54.

¹⁰² BodL, MS Rawl. C.285, f.39^r (E8); *DG*, 157.

¹⁰³ The other surviving witnesses are CUL, MSS Dd.v.55, f.101^v (E2); and Ff.v.40, ff.113^v–114^r (E3); *DG*, 150–52.

One copy of *The Prick of Conscience* preserves evidence of organised book borrowing. It contains a note that ‘Liber iste pertinet Iohanni Crosby capellano plegit pro iij s. iiij d.’ [This book belongs to John Crosby, chaplain; he pledges [it?] for three shillings and four pence].¹⁰⁴ Overleaf another note remarks that ‘T plegges for stemulus concienzie In latyn A sequenciarie A lytyl booc of a tretuys of Iohn of Burdews and a Rolle of al þe Cete of Rome *et aliis*’.¹⁰⁵ This proves that *The Prick of Conscience* was being loaned. However, the syntax raises the possibility that it was not this copy of the poem but rather a copy ‘In latyn’, that is to say the Latin translation: liturgical sequences were normally in Latin anyway, so it might be slightly odd to specify that a sequenciary was ‘In Latyn’; and the other two items in the list begin with ‘a’. Whatever version—Latin prose or English verse—was being loaned, ‘T’, who was evidently one of ‘the learned’, seems to have been willing to deposit several other items in return for access.

Might these texts also have been heard in sermons? Studies of preaching in England have established its importance and its influence on other English literature, but unfortunately we do not have much hard evidence that these particular poems were

¹⁰⁴ BodL, MS Lyell empt. 6 (SR14), f.118^r. This note is now damaged and faded and I rely for its transcription partly on Albinia de la Mare, *Catalogue of the Collection of Medieval Manuscripts Bequeathed to the Bodleian Library, Oxford by James P. R. Lyell* (Oxford, 1971), 288.

¹⁰⁵ MS Lyell empt. 6, 118^v.

themselves deployed in preaching.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae* repeatedly use careful phrases referring to both reading and hearing as modes in which they might be experienced.¹⁰⁷ As Doyle noted, these may be stock phrases, the fossilised remnants of a tradition which was old-fashioned even when these poems were composed.¹⁰⁸ Whether or not these were stock phrases at the time of composition, actual reading practices over the following two centuries might have varied considerably. But the case of John Hacker and John Pykas with which this chapter began involved another copy of *The Prick of Conscience* passing between readers, and includes the mention of the servant who was ‘a great Reder amonges them’, a figure who is unlikely to have been merely a rhetorical trope. Leaving preaching aside, might earlier and more orthodox readers have read texts such as these in private domestic or institutional settings as Hacker’s circle did? Joyce Coleman has established that group reading was normal for some in the later fourteenth century, but her study focuses on courtly texts and explicitly excludes ‘religious reading’.¹⁰⁹ Similar behaviour is, however, suggested by the encouragement of reading in the household in the much-referenced early fifteenth-century ‘instructions for a devout and literate layman’

¹⁰⁶ G. R. Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England: An Introduction to Sermon Manuscripts of the Period c.1350–1450* (Cambridge, 1926); and G. R. Owst *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England: A Neglected Chapter in the History of English Letters & of the English People*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1933; Oxford, 1961). David d’Avray, *Medieval Marriage Sermons*. As Doyle noted with references to the friars ‘there is little positive evidence of public mendicant employment of [*Speculum Vitae*], despite its fitness for their methods [...] proof of use in ordinary parochial conditions is also deficient [so] it may be [...] that in fact conventual and domestic use was much more important’; ‘Survey’, I, 86–87. One copy of *The Prick of Conscience* does survive alongside some English sermons, in Shrewsbury School, MS 3 (MV95); Lewis and McIntosh comment that its shortened text is ‘more a revision with lines omitted than a paraphrase’ (DG, 128), and it may have been altered to suit preaching use.

¹⁰⁷ For example, *Morris*, ll.343, 347, 9579 and 9597; and *SVRE*, ll.16070 and 16073.

¹⁰⁸ Doyle, ‘Survey’, I, 12–13.

¹⁰⁹ Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge, 1996), xi.

discussed by W. A. Pantin and by texts such as the opening of *Speculum Christiani*, which presents teaching as a responsibility which everyone can exercise.¹¹⁰

Although many people might not have had what would today be regarded as full literacy, and some people would not have been able either to read or to write, by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in England almost everyone's lives would have been significantly affected by writing, and many who did not have perfect literacy nevertheless had reasons to access written material, and routes by which they could do so.¹¹¹ Although in the following chapters much of the material and textual evidence discussed simply does not allow the reconstruction of the hearing of these texts, we should not forget the potential audience of what I will call the 'paraliterate': those who could not read but could listen to books being read, or indeed were required to listen to books being read.

Conclusion

These poems were read, heard, owned and borrowed by a wide range of people in a wide range of places and positions in society. Copies moved between religious and lay hands, and not consistently in one direction. Many readers probably read these texts

¹¹⁰ W. A. Pantin, 'Instructions for a Devout and Literate Layman', in *Medieval Learning and Literature: Essays Presented to Richard William Hunt*, ed. by J. J. G. Alexander and M. T. Gibson (Oxford, 1976), 398–422 (399). Gustaf Holmstedt, ed., *Speculum Christiani: A Middle English Religious Treatise of the 14th Century*, EETS, o.s., 182 (London, 1933), 2.

¹¹¹ As is argued convincingly in Malcolm Richardson, *Middle-Class Writing in Late Medieval London* (London, 2011). This situation is the end result of the changes laid out in M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307*, 3rd edn (London, 1979; Oxford, 2013); and, on a European scale with a focus on intellectual history, in Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Century* (Princeton, 1983).

alongside a variety of other genres. Exercises in manuscript studies sometimes speculate about reading in a particular genre from the evidence of a particular relatively homogenous manuscript. But the other texts found in records alongside these poems suggest a much wider variety of reading than the co-texts in surviving manuscripts would suggest on their own. This contrast might be a useful reminder that while readers' books might sometimes be homogenous, their libraries and the range of texts they borrowed from others did not have to be. One surviving manuscript is a terribly narrow slice of any owner's potential reading experience.

The production of copies of both texts slowed after the first half of the fifteenth century, but copies of both continued to be passed between readers, and there are hints in the surviving evidence of saturation and exemplar wealth. Some readers in even the early sixteenth century still found value in these texts, so although production slowed, reading continued. The examples of readers with humanist connections and readers with heterodox opinions demonstrate that these texts could interest a very range of people, and that reading 'taste' in this period could be more complex than our desire to taxonomise always allows.

2. Navigating

Apart from the rare experience of reading one text in a single-text codex in one sitting, navigation through the space of the book is inherent in all kinds of codex-based reading. When reading a text from beginning to end in more than one session we must ‘find our place’ on each return to the book; when reading a text out of order we must navigate within and between different pages.¹ Different kinds of reading require different kinds of navigation. How did readers move into and through copies of *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae*? And what can readers’ movements reveal about the ways these two poems were read?

Large-scale histories of reading broadly agree that navigation in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries involved more movement, and more out-of-order movement—more discontinuity—than the reading practices which came before and possibly also those which came afterwards. Malcolm Parkes and Mary and Richard Rouse demonstrated (as discussed in the introduction) that in the twelfth and especially the thirteenth centuries readers applied a range of pre-existing navigational tools in more systematic and organised ways, therefore probably moving increasingly discontinuously both within books and from book to book.² Parkes also highlighted changes in the same period in both the kind of navigational aid to be found on individual pages, and the kind of compiling practices which could make discontinuous reading both easier and more necessary. Moreover, this period saw the rise of books which were themselves designed

¹ For such navigation today, see Baron.

² Parkes, ‘*Ordinatio* and *Compilatio*’; ‘Hypertext and the Index’. Rouse and Rouse, *Preachers, Florilegia and Sermons*, 3–36.

to do some of this work, books which already did some navigation and selection, such as *florilegia*. At the other end of the period, early modernists too have described the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as a time dominated by discontinuous reading.³

If reading was often discontinuous, what did the necessary navigation involve? Were there different kinds of discontinuity? It stands to reason that reading remained continuous on at least the small scale of the line or few lines. Did readers ever still read continuously on the large scale as well? Navigational aids empower readers, but they also send them in particular directions and occlude other navigational options: Daniel Wakelin has asked whether guiding notes close off other kinds of reading, or implicitly acknowledge readers' ability to disobey or to read incorrectly, while Heidi Brayman Hackel has commented on the potential for antagonism in readers' relationships with textual guides.⁴ Did readers in this period supplement, expand or rebel against the tools they received?

Investigating these questions using the surviving manuscripts of *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae* means attending to certain kinds of paratext, not all of which have received the attention they deserve. By 'paratext' I mean any feature or aspect of these manuscripts which is not the text, yet affects the reading of the text; in adopting this definition I have in mind Charlotte Cooper's argument that Gérard Genette's 'paratext' can usefully be used to talk about medieval manuscripts but was

³ Stallybrass, 'Books and Scrolls'; Blair, *Too Much to Know*.

⁴ Wakelin, 'Instructing Readers', 438; Hackel, 73–74, 125–27.

not conceived for them, and so should be deployed carefully.⁵ Work on this kind of evidence in Middle English studies has been intensive but often restricted to manuscripts of canonical texts, and focused on the interpretation of individual notes rather than the structural function of whole apparatuses.⁶ Some studies, however, have looked further afield and attended more to function.⁷ Working specifically on religious books, meanwhile, Vincent Gillespie has examined some of the ways in which reading was imagined in the period, and also some of the practical attempts which were made, with varying success, to render religious books readable in particular ways.⁸

⁵ Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris, 1987); translated as *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge, 1997). Charlotte Cooper, 'What is a Medieval Paratext?', *Marginalia*, 19 (2015), 37–50. On the concept of paratext in bibliography and codicology, see William H. Sherman, 'On the Threshold: Architecture, Paratext, and Early Print Culture', in *Agent of Change: Print Culture Studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein*, ed. by Sabrina Alcorn Baron and others (Amherst, 2007), 67–81; and Matti Peikola, 'Manuscript Paratexts in the Making: British Library MS Harley 6333 as a Liturgical Compilation', in *Discovering the Riches of the Word: Religious Reading in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Sabrina Corbellini and others, *Intersections*, 38 (Leiden, 2015), 44–67 (44–47). Genette's 'threshold' metaphor implies a close connection between paratext and text. This implication is consonant with Cooper's suggestion that medieval readers did not perceive the sharp distinction between paratext and text which is observed in some modern scholarship (Cooper, 41–44).

⁶ Caie; Schibanoff; Kerby-Fulton, 'Annotators, Editors and Correctors'; Grindley.

⁷ Charles F. Briggs, 'Late Medieval Texts and *tabulae*: The Case of Giles of Rome, *De regimine principum*', *Manuscripta*, 37 (1993), 253–75; George R. Keiser, 'Practical Books for the Gentleman', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain Volume 3: 1400–1557*, ed. by Lotte Hellinga and J. B. Trapp (Cambridge, 1999), 470–94; Ralph Hanna, 'Lambeth Palace Library, MS 260, and the Problem of English Vernacularity', *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, 3rd series, 5 (2008), 131–99 (148–52); J. P. Gumbert, 'Points and Signposts: Whom do they Help?', *Scriptorium*, 63 (2009), 231–37; Peikola, 'Manuscript Paratexts'; Matti Peikola, 'Tables of Lections in Manuscripts of the Wycliffite Bible', in *Form and Function in the Late Medieval Bible*, ed. by Eyal Poleg and Laura Light, *The Manuscript World*, 4 (Leiden, 2013) 351–78; Mattie Peikola, 'The *Sanctorale*, Thomas of Woodstock's English Bible, and the Orthodox Appropriation of Wycliffite Tables of Lessons', in *Wycliffite Controversies*, ed. by Mishtooni Bose and J. Patrick Hornbeck (Turnhout, 2011), 153–74; and Matti Peikola, 'Instructional Aspects of the Calendar in Later Medieval England, with Special Reference to The John Rylands University Library MS English 80', in *Instructional Writing in English: Studies in Honour of Risto Hiltunen*, ed. by Matti Peikola and others, *Pragmatics and Beyond*, n.s., 189 (Amsterdam, 2009), 83–104.

⁸ Gillespie, '*Lukynge in haly bukes*'; 'Vernacular Books of Religion'.

The discussion below builds on these studies by combining surveys of trends with detailed attention to both typical and unusual examples of navigational aids. Matti Peikola has argued that, since most book production in this period was bespoke, paratexts which occur in many copies with little variation were not responding to the demands of a particular reader, but paratexts which occur only once might have been shaped for one person.⁹ This is reasonable, and in some of the cases below the particularity can be increased further because the creator of a paratext was also the book's first user: we must reckon with the user-produced navigational aid as well as the user-produced book. But widely transmitted and unvarying paratexts also deserve attention. Since most book production in this period was bespoke, the choice (perhaps not even consciously taken) to transmit even a 'boilerplate' paratext must have also been a judgement that that paratext at least reached a basic level of acceptability for a particular reader, even if the choice was also driven by considerations of labour cost. It follows that the choice not to transmit a navigational aid should be of interest too: as in other parts of this study, manuscript copies which do not contain distinctive evidence are still significant and demand recognition, even if less can be said about them directly.

This chapter begins by quickly characterising the textual evidence available for readers' navigation, since both texts are structured in ways which encourage some kinds of movement and discourage others. It then examines external navigational aids, the kind of tools found at the edges of texts and books, and internal navigational aids within the main text-column, in the margins, and built into pages' edges.

⁹ Peikola, 'Manuscript Paratexts', 47.

Textual evidence

We can learn something about readers' navigation of these texts simply by examining what the texts themselves say about their own structure and imagined reading. The instruction to 'Turne over the leef and chese another tale' is a rather worn example; another which is more relevant here and even more redolent of discontinuous navigation is Robert Mannyng's description of a text which is full of starts and finishes and which demands multiple readings:

Whedyr outys þou wylt opone þe boke
 Pou shalt fynde begynnyng on to loke.
 Oueral ys begynnyng—oueral ys ende.
 Hou þat þou wylt turne hyt or wende[...]
 Pou mayst nouȝt wyþ onys redyng
 Knowe þe soþe of eyery þyng.¹⁰

Poems' own statements do not necessarily reflect how they were actually read, or even how their authors expected them to be read, as such statements might be inherited *topoi*.¹¹ However, the poems' reception might still have been influenced by such statements and it would be as unwise to ignore this evidence as it would be to take it at face value. It offers a glimpse of ways in which the best-informed readers of these poems—their authors—may have thought about reading, even if that thought was habitual and conventional.

¹⁰ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson (Oxford, 1988), I.X.3177; Idelle Sullens, ed., Robert Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, *Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 14 (Binghamton, 1983), II.121–24, 127–28.

¹¹ Doyle, 'Survey', I, 12–13.

Textual evidence in *Speculum Vitae*

Speculum Vitae says that it is a compendium of knowledge: it claims to contain all virtues and all sins, so that a man may ‘se þarby | Of what synne he es mast gilte | And what remedy is þaragayne’ (ll.16047–49). The knowledge the poem contains is presented as something necessary, but not sufficient: it stresses the individual sinner’s will to confess and resist sin in future. The poem does separately state that ‘men suld oft here and loke’ at the ‘maters’ he has compiled (ll.16070–01), and that:

whaso wille oft þam here or rede
He sal noght faylle þat he ne sal spede
Of speciall grace þat hym sal wisse
The redy way to heuen blisse. (ll.16073–76)

But, as it will only ‘wisse’ the reader or listener, even this grace is informative rather than saving or motivating. *Speculum Vitae* is a book of knowledge, or perhaps, following Avril Henry’s emphasis, a book of (or for) teaching.¹² Its claim to comprehensiveness is not empty: Gillespie has called it ‘the nearest thing to a vernacular *summa* produced in the period’.¹³

The poem’s large- and small-scale structures do welcome referential, discontinuous reading.¹⁴ *Speculum Vitae* can be described as a series of nested lists.¹⁵ These lists are often keyed to sequences of words which readers or listeners might well

¹² Henry.

¹³ Gillespie, ‘Vernacular Books of Religion’, 170.

¹⁴ Hanna, ‘*Speculum Vitae* and the Form of *Piers Plowman*’, 126, suggests that the poem was written to be consulted rather than ‘read’ in the modern continuous sense. See also Vincent Gillespie, ‘The Literary Form of the Middle English Pastoral Manual with Particular Reference to the *Speculum Christiani* and some Related Texts’, 2 vols (unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1981), I, 129–30.

¹⁵ Henry, 103.

know by heart. The second and larger part of the poem, in which each petition in the Pater Noster, treated in reverse order, is linked to a gift of the Holy Spirit, with an associated virtue and contrasting vice, is a large-scale example, while the keying of the articles of faith to the twelve disciples (ll.1246–1452) is one of many smaller-scale examples. At times reading the poem feels like reading a complex diagram, but the poem itself never offers readers a short, simple overview of its own organisation. However, the copy in the Vernon manuscript is preceded by just such a diagram of the Pater Noster, which suggests that at least some among the poem's first generations of readers had the same experience.¹⁶

Furthermore, smaller, perhaps catechetical texts offering a 'diagrammatic' reading experience were widespread. A fairly typical example in one instructional and devotional compilation consists of an English poem in two *abababab* stanzas, the first listing the bodily works of mercy, the second the ghostly.¹⁷ In one witness the two stanzas are arranged parallel to each other and labelled ('Bodily' and 'Gostly') on opposite sides, presenting the text like a diagram.¹⁸ The quasi-catechetical aspect of the text is enhanced by its initial use of the first person, both singular and plural: 'The seuene dedis of mercy,' the reader reads, 'I wole do as god us bede'. A Latin list of the gifts of the Holy Spirit follows, and although the order and details vary from those in *Speculum Vitae*, this list also uses the arrangement of gifts matched to associated pairs of vices and virtues.¹⁹ 'Diagrammatic' English verse on these topics, inviting referential

¹⁶ Henry; MS Eng. poet. a.1, f.231^v.

¹⁷ *IMEV* 3459.

¹⁸ HEHL, MS HM 127, f.62^v. The other witness is arranged more conventionally: Cambridge, MA, Houghton Library, MS Richardson 22, f.68^v.

¹⁹ MS HM 127, f.62^v.

reading, might, then, have been familiar to readers of the *Speculum Vitae*'s extended exercise in the same patterns of thought.

Mnemonic reading may be significant here too. By mnemonic reading I mean reading which was at least partly intended to store the text's contents in the reader's mind, thus making future reading less necessary. *Speculum Vitae* frequently uses arboreal similes, telling readers that the subject at hand has roots or branches; in this it follows *Somme le roi*, which Morton Bloomfield suggested popularised the use of tree images in discussions of the vices and virtues.²⁰ At points *Speculum Vitae* develops the simile beyond pure convention, as in the comparison of the virtue of mercy to a tree 'þat men sees bathe growe and sprede, | Bathe on heght and also on brede', with seven branches on its right side and seven on its left (ll.7321–28).²¹ This simile is recalled later in the discussion of mercy (ll.7477, 7520). Arboreal similes make the poem's lists easier to visualise, which may explain the insistence on sight: 'men sees' the tree of mercy grow, and the 'Seuen degrees of þat tree er sene' (ll.7323, 7325). Occasionally other concrete similes appear, such as a four-cornered house, each corner keyed to a compass direction and one of the cardinal virtues (ll.1931–42). Mnemonic aids in *Speculum Vitae* seem to have more in common with catechetical instruction than with complex devices used by the well-educated.²² That said, the spatial aspect of some similes also faintly recalls the more developed architectural mnemonics discussed by

²⁰ Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (Michigan, 1952), 125. On tree imagery in general, see Parkes, 'Folia librorum quaerere', Plate IV; and Pippa Salonijs and Andrea Worm, eds, *The Tree: Symbol, Allegory, and Mnemonic Device in Medieval Art and Thought*, International Medieval Research, 20 (Turnhout, 2014).

²¹ For the equivalent remark in the *Somme*, see Brayer and Leurquin-Labie, eds, 308.

²² As Gillespie, 'Literary Form', I, 139, notes.

Mary Carruthers.²³

So, then, the self-presentation of *Speculum Vitae* as a comprehensive factual compendium seems to be borne out by its structure. Its organisation seems most suited to granular, highly discontinuous referential reading. It also employs a range of devices which are potentially suited to mnemonic reading. Yet the length of the topic sections in *Speculum Vitae* suggest the kind of referential reading associated with encyclopaedias more than the kind associated with dictionaries: readers navigating to particular topics but then staying in one place for a period of time in order to read sections, not just checking individual details. The kind of reading offered by the poem is not simply discontinuous, but rather discontinuous in a specific way.

Textual evidence in *The Prick of Conscience*

Speculum Vitae describes its role quite narrowly as the provision of knowledge. By contrast, *The Prick of Conscience* promises not just to inform, but to motivate reform through the pricking of the conscience (ll.344–45). This wording has rightly been connected to the concept of *compunctio*, but it has a firm and quotidian sense too: in Middle English a prick is not just a sharp point but more specifically a goad or a spur, and the verb *priken* can denote goading.²⁴ Accordingly, the poem is far more lurid than

²³ Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge, 1998), 16–24; Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1990; 2008), 89–98.

²⁴ Wogan-Browne and others, eds, 244. *MED*, ‘prike (n.)’, senses 2, 3; ‘priken (v.)’, senses 4a, 4b, 5. The commonest title given for the poem outside its own text in the manuscripts is *Stimulus Conscience*, and a *stimulus* could also mean a goad (*DMLBS*, ‘stimulus’, sense 1). The pricking of the conscience may have been proverbial: for example, there seems to be no necessary reference to *The Prick of Conscience* when the phrase is used in G. C. Macaulay, ed., *The English Works of John Gower*, 2 vols, EETS, e.s., 81 and 82 (London, 1900–01), *Confessio Amantis*, V, ll.5915–17.

Speculum Vitae, and it seems designed to encourage more emotionally engaged reading. The lengthy scribal colophon in one copy tells the reader that ‘Hic liber est tibi *conscientie* stimulus’ [this book is a prick of conscience for you] and warns ‘Vide quod legendo respicis. viuendo *non contempnas*’ [see that you do not scorn in living what you attend to in reading].²⁵ Whoever originally composed this colophon evidently wished to present the poem as a useful tool for the personal improvement of the reader. There is, then, evidence that some readers grasped the poem’s titular metaphor and its emotional reading agenda, and elaborated on it. Four among the Lichfield group of copies transmit an additional preface, which names the poem, notes that it is aimed at the sinful and calls for the attention of a listening audience.²⁶ One further copy preserves an expanded version of this preface drawing on digestive metaphors: the poem contains, it says, ‘noble materus for souls fode’.²⁷ Pleasingly, it also instructs the audience to take the poem’s contents ‘And in 3oure hertus suffere hem synke | As parchement taketh wrytyng of ynke’.²⁸ For any reader familiar with the properties of ink in this period—or the etymology of the English word—this image would have stung: writing on parchment required ink acidic enough to burn into the surface and, as anyone who had ever had to scrape writing would notice, ink could burn quite a long way down.

²⁵ BodL, MS Digby 14, ff.159^{r-v}, discussed in Galloway, 56–57 and 66–68.

²⁶ On the Lichfield group, see above, 44–45. The relevant copies are those in Earl of Leicester’s Library, MS 668; JRL, MS English 50; BodL, MS Douce 156 (MV68); and TCO, MS 16B. The copy in London, College of Arms, MS Arundel 57 (MV45) begins imperfectly but Lewis and McIntosh suggest from the state of its text that it too once featured this preface: *DG*, 79.

²⁷ TCO, MS 16A, f.1^r, l.9. From its textual closeness, the acephalous copy in MS Osborn a.13 may once have had this expanded preface.

²⁸ TCO, MS 16A, f.1^r, ll.13–14. This is a parchment manuscript.

This focus on shock value may go some way to explaining why, while *The Prick of Conscience* certainly has a compendious aspect and compiles ‘sere materes drawnen | Of sere bukes’ (ll.9542–43), it does not attempt to offer comprehensive, encyclopaedic coverage in the way that *Speculum Vitae* does. The poem is divided into seven large parts, but the transitions between the parts are explicitly announced within the poem itself. Perhaps imitating Latin incipits and explicits, the poet normally declares the end of the current part (‘Here es þe thred parte of þis buke spedde’, l.2682) and points forward to the start of the next (‘now wille I til þe fifte part wende’, l.3963). The large-scale structure of the poem is clearer than it is in *Speculum Vitae*.

The topics of the seven parts of *The Prick of Conscience* are, however, not seven equivalent entities from a unified list, and are not presented in a taxonomising order as the vices and virtues are in *Speculum Vitae*. The poet adopts an arrangement designed for effect rather than for encyclopaedic organisation. The poem’s medium- and small-scale structures are also inconsistent and unprogrammatic, albeit effective. The poet included digressions on various topics, such as the planets and astronomical distances (ll.7644–83), and while these always serve a larger purpose, they lend parts of the poem a slightly meandering air.

The poet did use numbered lists quite frequently, but they do not structure the poem as a whole, only its final three parts, and there is little of the ramification of multiple layers of lists within other lists found in *Speculum Vitae*. Unnumbered lists of items, by contrast, sometimes become rhetorical set-pieces, piling anaphora on anaphora, as in the poet’s descriptions of the world’s wretchedness, the day of judgement and the superiority of heaven (ll.1169–77, 6099–6117, 9023–50). Such long passages are memorable as whole entities, but unlike short numbered lists they are not

easily divisible into discrete chunks of information suitable for memorisation. Perhaps the poet's limited deployment of lists helps to emphasise those lists which do appear.²⁹

The Prick of Conscience is thus quite unlike *Speculum Vitae* in this respect: its large-scale structure is more clearly expressed, but its medium- and small-scale structures are less clear. As such, the poem may have been more welcoming to continuous reading than *Speculum Vitae*. Indeed, the poem's seven parts could be read as a course of instruction with some coherence. The first three parts discuss man's life, the world and then death; while the next four discuss information relevant to the soul's existence after death, finishing with the joys of heaven. There are hints in the text that this was at least a possibility. 'Be bygynnyng of alle þis proces' of reformation is, its prologue says, 'Ryght knawynge of a man self', which is the subject of its first part (ll.235–36). The use of 'proces' here, in particular, might point towards continuous reading: the word was used to mean both an ordered sequence and a narrative or text.³⁰ The explicit textual markers of readers' location progress determinedly in one direction, with the voice that arises at these points deploying verbs such as 'Ga' and 'wende' (ll.366, 3963). The temporal and spatial specificity of these statements and others like them, with their insistent repetitions of 'now', ties readers or listeners to the speaking voice's staged 'proces' from beginning to end.

These textual features of *The Prick of Conscience* are useful reminders that works could resist discontinuous reading. The study of navigational tools naturally privileges discontinuous reading, and by its very nature continuous reading left less

²⁹ Such as the list of the fifteen days preceding the end of the world (ll.4758–4815).

³⁰ *MED*, 'proces (n.)', senses 1, 3; Griffiths, 24–25.

evidence, so only a limited amount of comment upon it is possible. Historians of reading have described the later Middle Ages as a period of discontinuity and cross-reference, contrasted with other practices such as meditative monastic reading in the early Middle Ages and the hungry, intensive and continuous reading of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels, but in this intervening period too readers could and probably did read continuously. After all, later periods which are thought to have been dominated by continuous reading also had discontinuous reading—the nineteenth century, for example, saw much anthologising.³¹

The two poems thus seem to be written so as to encourage slightly different varieties of reading, suiting their different goals. However, a final caveat about this evidence: readers did not necessarily follow these contrasting invitations. One unique tail-rhymed colophon added to a single copy of *Speculum Vitae* presents the poem in noticeably more affective and less referential terms than those of the poem itself:

Here endiþ þe book
Of vertu and of Synne
Who so en þat Wel loke
He schal fynde hope þer Inne
 I telle 3ow trewe
Ho so Wele yt on rede
And þer to take kepe
In hys hert he may haue drede
And for hys synne wepe
 And In hys hert rewe.³²

Although it acknowledges the relatively positive attitude of *Speculum Vitae* in its reference to hope, this is a description of *Speculum Vitae* using the kind of vocabulary preferred by *The Prick of Conscience*, the poem which seeks to inculcate ‘right drede’

³¹ Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot* (Cambridge, 2000).

³² TCD, MS 423, f.103r; *IMEV* 1197.4. The tail-rhyme lines are positioned to the side and braced.

(1.342). Whoever composed it seems to have read *Speculum Vitae* as a goad for contrition and hope rather than simply as a compendium of helpful information. External comments on reading such as these, anomalous though this one is, might guide future readers' approach to these poems.

External aids

On approaching an unfamiliar book or text a reader is more likely to encounter, or to deliberately seek out, navigational aids which are external rather than those which are internal. By 'external' I mean aids which appear before or after the main text, as opposed to 'internal' aids which appear within the text, either around it in the margins, or sometimes within the body of the text itself. This categorisation is not perfect, and (as will be demonstrated below) sometimes external navigational aids can have an intimate relationship with internal navigational aids, as when an external summary matches the wording used in internal running headers. Nevertheless, readers are more likely to have come to external aids before internal ones.³³

Broadly speaking, we can distinguish three types of navigational aid which appear around rather than inside the texts they refer to: summaries, tables of contents and indexes. Summaries summarise. If they make reference to explicitly identified parts of the text which are also tracked and indicated by, for example, chapter titles in running headers, they are implicitly also indexed, albeit very bluntly, being linked to sections of text rather than precise points. And tables of contents are effectively summaries with explicit indexing. In practice medieval tables of contents are often more

³³ Parkes used a similar distinction: *Pages from the Past*, 'Folia librorum quaerere', 23–24, 31–32.

fine-grained than summaries, but (as some of the examples adduced below demonstrate), they do not have to be. Indexes are defined and structured by cross-referencing and they summarise only implicitly, and usually discontinuously.³⁴ Indexes are often connected to markers found in the margins: marginal notation, page- or leaf-numbering and running headers.

All three of these types, and summaries and tables of contents in particular, have mnemonic applications, offering a précis of the text to the reader. But external aids could also enable and encourage a variety of other kinds of reading. It is important to know which kinds of sections or points in the text are indicated and rendered findable: permitting precise and fine-grained access promotes a very different kind of reading from offering large-scale structures. It is also important to know how these external aids relate to texts' pre-existing structures: navigational tools can reproduce a text's structure, simply making it more accessible or explicit, but they can also impose new structures.

There is no surviving evidence for the provision of external navigational aids to either of these texts at the point of composition: there are no summaries, indexes or tables of contents which are found across the early dissemination, as though they might be authorial. Therefore those external navigational aids which are attached to surviving copies always result from reading and anticipate future reading. A reader would have judged that the aid they were adding would help, or help to provoke, the kind of reading they expected or wanted. This principle holds true whether the reader adding the aid

³⁴ Short stories written as indexes demonstrate the form's summarising ability: see for example J. G. Ballard, 'The Index', *Paris Review*, 118 (1991), 304–10.

was planning to read the book himself or was considering the reading needs and wants of another.

As it happens, *The Prick of Conscience* was far more often summarised, tabled and indexed than *Speculum Vitae*—in fact, no copies of *Speculum Vitae* survive with this kind of navigational aid. The lack of aids in copies of *Speculum Vitae* might be significant itself: perhaps the logical organisation of the poem and its fairly full apparatus of internal navigational aids (discussed below) made learning to navigate it sufficiently easy that few readers saw any need for external aids. Conversely, the lack of an entirely clear and explicit description of the poem's structure within the text may have given readers less to work with when considering adding aids. The addition of external navigational aids to *The Prick of Conscience*, meanwhile, might indicate that some readers found it lacking in guidance for navigation: its structure might have seemed easier to tabulate but also more in need of tabulation than that of *Speculum Vitae*.

Summaries

Summaries were not new or unusual. Summaries shade into tables of contents, but in as much as they can be distinguished, they perhaps had a sophisticated older model in the short preliminary discussions of *auctores*, the *accessus*, developed in the twelfth century.³⁵ Those summaries outside the text of *The Prick of Conscience* existed alongside those inside the poem, integrated into its prologue and epilogue (ll.348–65, 9530–41). These suggest that the poet thought that summaries would be useful for his

³⁵ A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott, eds, with David Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, c.1100–c.1375: The Commentary-Tradition*, rev. edn (Oxford, 1988; 1991), 12–36.

readers. The fact that some later readers went to the trouble of creating and transmitting external summaries suggests that they valued this kind of navigational aid even more than the poet, and disagreed with his choice of internal placement.

The shortest surviving external navigational aid added to *The Prick of Conscience* is a single couplet included within all forms of the Lichfield group preface: ‘In wiþ þis book’, it says, ‘contened ben euene / An entre first and partes seuene’.³⁶ This glancing reference provides a navigational hint but only a tiny one. The fuller summaries found at the beginnings of other copies are more telling guides for reading. For instance, some Main Version copies are preceded by brief Latin summaries of the poem’s contents, describing each part’s topic.³⁷ These Latin summaries differ textually and are probably the products of a number of independent impulses which drove certain readers to create similar navigational aids for future readers. By replicating the poem’s own part divisions, the readers who created these summaries reinforced the original poet’s division of his material into large chunks, but rendered that division explicit from the outset rather than relying on the poet’s decision to integrate his own summaries into the text. This might hint that they anticipated readers who would want to know about the poem’s contents and structure without investing the time required to investigate even just the prologue. If so, these summarisers imagined, and perhaps inhabited, a context in which potential readers were more cursory in their investigation of books.

A Latin summary surviving in one copy briefly but firmly reinforces the poem’s pre-existing structure.

³⁶ MS Douce 156, f.1^r, ll.6–7.

³⁷ LPL, MS 492 (MV48); BL, MS Add. 11304.

*prima pars. de natura humana. secunda. de mundo. iija. de morte. iiija de purgatorio. quinta. de die Iudicii. vja. De penis inferni. septima pars de gaudiis celi.*³⁸

[The first part. About human nature. The second. About the world. The third. About death. The fourth about purgatory. The fifth. About the day of judgement. The sixth. About the pains of hell. The seventh part about the joys of heaven.]

This summary emphasises the idea of compilation: it begins ‘Hic incipit liber qui vocatur stimulus consciencie et ex dictis doctorum colligitur atque tractatur et diuiditur in septem partes’ [here begins the book which is called *The Prick of Conscience*. And it is collected from the doctors’ sayings, treated and divided into seven parts].³⁹ Here is a navigational aid which points to the poem’s structure and construction explicitly as well as implicitly, bringing the poem’s own self-summaries outside the text.

Another copy contains a longer Latin summary, which echoes the part headings in Latin in the same book. The summary reads as follows:

Hic incipit liber qui vocatur stimulus consciencie et continet in se septem libros quorum *primus* loquitur de factura hominis et de misera eiusdem. *secundus* de mundo et de instabilitate illius. *tertius* de morte. *quartus* de purgatorio et de penis illius *Quintus* de die iudicii et de aduentu antecristi. *sextus* de penis inferni. *septimus* de gaudiis celi.⁴⁰

[Here begins the book which is called *The Prick of Conscience*, and it contains in itself seven books, of which the first speaks about the formation of humankind and about the misery of the same. The second about the world and about its instability. The third about death. The fourth about purgatory and about its pains. The fifth about the day of judgement and about Antichrist’s coming. The sixth about the pains of hell. The seventh about the joys of heaven.]

³⁸ LPL, MS 492, f.1^r, ll.3–6.

³⁹ LPL, MS 492, f.1^r, ll.1–3.

⁴⁰ BL, MS Add. 11304, f.72^r, ll.1–9.

This summary is a different text, attached to a different version of the poem, and it probably represents an independent decision to summarise.⁴¹ With the exception of the description of Part I, the summary's list of subjects matches the Latin titles given for each part in this copy quite well. The summary was probably worked up with reference to these titles, possibly for this copy or in a preceding exemplar. This summary therefore integrates with the part numbering at the top of the rectos in this copy, which would let readers put the summary to use. So, for readers who might not even have examined the poem itself yet, the summary reinforces the structure which the poet chose and follows the poet's advice on the most helpful way to read the poem's structure, qualified by disagreement about the ideal placement of the prompt to that reading. The summary therefore strengthens the potential for the kinds of reading (discussed above) which are encouraged by that structure: discontinuous reading, but discontinuous reading which comes in large chunks; and (as also noted above) the possibility of continuous reading of these ordered parts.

These summaries were copied by scribes who also copied the main text. One example, though, survives of a summary added by later hand, and therefore a later reader. This manuscript contains a copy of *The Prick of Conscience* in a hand which Lewis and McIntosh date to the early fifteenth century.⁴² A verse summary of the poem appears on its first flyleaf's recto in a late fifteenth-century hand:

þer beth vij partys yn þys booke
 þat beth good on to look
 þe forst of þem þat cowmmyt to mynde

⁴¹ LPL, MS 492 transmits a Group IV text of the poem and BL, MS Add. 11304 transmits a Group II text, so there is also no close textual relationship. The descriptions for each part in the summary in LPL, MS 492 only match two of the surviving five part titles within the text, and so the summary is unlikely to have been derived directly from them.

⁴² *DG*, 105–06.

ys of þe wrachednys of mankyng
 þe seconde ^{^ys^} of þe worell condycyon
and of þe vnstabynys of þis worell
 þe thorde of þam ys of dethe bodyly
 þe fowerth of þam ys of porgatory
 þe fyff of þam ys of day of dom
and þe tokenys þat be for shall cown
 þe vj ys of þe payn of hell
 but of þe paynys few can tell
 þe <vij y>s of heuen blys
and þe geyys þat þer on ys. fynys.⁴³

This summary offers some evidence for the summariser's reading practice. Lewis and McIntosh suggest in passing that the summary draws on the poem's own description of itself in its epilogue (ll.9535–44) and six lines do—though, interestingly, none are exact reproductions.⁴⁴ However, the summary also recalls lines from the poem's prologue: the statement that Part I of the poem 'cowmyt to mynde' echoes the poem's prologue, not the epilogue.⁴⁵ The summary also adopts the couplet rhyming 'dome' | 'come' from the prologue to describe the fifth part; the equivalent couplet in the epilogue rhymes 'alle' | 'falle'.⁴⁶ Furthermore, some of the matter in this external summary is from neither of the poem's internal summaries but rather from elsewhere in the poem: the second half of the statement that 'the vj ys of þe payn of hell | but of þe paynys few can tell', appears in neither of the poem's internal summaries but closely echoes the beginning of that sixth part: in this manuscript, 'Many men spekyþe of helle | Bote of þe paynes fewe

⁴³ MS Laud Misc. 486, f.i^r. The flyleaf's verso contains an English medical recipe in a later hand, two Latin proverbs, a stock Latin legal phrase and a post-medieval note of the manuscript's contents. The manuscript's binding is medieval, and the same hand also wrote the poem's title on the inside of the front board, on the leather cover's upper turn-in.

⁴⁴ *DG*, 106. MS Laud Misc. 486, f.i^r, ll.4–8, 11. Compare f.121^r, ll.12–16, 19.

⁴⁵ MS Laud Misc. 486, f.5^v, l.5: 'The furst partye þat cometh to mynde'.

⁴⁶ MS Laud Misc. 486, f.5^v, ll.13–14. Compare f.121^r, ll.17–18.

cunne tell'.⁴⁷

It is unlikely that the summariser opened MS Laud Misc. 486 at folios 5^v, 121^r and 80^r and copied out lines from each page. Even if the leaves were unbound, it would be difficult to flip back and forth within the book to collect isolated half-lines from one summary or the other.⁴⁸ Instead, this external summary is at least partly the product of familiarity with the poem. The summariser might have written entirely from memory, or he could have referred to the epilogue's summary, modifying it to suit, and filled in the other lines from memory. Either scenario suggests that he had internalised some of the content of the poem, and from the evidence of the quotation from the sixth part, possibly even memorised a few lines. A mnemonic explanation also fits with the fact that the summary echoes this manuscript's text of the poem, but never exactly reproduces it. The verse summary on this flyleaf thus indicates careful, internalising reading on the summariser's part, coupled with the ability to compile new material from what he had read.

The summary also, however, demonstrates the expectation of a different kind of reading: its addition anticipates readers who do not have the same familiarity with the poem. The summary might also be a response to a perceived lack in the book: neither of the poem's two internal summaries are as easily locatable as the front flyleaf. And the original scribe's table of contents to Gregory's *Pastoral Care* later in the manuscript might have made the copy of *The Prick of Conscience* seem naked without a similar device.⁴⁹ This copy of the poem also contains running part numbers at the top of its

⁴⁷ MS Laud Misc. 486, f.i^r, ll.11–12. Compare f.80^r, ll.1–2. The equivalent lines in *Morris* are ll.6419–20.

⁴⁸ I have attempted this myself, without success.

⁴⁹ MS Laud Misc. 486, ff.123^r–124^r.

rectos. Without a summary, they were only useful to readers already familiar with the shape of the poem. They might, then, have invited the addition of a summary which could immediately direct readers to them. Therefore, although this summary does not provide fine-grained detail, its addition nevertheless meant that a new reader coming to the manuscript could rapidly learn how to access the poem's larger parts.⁵⁰ The summary was probably written by someone with intensive experience with the poem, even memory of it, but the summary itself expects readers with less time and less familiarity with the text.

An index

One copy of *The Prick of Conscience* survives with a fully-fledged index which atomises the poem, alongside a more conventional short summary. Indexes were a relatively familiar feature of Latin books by this period.⁵¹ For at least some readers with a university education indexing seems to have been a significant activity.⁵² Indexes were, however, uncommon additions to English verse in the fourteenth century and into

⁵⁰ For some other examples of the later provision of finding-aids for texts and books, see Gillespie, 'Lukyng in haly bukes', 137–38. For recent discussion of organisational principles and aids in compiled books, see Margaret Connolly, 'Compiling the Book', in *PBE*, 129–49 (131–37, 142–46).

⁵¹ Parkes, 'Folia librorum quaerere'; Rouse and Rouse, *Preachers, Florilegia and Sermons*, 11–23.

⁵² Such as Peter Partridge, an inveterate indexer: Ralph Hanna, 'Dr Peter Partridge and MS Digby 98', in *Text and Controversy from Wyclif to Bale: Essays in Honour of Anne Hudson*, ed. by Helen Barr and Ann Hutchinson (Turnhout, 2005), 41–65.

the fifteenth.⁵³ No indexes to *Speculum Vitae* survive, though one does survive for its primary source, the French *Somme le roi*.⁵⁴

This index to *The Prick of Conscience* might be explained by its context of use. It was definitely in the hands of a York Dominican at the Reformation, and was probably in the hands of York Dominicans in the later fifteenth century; its contents point towards mendicant preaching use. Suggestively, the text of *The Prick of Conscience* which it preserves is good, and might be the best surviving representative of the form of the text from which the most widely circulated versions of the poem descended.⁵⁵ The meat of the manuscript consists of two large booklets separated by a short booklet which was added later.⁵⁶ Both large booklets were copied by the same scribe, and the second of the two paper stocks in the first booklet is probably the only paper stock in the second: they seemingly shared a production context although they were not definitely designed to form one book. The first booklet contains *The Northern Homily Cycle*, two collections of sermon outlines and two collections of exempla.⁵⁷ The second booklet contains *The Prick of Conscience*, followed by a short summary and an index to it.

⁵³ This would be a later fifteenth-century phenomenon: see for example the index to *On Husbandrie*, in all three copies: BodL, MSS Duke Humfrey d.2, ff.x^r–xviii^v; Add. A.369, ff.1^r–8^v; and Glasgow University Library, MS Hunter 5, ff.1^r–6^v; Wakelin, *Humanism*, 43–44.

⁵⁴ BL, MS Cotton Cleopatra A.v, ff.5^r–11^v.

⁵⁵ *Morris*, lxiv–lxxiii.

⁵⁶ For the most recent description, see *Morris*, xxvi–xxix; see also the discussions in Ralph Hanna, ‘Lambeth Palace Library MS 260 and Some Aspects of Northern Book History’, *Journal of the Early Book Society*, 9 (2006), 131–40; and ‘Problem of English Vernacularity’.

⁵⁷ LPL. MS 260, ff.1^r–90^v.

The summary directly follows the colophon. In the summary the scribe—called Wilfrid—used a different pen and different ink.⁵⁸ Normally summaries copied by the main scribe are presented fairly formally, with rubrication, and sometimes a more impressive script. Whether this one was a text which Wilfrid found from another source later or one he composed himself, he copied it in as though it was an afterthought. It is not the same text as that of any of the other summaries, but much like them it is a bald Latin description of the topic of each part in turn.⁵⁹ The summary was not entirely useful. Peter Tollar, the York Dominican who owned the book in the sixteenth century, had to add part numbering in running headers to make the summary more effective. By contrast, the index was better integrated into this book. Each opening of *The Prick of Conscience* has a number, so that the index could direct readers to different double-page slices of the poem.⁶⁰ Since the index is keyed to the physical structure of this copy, a copy which shows no evidence of page-by-page duplication from its exemplar, the index was almost certainly created for this copy specifically, probably by Wilfrid.

The entries in the index are mostly, but not exclusively, Latin words from the poem's embedded quotations. Wilfrid grouped entries alphabetically by first letter only,

⁵⁸ Wilfrid identifies himself on LPL, MS 260, f.66^v.

⁵⁹ Despite following the colophon, the summary is textually closer to the summary in the poem's prologue than to the summary in the epilogue. For instance, Wilfrid's summary follows the prologue summary in describing the second part's topic as 'morte *et* timore' [death and fear]: in the epilogue the fear is not mentioned.

⁶⁰ Corresponding opening-numbers are sometimes visible in the bottom right-hand corners of rectos, first in Roman numerals and then from at least '15' onwards, in Arabic numerals similar to those used in the index: see for example f.101^r or f.104^r for Roman examples and f.124^r and f.130^r for Arabic examples. These may be Wilfrid's work. Note that when using the index now, your calculations must take account of the leaf now missing between f.102 and f.103. The present f.102^v was the first half of opening 3, and f.103^r was the second half of opening 4.

as was typical of indexing in this period.⁶¹ Initially Wilfrid assigned a letter to each Latin quotation within each opening to allow more precise reference. For example, the entry ‘cito 2 . e .’ directs the reader to the fifth Latin quotation in the second opening of the poem: ‘Et crediderunt uerbis eius *et* laudauerunt laudem eius cito fecerit *et* obliti sunt opera eius’ [‘And they believed his words, and they sang his praise; they were done quickly and his works were forgotten’].⁶² This system is akin to the subdivision of chapters of the Bible into sevenths lettered A–G in this period.⁶³ Wilfrid abandoned this plan later in the index. Perhaps it required a level of precision too far. Later entries are formatted simply as, for example, ‘superbia . 6 . 28 .’, which directs readers both to the admonition that ‘Omne quod est in mundo. *aut* est concupiscencia carnis. *aut* concupiscencia oculorum. *aut* superbia vite.’ [‘All which is in the world is either the desire of the flesh, or the desire of the eyes, or pride of life’] in the sixth opening, and to the cry of the damned, ‘Quid nobis profuit superbia’ [‘What has pride profited us?’] in the twenty-eighth.⁶⁴ In these cases readers would have to search among the multiple Latin quotations within the opening to discover which was the intended reference.

Wilfrid was, it seems, setting the book up for readers (probably, initially at least, himself) who wished to use *The Prick of Conscience* as a navigable source of *sententiae*

⁶¹ Lloyd W. Daly, *Contributions to a History of Alphabetization in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Collection Latomus, 90 (Brussels, 1967), 69.

⁶² Psalm 105. 12–13. LPL, MS 260, f.138^r, l.b2; and f.102^r, l.b26; the equivalent lines in *Morris* are ll.317–19. The word indexed here—‘quickly’—is also a good example of the index’s broad, generous inclusion of bland words. Only a few of the marginal guide letters survive (Hanna notes those on the leading edges of f.120^r and f.124^r).

⁶³ Richard H. Rouse and Mary A. Rouse, ‘The Verbal Concordance to the Scriptures’, *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum*, 44 (1974), 5–30 (10).

⁶⁴ I John 2. 16 and Wisdom 5. 8. LPL, MS 260, f.139^v, l.a36; f.104^v, ll.30–32; and f.126^v, l.b64. The equivalent lines in *Morris* are ll.1130–33, 7079.

or references to authorities: a jury-rigged *florilegium*. This fits the mendicant use of this manuscript suggested by the available evidence. To suit this purpose, the index ignores the poem's own structure and makes individual passages immediately accessible. It also makes the Latin quotations read very differently. When the poem is read in larger chunks, the quotations are not so much markers of topic as they are authorising statements: the heavy lifting of communication is done by the English verse, which draws on quotations from authorities to back itself up. The poet assiduously included an English translation after almost every quotation, and there is none of the intimate meshing of Latin quotations and Latin dialogue within English lines found in *Piers Plowman*. With the index to hand, however, the quotations become fast routes out of the text. The kind of reading involved in compiling a sermon was probably highly discontinuous and extensive, perhaps at times more raiding than reading.

The index also, however, opens up the possibility of instant cross-reference within the poem. The two Latin quotations on pride, for example, are distant from each other in the poem itself but are brought together in the index and could easily be spun into a rhetorical point. It would not be difficult to move from the mention of 'superbia vite' in Part II to the image of sinful souls in hell lamenting pride's uselessness in Part VI. The index would then have made the poem a source of raw material for sermons searchable by topic rather than by occasion, as the other booklet's copy of the *Northern Homily Cycle* was.⁶⁵

This is quite a specific kind of use, so that the index might imply a particular level of anticipated familiarity: judging from it, Wilfrid wanted to allow himself to

⁶⁵ The later owner, Peter Tollar, added running headers indicating the relevant occasion in the copy of the *Northern Homily Cycle*, enhancing this aspect of its usefulness.

access small-scale parts across the whole poem's length, and he did not anticipate reading the poem so often that he would develop the wide-ranging familiarity required to do this without an index—the kind of familiarity that is perhaps evidenced in the summary partially written from memory (discussed above). Wilfrid thought that he would be a highly referential, discontinuous reader, but possibly not a very frequent or extensive reader. The index in this manuscript thus suggests a reading scenario which is considerably more nuanced than simply 'discontinuous reading'.

Moreover, no other indexes for either poem survive. Granted, similar navigational aids were probably particularly likely to be attached to copies which were then worked very hard, reducing their survival rate. Nevertheless, it seems likely that Wilfrid was unusual in placing these sophisticated, complex referential and cross-referential demands on the baggy, digressive text that is *The Prick of Conscience*. The poem seems ill-suited to this kind of reading, and Wilfrid had to work hard to enable it. The effort required to make the index in this copy, and in only this surviving copy, shows that such discontinuous reading might not have been the mode of apprehension best or most often elicited by the poem.

Tables of Contents

What of the tables of contents which appear in more copies of *The Prick of Conscience*? How do they relate to reading? Readers with higher levels of education might have been able to encounter well-organised and convenient tables of contents in university or institutional books, and in secular administrative books, and in surviving books from

earlier centuries.⁶⁶ Sometimes other English poems had tables of contents. Lydgate's *Lyf of Our Lady* seems to have circulated with several interrelated tabulations: one copy from the first half of the fifteenth century has a table, and chapter numbers from that table carefully added to the upper right-hand corner of rectos, probably for visibility.⁶⁷ At least one copy of Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* has a fine-grained table of contents combined with part numbering in the running headers to form a precise navigational system.⁶⁸ One copy of *Cursor Mundi* has a table of contents integrated with chapter numbering in running headers and with chapter headings: like summaries, tables of contents could work together with other navigational aids.⁶⁹ Books containing many different texts could have tables of contents too.⁷⁰

Fine-grained tables of contents to *The Prick of Conscience* survive in some Southern Recension manuscripts. These English tables split each part into subdivisions or chapters rather than simply replicating the seven-part structure laid out in the poem's own summaries. Two copies contain the same summary at the poem's start and a

⁶⁶ Earlier examples: BodL, MS Laud Misc. 641, f.1^{r-v}; BodL, MS Laud Misc. 123, f.1^v; and BodL, MS Laud Misc. 413, ff.2^{r-7^r}. BodL, MS Laud Misc. 165 preserves an impressive later fourteenth-century calendar of parts and chapters with corresponding gospel chapters (ff.1^{r-4^r}), as well as a magnificent index (ff.5^{r-12^v}) and running headers; Lucy Freeman Sandler, 'Index-Making in the Fourteenth Century: Archbishop Arundel's Copy of the Gospel Commentary of William of Nottingham', in *Satura: Studies in Medieval Literature in Honour of Robert R. Raymo*, ed. by Nancy M. Reale and Ruth E. Sternglantz (Donnington, 2001), 164–75. Richardson, 77–78 and 85, discusses tables in administrative books.

⁶⁷ George R. Keiser, 'Serving the Needs of Readers: Textual Division in Some Late-Medieval English Texts', in *New Science out of Old Books: Studies in Manuscripts and Early Printed Books in Honour of A. I. Doyle*, ed. by Richard Beadle and A. J. Piper (Aldershot, 1995), 207–26. HEHL, MS HM 115, table at ff.1^{r-2^r}; example chapter numbers at ff.41^r, 78^r, 106^r, but widespread elsewhere in the text.

⁶⁸ HEHL, MS HM 1339, ff.1^{r-2^r}.

⁶⁹ BodL, MS Fairfax 14, ff.2^{r-3^r}.

⁷⁰ For example, MS Eng. poet. a.1, ff.i^{r-iii^r}.

detailed table of contents at the start of each part.⁷¹ One further copy probably had this arrangement, though two tables are now missing.⁷² Suggestively, according to our current state of knowledge about the text of the Southern Recension these three manuscripts form a relatively close group.⁷³ However, while all three share the arrangement of a table of contents before each part, they preserve two different and differently detailed ‘texts’ for these tables.

Two of these three manuscripts offer tables which thoroughly atomise the poem. For instance, the table to Part II in these two copies begins (with minor variations) as follows:

Here biginneþ þe chapiteles of þe secunde part of þis book þe whiche spekeþ of þe wordel. **F**erst hit telleþ how þat god made two wordles for man. **A**t þat on is heuene gostli to speke where aman schal euere be ȝif he doþ wel whiles he here liueþ. **A**nd þat oþer is þe dale whare Inne we beþ now liuinge. **H**ow þat god made two eortheli wordles þe more *and* þe lasse. **H**ow he calleþ aman þe lasse wordel. **A**nd þe more world he calleþ þis eorthe whare on aman dwelleþ. **H**ow þat god made þis wordel to be soget to man *and* nout man to be soget þerto. **H**ow þat man scholde nouȝt triste to þe world þe whiche is bote vanite.⁷⁴

This is only part of the list of topics for Part II. The detailed descriptions here echo the English subtitles embedded in these copies of the poem, but they were not simply created by compiling these subtitles: some subtitles do not appear in the tables, some entries in the tables have no corresponding subtitles, and sometimes the subtitles and

⁷¹ CUL, MS Ee.iv.35.ii (SR4), ff.1^r, 11^v, 19^r, 31^r, 46^v, 74^v and 82^v; and TCD, MS 69 (SR5), ff.83^v, 84^v, 87^r, 90^v, 96^r, 103^r, 109^v and 114^r.

⁷² Cambridge, Pembroke College, MS 272 (SR2), ff.8^v, 28^r, 46^r, 70^r, and 119v-120^r.

⁷³ Waters, 62.

⁷⁴ MS Ee.iv.35.ii, f.11^v; in this manuscript the tables are copied in red ink, with blue-ink large initials, represented here with bold type. The other manuscript with tables like this is TCD, MS 69.

tables describe similar events but do so differently.⁷⁵ The tables in the third manuscript, by contrast, are much more clipped:

	Here bigynnythe þe chapeters of þe secunde part of þe boke which spekith of þe wordle
Capitulum .j.	Ferst he tellyth how god made too wordys
ij	How þat a man schulde not truste yn þe wordes vanyte
iiij	How he lykeneth þe word to iiij thynges. ⁷⁶

This table has far fewer chapters, and is lineated as an actual table, replete with numbering.⁷⁷ It is difficult to tell whether one of these tables is the ancestor of the other, or whether both are independently descended from the poem itself: all these scenarios could explain the similarities in wording, which suggest that these tables are directly related somehow. I have not collated the tables against each other in full, but initial comparison leads me to suspect that the shorter set of tables is derived from the longer set.

Regardless of the exact origin of these tables, they anticipate—or encourage—reading which begins at the level of the part even if it does not remain at that level: one reads the summary at the beginning to discover which part one might want to read, then turns to that part and identifies which chapters within the part are of interest. But they also represent two different approaches to slicing the poem up for discontinuous access and so they inculcate two different kinds of discontinuous reading. The fuller, more atomising table replicates the poem’s content much more thoroughly—so, for example,

⁷⁵ Compare, for example, the tabulation of the life of Antichrist, MS Ee.iv.35.ii, ff.46^v–47^r, to the subtitles for the same passage, ff.50^v–56^v.

⁷⁶ Cambridge, Pembroke College, MS 272, f.8^v.

⁷⁷ In this case the body of the table is copied in text ink, but the table’s incipit and the chapter numbers are copied in red ink. The rubrication of the manuscript was not finished, and these incipits and chapter numbers are absent from tables later in this copy, as are the poem’s Latin quotations.

it reveals which ‘two wordles’ are meant rather than reporting the distinction between two alone. The other table is faster, demands less time from readers, and leads more directly into the poem. The two kinds of reference reading which these three manuscripts allow are thus different from each other in their levels of exactitude.

One further Southern Recension copy has a table of contents, this time at the beginning of the whole poem.⁷⁸ This table is detailed, and comparison against the long-form part-tables discussed above suggests that it is descended from them: at some point a reader decided to compile these part-tables together into one grand table of contents for the entire poem.⁷⁹ The text of the poem itself, however, in this copy, which Waters sorts into his Group B, is probably not closely related to the other three Southern Recension copies with tables of contents, and the first 715 lines in this copy are from the Main Version of the poem.⁸⁰ This quirk suggests a production context in which multiple exemplars were available, though not necessarily at the same time.

Furthermore, the leaves carrying the opening table constitute a separate first quire.⁸¹ The table might therefore have been adopted from a manuscript other than that used for copying most of the poem or at least reorganised from a copy with separate tables for each part. Thus the provision of this one large table represented, at some stage in textual transmission, a conscious choice. Whatever its cause, the consolidation of the tables at

⁷⁸ Princeton University Library, MS Garrett 138 (SR15), ff.1^r–6^v; Morris printed this table in his edition, xxxiv–xli.

⁷⁹ I have read the table in MS Garrett 138 against the tables in MS Ee.iv.35.ii and have found only minor variations in wording, not in structure.

⁸⁰ Waters, 68. MS Garrett 138 mostly transmits a text in Waters’s Group B, while the other three are closely-related members of Group A. Group B may represent a further stage of revision carried out by a second redactor working on the Southern Recension.

⁸¹ The manuscript’s collation is 1⁶, 2–16⁸, 17⁴.

the start of this copy represents a simplification, a withdrawal to a more conventional single table of contents at the start. The unified table in this manuscript anatomises the entire poem and flattens out the distinctions between each part of the poem. In the other three Southern Recension manuscripts the summary and tables together suggested a structure of discontinuous reading within each part, guided by a table specific to that part: there is an echo here of the scholastic, mnemonically helpful nesting structure used in *Speculum Vitae*. Again, then, distinctions between different kinds of discontinuity are visible in the differences between these tables.

However, discontinuous reading is not the only kind of response which these tables of contents might have invited. First, the non-navigational functions of a table of contents should be acknowledged: here we get closer to the idea of the paratext in printed books, designed to impress readers. We must allow for the possibility that part of this table's function was to impress those who saw the manuscript: here is a serious text with serious topics, organised seriously, 'na vayne carpynge | Of dedes of armes ne of amours' (*SVRE*, ll.36–37). Navigational aids such as these might also signal to whoever commissioned the manuscript that the scribe had done a good job and a complete one. One thinks of the scribe of MS Garrett 138 conscientiously including the table at the front of his book. That said, if the table was partly there to impress readers with a poem's organisation and extent, it did so by pointing out that this kind of navigation was possible and presumably desirable.

Second, though, unlike the sole index found in the surviving copies of *The Prick of Conscience* (discussed above), these Southern Recension tables of contents do not only offer the kind of discontinuous access to the poem which we might expect from the general history of reading outlined by Parkes, Rouse and Rouse, and Stallybrass.

Although, like the index, they divide the poem's parts into many smaller and more precise slices, they also offer a synoptic and potentially continuous view of the poem rather than raw discontinuity organised by the alphabetisation of interesting words. These tables might show readers how to break the poem into chunks, but they still remind readers that these chunks are arranged in a particular order.

There are only four copies in the large English corpus surviving which definitely had these very detailed tables. There is no surviving Main Version copy of the poem which preserves conclusive evidence of a table of contents which was keyed to divisions within parts of the poem in the granular way that these Southern Recension tables of contents are. One copy of the Latin translation contains a table to the text's seven parts, and tables of contents for each part, with the parts themselves divided into numbered chapters.⁸² One acephalous English copy, meanwhile, preserves numbered chapters within each part which are a useful reminder that other tables of contents and summaries might well have been lost in such incomplete copies.⁸³ The numbering itself establishes that at least one reader and probably several read the Main Version with this degree of subdivision, table or no table.⁸⁴ The chapter divisions in this copy are different from and more numerous than those in the more detailed of the Southern Recension tables.⁸⁵ The chapter divisions appear at Latin quotations as well as at points within the English text. These points are not always obviously points of change, as the

⁸² BodL, MS Bodley 159 (L5), the general table f.161^v; for an example of a table with numbered chapters for each part, see f.176^{r-v} for the table to Part VII.

⁸³ Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS F.4.18. BL, MS Add. 24203 contains something which may well have been an opening summary, but which is now illegible: f.1^{r-v}.

⁸⁴ The chapter numbering appears in the left-hand margin, in red ink, using Roman numerals.

⁸⁵ For example, this manuscript contains thirty-two chapters for Part II and fifty-nine for Part V, while the detailed Southern Recension table only offers seventeen and forty-three headings for these parts.

Latin quotations often restate or substantiate a previous point, and are then restated themselves by subsequent translation. Most chapters are very short, but some are long.⁸⁶ The chapters would not, then, serve as a very useful division of the poem into intellectually meaningful parts. And even if these chapters did serve discontinuous reading, imposing them required an initial continuous and not very analytical read-through.

Beyond these curiosities, the absence of similar tables in the other copies suggests that most of the readers of this poem who were involved in transmitting it did not consider such navigational aids essential, even if the only thing that restrained them was inertia. They might have expected readers to be so practised that such aids were unnecessary, but they might also have thought this kind of hyper-discontinuous access to be overkill for a relatively unprogrammatic poem such as *The Prick of Conscience*. This is of course an argument from an absence of evidence, so it should not be taken as definitive. But it is worth holding in mind the possibility that for some readers in this period ever-greater discontinuity was not the goal, even though the gradual development of navigational aids offers modern scholars a more teleological picture.

There is only one example that I have found of a table of contents probably added by a later reader and composed using the copy at hand rather than transmitted

⁸⁶ There are, for example, approximately 550 lines in the third chapter of Part V, the equivalent of *Morris*, ll.4187–4757: Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS F.4.18, p.81, l.33 to p.96, l.8 (manuscript is paginated).

with the poem by a scribe.⁸⁷ Unusually, and in contrast to most of the summaries and tables of contents, this table is in fact laid out with a new line after each entry. It begins much like a summary, echoing the poem's internal summaries and assigning one entry to each part of the poem:

De miseria humane natura	[About miserable human nature
De mundo et delicijs eius	About the world and its delights
De morte <i>et</i> quid est mors	About death and what death is]

However, after its seventh line, and without any explicit acknowledgement, the table launches into a detailed list of the implicit sections within the poem's parts, beginning with the last section of Part IV, on the suffering of friends in purgatory:

De gaudijs celi.	[About the joys of heaven
De suffragijs amicorum	About friends' intercessions
De ante <i>christo</i>	About Antichrist
De quindecim signis	About the Fifteen Signs]

The table maintains this fine-grained itemisation all the way to the end of Part VII. This table thus replicated the poem's own large-scale septenary division, but followed it with a more detailed scheme for much of the poem, perhaps one which the tabulator found interesting and expected readers of his table to find interesting. Some of the entries reflect the wording of the Latin subtitles in this copy, and so might be direct quotations

⁸⁷ University College, MS 142, f.1^v. This table survives on the first flyleaf, which, from the patterns of discolouration and indentation on it, may once have been a pastedown. Despite its scrappy writing support, the table is written in a hand modelled on textualis, which is probably from the first half of the fifteenth century. The main text is copied in a different hand from the same time period, using different ink. Simon Horobin describes the main hand of the manuscript in detail, with plates, in 'The Scribe of Rawlinson Poetry 137 and the Copying and Circulation of *Piers Plowman*', *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 19 (2005), 3–26. The table is therefore probably the work of another person, or at least the work of the same person at another time.

from them.⁸⁸ But some subtitles do not appear in the table. And the itemisation is selective rather than comprehensive, even within some of the poem's own numbered lists. The table only includes five of the fourteen pains of hell in Part VI, for instance. Furthermore, other phrases in this table do not match the text itself and so might have been invented. It is interesting that the tabulator seems to have decided himself which parts of the poem merited inclusion. Here is a reader who cooperated with the guides to reading that he found on the pages in front of him only up to a point, while also thinking about his interests and exercising agency in carving out his own finding-aid.

This table's story has a further twist. In its original incarnation the table did not indicate which parts of the poem each of the smaller sections is in. However, a set of fifteenth-century Arabic numerals was added to most of the table. It is impossible to tell whether these are in the same hand, but they are clearly not the same stint of writing, because the ink has dried a different colour, and because the nib of the pen was cut differently. Someone, either the original tabulator at a later time, or a completely different person, decided that the table would be more useful to readers if it was improved by reference to the poem's own seven parts. Now readers would be able to know to look in Part V for discussion of damnation, and in Part VII for discussion of the joy of freedom in heaven, for example. Could they find these parts easily? In this copy of the poem there is a widespread but not comprehensive set of Arabic part numbers

⁸⁸ 'De suffragijs amicornum' may be taken from the subtitle which begins with the same words at University College, MS 142, f.48^v, l.29, for example, and 'De finali iudicio' matches the subtitle beginning 'De final [sic] iudicio' at f.83^r, l.19. As noted below, these derive from the apparatus of marginal topical notes attached to the poem, which scribes sometimes amalgamated into the main column as subtitles.

written as running headers in the top margin.⁸⁹ While it is impossible to determine conclusively whether these numbers are the work of the person who numbered the table, the fact that they were added a little inconsistently hints at the work of a later reader rather than a methodical book producer.

It seems likely, then, that in this case the addition of external navigational aids was a two-stage process driven by one or more readers' desire for more precise access to the poem—although not as precise as the access offered by Wilfrid's index. Yet a preaching context might, as in Wilfrid's copy, be relevant. Simon Horobin has identified the scribe of this copy of *The Prick of Conscience* as Thomas Tolyte, a vicar attached to Chichester Cathedral, who also copied one surviving text of the A version of *Piers Plowman*.⁹⁰ The name of another Chichester Cathedral vicar, Richard Rauf, appears in the book itself.⁹¹ Horobin proposes that this copy might have been a source of raw material and attractive phrasing for sermons. Perhaps, therefore, the detailed anatomisation of the poem by this table was partly intended to facilitate discontinuous reading and excerpting for sermon composition, not unlike the access suggested by the index in LPL, MS 260. Again, then, a distinctive navigational aid seems to emerge from a distinctive context.

⁸⁹ University College, MS 142, ff.12^r–58^v, 59^v–64^v, 65^v–70^r, 73^r–80^v, 87^v–102^r, 106^v–125^r. The poem as a whole occupies ff.4^r–125^v.

⁹⁰ BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 137 (MV82); Horobin, 'Rawlinson Poetry 137'.

⁹¹ University College, MS 142, f.125^v. As noted above (52) one of the cathedral canons at Chichester, Thomas Harlyng, bequeathed a copy of *The Prick of Conscience* in his will; from the chronology that Horobin proposes, Harlyng would have been a contemporary of Tolyte and Rauf. MS 142 contains one of only two Main Version copies of the poem which switch to the Southern Recension text in the epilogue. The other copy survives in BodL, MS Rawl. C.35, and since the date and hand of this manuscript suggest a similar time and place, Horobin notes (18–19) that this might have been Rauf's copy.

Otherwise, it is important to note that the majority of surviving copies do not preserve these aids. Evidently many readers did not feel that the poem needed these additions, and perhaps found the internal summaries sufficient. Even more strikingly, there are no equivalent external navigational aids in the surviving copies of *Speculum Vitae*. *Speculum Vitae* is not explicit about its large-scale structure, which makes the absence of external navigational aids in copies striking—especially given that *Speculum Vitae* is around 6500 lines longer than *The Prick of Conscience*. Perhaps at least one factor behind this absence is the familiarity and the consistent arrangement of the large-scale structures within the poem: the Pater Noster, the vices and the virtues are logical enough and ought to have been familiar enough for anyone with rudimentary education or indeed for the many laypeople with a little catechetical experience. It is therefore possible that one reason for the absence of external navigational aids for the longer poem is that its structure was already mnemonically and navigationally helpful to readers.

By contrast, these aids do appear in a significant minority of surviving copies of *The Prick of Conscience*. The initial impetus to create an aid was probably the decision of one individual reader, but others evidently accepted these aids as something worth transmitting. The significant amount of variation within the Southern Recension tables of contents—four copies representing this tradition, but in three different ways—suggests a whole series of readers, quite possibly all involved in book production themselves, who felt willing and able to customise the external navigational aids attached to this text.

Internal aids

Contrasting with external aids—but sometimes (as observed above) also intimately connected to them—are internal ones: tools placed around or inside the main text to help readers find their way—or to tell readers how they should find their way. These largely take the form of words copied in the margins, words either copied or paraphrased from the text. In this period poems could circulate with navigationally useful notes in the lateral margins. The top margin, meanwhile, sometimes contained running headers indicating the location of each page or opening within the text. As with external aids, the general landscape of internal aids has been surveyed by Parkes and Rouse and Rouse, with the latter pointing out that these tools' later medieval popularity represents the extension and standardisation of pre-existing practices.⁹²

Marginal notes which primarily serve as finding aids differ from interpretative glossing, marginal text expanding or commenting on the main text. Jane Griffiths has pointed out that these interpretative glosses can sometimes blur into the territory of 'simple' marginal navigational apparatus.⁹³ However, in copies of my primary texts they are fairly easy distinguished, and generally speaking there are no glosses. I know of two major exceptions. One copy of *The Prick of Conscience* contains extensive glossing, which has been discussed by Andrew Galloway: the glossing in this copy is not navigational, and although it is interesting it is also extremely atypical, not, as Galloway implies, representative of the general tradition of Latin attached to the

⁹² Parkes, '*Ordinatio and Compilatio*', especially 51–58. Rouse and Rouse, 'Preachers, Florilegia and Sermons', 27–34.

⁹³ Griffiths, 4–8.

poem.⁹⁴ One copy of *Speculum Vitae*, meanwhile, contains the standard navigational apparatus for the poem together with extensive glossing annotations in the same hand as the navigational apparatus.⁹⁵ Previous studies have focused on interpretative marginalia such as these in canonical Middle English verse. I will ask different questions of different material, focusing on navigational apparatus. How often does this apparatus appear in copies of my primary texts? Was it transmitted carefully? What kinds of reading did it encourage or enable by its structure, rather than by any interpretative force that it possessed? Rather than unpicking what these navigational aids meant, I would like (as suggested at the start of this chapter) to know how they worked. I also exclude later readers' reactive marginalia: examples from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in these corpora are rare and uninteresting.⁹⁶

Running headers or running titles have received less attention than marginal navigational notes.⁹⁷ But they have a closely related function. And as the sets of running headers associated with external navigational aids discussed above demonstrate, they may have been more important to navigation in some copies of these poems than notes in the lateral margins. They also stay in precisely the same place on different pages, unlike many other types of marginal note: the reader's eyes can remain stationary as he or she rapidly flicks through many leaves at once. Ensuring that the headers reflected the contents accurately could be a challenge, since adding them was a routine, habitual

⁹⁴ Bibliothèque Royale Albert I, MS IV 998; Galloway.

⁹⁵ CUL, MS Ii.i.36.

⁹⁶ I also exclude aspects of page decoration and layout and even perhaps punctuation which are relevant to navigation but exist in such large numbers that they cannot be studied in the space of this chapter: chiefly, these are paraphs and variations in the size and decoration of large initials.

⁹⁷ Some earlier examples are discussed in Winfried Rudolf, 'The Addition and Use of Running Titles in Manuscripts Containing Old English', *New Medieval Literatures*, 13 (2011), 49–97.

task which required regular conscious cross-referencing against the rest of the page.⁹⁸

This difficulty, and others like it, might help to explain the different fates of the apparatuses in the two poems.

As it turns out, both *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae* were probably furnished with internal navigational aids by their original authors. But because of the differences between the ways in which the two poems are organised, they received different kinds of authorial navigational apparatus. The internal navigational aids in each poem also seem to have had different fates: those provided for *The Prick of Conscience* dwindled in transmission, sometimes quite rapidly, while scribes transmitting *Speculum Vitae* appear to have made a more concerted and determined effort to preserve its apparatus, even if they did not always succeed. This difference again suggests that the two poems were read in different ways.

Apparatus in *Speculum Vitae*

Most copies of *Speculum Vitae* contain a considerable amount of marginal apparatus, including those copies closest to the presumed original.⁹⁹ Either the original poet or at least someone intervening before the surviving record, had decided that this apparatus suited the kinds of reading they anticipated for the poem. How well did it survive? Did book producers transmit it faithfully? How did this apparatus function, and what kinds of reading did it encourage?

⁹⁸ Rudolf, 68–72, 85–9.

⁹⁹ The best surviving copies are thought to be those preserved in Liverpool University Library, MS F.4.9; BL, MSS Add. 33995 and Stowe 951; BodL, MS Eng. poet. d.5; and Princeton University Library, MS Taylor Medieval 11: *SVRE*, I, lxxx.

The apparatus of *Speculum Vitae* has three primary elements: running headers, occasional subtitles and marginal notes, which are mostly topical but which occasionally give sources or mark one of the text's rare *exempla* with 'Narracio'. In their likely original form, the running headers were notably sophisticated, indicating not just the topic at hand, but, in the text's longest section, the relevant gift, the virtue or vice under discussion, and the relevant words from the Pater Noster. This tripartite header is sometimes strung across the whole opening, a practice which would have required more attention from the scribe.¹⁰⁰ These features are retained in most of the surviving copies. Hanna records thirty-seven substantial surviving copies of *Speculum Vitae* with relatively undamaged margins.¹⁰¹ In this corpus the standard presentation of the text is in one column, with source and topical notes present in the external margins, and running headers at pages' tops. Hanna reports the preservation of at least some of the marginal notes in thirty-four of these copies, and the additional preservation of at least some running headers in twenty-five of that group of thirty-four copies.

The survival of the apparatus was sometimes a complex business. In the rarer two-column copies the space available for the marginal notes could be limited, and in at least one case this drove a scribe to copy marginal notes in the main text, effectively

¹⁰⁰ In MS Add. 33995, the tripartite header usually appears on the verso side, with only the vice or virtue under discussion on the recto. But on the other hand when the topic changes in this copy the scribe often included both relevant headers (see for example the headers on ff.30^v–31^r). In the copy in GCC, MS 160/81, the gift and the vice or the virtue appear the verso side of the opening, and then the vice and the virtue and the words from the Pater Noster appear on the recto side of the opening; there were evidently a number of ways of arranging these headers.

¹⁰¹ *SVRE*, I, xvi–lix. I include the copies in Glasgow University Library, MS Hunter 89 and BL, MS Sloane 1785 in my count as substantial examples. Although they are not complete, they contain enough of the poem to provide evidence of its presentation. I exclude BL, MS Cotton Tiberius E.vii as its margins were badly damaged in the 1731 fire at Ashburnam House.

making them into subtitles.¹⁰² A more astute scribe using two columns in another copy simply allowed the marginal notes to indent into the ruled columns without completely absorbing them.¹⁰³ Vincent Gillespie has noted that between copies which retain the complex tripartite running headers and copies which have no running headers, there are also copies which preserve a simplified system of headers which simply note the topic at hand.¹⁰⁴ It is impossible to know whether the headers were simplified for scribes' convenience, or to avoid confusing less sophisticated readers. In either case, the simplified system represents a deliberate intervention in the tools provided for reading.¹⁰⁵ The practical application of running headers also troubled some book producers: in some copies, for example, the headers cease running and pop up sporadically instead.¹⁰⁶ Despite all these vicissitudes, however, the corpus as a whole offers a picture of relatively faithful transmission for the marginal apparatus, with noticeable planning of its presentation in some cases.¹⁰⁷

So, how did this apparatus function, and what kinds of reading did it encourage? The marginal apparatus attached to *Speculum Vitae* enables—and, through its visible presence, invites—discontinuous reading in which the reader navigates backwards and forwards within the poem's mnemonically convenient large-scale structure. It does not,

¹⁰² MS Hatton 19.

¹⁰³ Toshiyuki Takamiya, MS 15.

¹⁰⁴ Gillespie, 'Vernacular Books of Religion', 170, and n.70.

¹⁰⁵ Gillespie, 'Vernacular Books of Religion', 171.

¹⁰⁶ Copies such as CUL, MS Ff.iv.9, part 1; and BL, MS Stowe 951. In MS Stowe 951, for example, in the span of ff.125^r–225^r, headers only appear at ff.145^{r-v}, 174^r, 199^r, 207^r, 208^r–209^r, 214^r, 216^{r-v}, 219^{r-v}, 221^v and 222^v.

¹⁰⁷ As Gillespie, 'Vernacular Books of Religion', 170, notes, the copy in MS Bodley 446 has a separate ruled margin for the apparatus. The same arrangement appears in the copy in TCC, MS R.3.23. The survival of this manuscript's pricking suggests that its margins have probably not suffered much later trimming.

however, provide interpretation or commentary and it is not very susceptible to the kind of interpretative study applied to some programmes of marginal notes by scholars such as Shepherd, Schibanoff and Kerby-Fulton and to glossing by Minnis and Galloway. Instead, most of the notes are entirely straightforward labels either signalling the subject of the text they accompany, or providing the Latin proverb or quotation behind it, so that, for example, the conventional remark that ‘habyte munk mas noght’ is accompanied by the Latin ‘Habitus non facit monachum’ (l.12765). The notes very rarely contain any information which is not in the text itself, and when they do the difference is minor. During the poem’s discussion of chastity, for example, the margin offers a slightly more concrete version of the same metaphor for virginity:

To pis flour þat clerkes calles
 ‘Flour of Maydenhede’ sex leues falles
 And thre greyns endored withinne.

Lilium vir<gi>nitatis
 <habe>t vj. folia et tria
 grana deaurata. (ll.11725–27)
 [The lily of virginity has six leaves
 and three gilded seeds]

The main text of the poem only specifies that the ‘Flour of Maydenhede’ is a lily two hundred lines later (l.11926). But the image is conventional: the reader and any listeners might well have already known which flower would symbolise virginity. This discrepancy is, then, very small; and the other marginal notes which differ from the main text do so in similarly minor ways.

True, even topical or navigational marginal notes do distribute emphasis simply by picking items out in a text.¹⁰⁸ The distribution of emphasis in *Speculum Vitae*, however, is not a complex business. Someone annotating a copy of *Piers Plowman*, by contrast, has a wide choice of figures, events and concepts to highlight. But *Speculum*

¹⁰⁸ Wakelin, ‘Instructing Readers’, 437–38.

Vitae is more programmatic: it is usually clear at any given point in the poem what concept should be marked by a marginal note, and the marginal apparatus has very limited interpretative force. There is one way in which *Speculum Vitae*'s marginal notes do alter the content they summarise: they summarise in Latin. The use of Latin might have had a comfortingly authorising effect, particularly when naming *auctores*. Then again, Latin is normal for navigational aids, and a normal part of the reading practices of the period. Knowledge of rudimentary Latin was intimately bound up with literacy itself and the primary readers of these texts may have been entirely accustomed to bouncing between English and Latin.¹⁰⁹

So there is little interpretative force in the marginal apparatus in most copies of *Speculum Vitae*. But this kind of mundane marginal apparatus could, viewed as a whole structure rather than interpreted piecemeal, have had an effect on readers' experience and practices. It offers readers a combination of security and power: the ability to manipulate the book and move within the text at will, within certain structures provided by someone else. While they might be individually dull, taken as a whole, a programme of topical notes could take a significant amount of labour, and navigational responsibility, out of reading.

Another navigational aspect of *Speculum Vitae*'s marginal apparatus is numbering. Many of the lists in the poem are explicitly itemised, and these are sometimes also accompanied by marginal numbers, usually in the same hand as the

¹⁰⁹ Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Schools: From Roman Britain to Renaissance England* (New Haven, 2006), 58–61. See the discussion of English–Latin relations with reference to the readers of *The Prick of Conscience* in Anne E. Killian, 'Bilinguality and Hermeneutics in an Interpolated Version of *The Prick of Conscience*: Re-evaluating the Lollard Sub-Group' (unpublished MPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2013), 5–31.

text.¹¹⁰ These marginal numbers call attention to the existence of other notes in the same sequence, permitting readers to make small-scale movements backwards and forwards within the list. However, a sequence of numbers is also easily recognisable *as* a list to a reader moving through the book very quickly in search of a particular passage, and so these notes also make at least some of the poem's lists locatable: it is possible to search the book for one sacrament in particular, for example, as well as for the seven sacraments as a group (ll.1390–1420). Yet even when readers use numbered lists to move discontinuously around in the book, or make smaller back-and-forth movements within the lists themselves, the numbering still lays out a progression in one direction, towards completeness. Marginal numbering invites practical reading which navigates around the poem while maintaining some sense of its large- and small-scale structures, reading which is discontinuous in ways perhaps typical of the period, structured and structurally-aware, not wandering or serendipitous.

Apparatus in *The Prick of Conscience*

Both the nature and the fate of the apparatus attached to *The Prick of Conscience* are rather different. *The Prick of Conscience* also appears to have been provided with a marginal apparatus at a relatively early stage, quite possibly by the original author.¹¹¹ However, even at the earliest surviving stages of its transmission the marginal apparatus in *The Prick of Conscience* was simpler and more sporadic than that in *Speculum Vitae*, and it was often not transmitted well.

¹¹⁰ For example, in BodL, MS Bodley 48, ff.83^v–84^r; 119^{r-v}; 294^r–295^r. This is by no means an exhaustive list of examples even within this one manuscript.

¹¹¹ *Morris*, lxxiii.

The marginal apparatus consisted of running headers and of marginal notes: some of these were topical notes and others source notes. When running headers are available they usually include only the part numbers. Source notes are the most common tool, since they come hand-in-hand with the poem's numerous Latin quotations, but not all of the quotations are sourced in even the fullest surviving apparatus.¹¹² Topical notes are more sporadic and unevenly distributed and the poem can go for hundreds of lines without them.¹¹³ Rather than marking an orderly succession of similarly sized and similarly important sections, they cluster.¹¹⁴ Like *Speculum Vitae*, some copies of *The Prick of Conscience* contain marginal numbering, sometimes transmitted by the scribe and sometimes added by another reader, or by the scribe at a later date using a different nib and ink. Numbering is most likely to survive, or be added by readers, in the list of fifteen signs of Doomsday, and, in general, marginal numbering is attached to the lists in the poem, such as the pains of hell and purgatory, the reasons why death is to be dreaded, and the joys of heaven.

Some copies preserve this apparatus well. As noted above, the important copy in MS Add. 33995 preserves a fine set of running titles and marginal notes. The small module of the notes in this copy and the relegation of some of them to the gutter by the

¹¹² Probably the best single surviving witness for the navigational apparatus is the suspiciously important BL, MS Add. 33995. In *Morris*, Hanna and Wood print this apparatus with occasional supplementation from LPL, MS 260 and Wellesley College, MS 8 (see for example the note to l.48, *Morris*, 264).

¹¹³ See, for example, *Morris*, ll.6016–6245.

¹¹⁴ See, for example, the set of marginal topical notes picking out different kinds of demands and accusations made on Doomsday, in which nine topical notes appear in just over a hundred lines: *Morris*, ll.5815–9122.

two-column layout somewhat hinder any navigational use, but the notes are present.¹¹⁵

The running titles, meanwhile, normally operate at the level of the part rather than specifying topics within parts, but do at least note parts' topics rather than simply giving their numbers alone. There are also some manuscripts further on in the transmission of the text which preserve fairly careful versions of the apparatus. For example, in one manuscript containing a Group III version of the poem copied in Norfolk dialect, the source notes have disappeared but many of the topical notes survive as subtitles within the main column, copied in red. As in MS Add. 33995, the running headers include parts' topics as well as their numbers, and for parts of the manuscript the running headers are arranged across the whole opening rather than at the tops of individual pages.¹¹⁶

Many copies, however, only partially preserve such an apparatus, and some preserve very little of it. Even many of the copies, other than BL, MS Add. 33995, which are thought to be textually close to the presumed original do not retain much of the apparatus.¹¹⁷ BL, MSS Harley 4196 and Cotton Galba E.ix both have minimal marginal apparatus: the former only has occasional gold-leaf paraphs with alternating red- and blue-ink penwork flourishing, while the latter only contains pairs of virgules, probably inviting later paraphs which were never added. The copy in BodL, MS Rawl. poetry 175, meanwhile, has no running titles or part numbers, and has only two

¹¹⁵ I suspect that this manuscript may be a 'compressed' copy of a larger and more decorated exemplar, which was possibly a book designed in part to preserve *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae*, as the Simeon and Vernon manuscripts might have been created at least in part to preserve and transmit a wider range of texts. In such a book this same layout might have worked more comfortably. This is, of course, speculative.

¹¹⁶ Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Library, MS Codex 196 (MV91).

¹¹⁷ For these copies see above, 36.

sequences of marginal numbering in red, one for the fourteen pains of hell and one for the fifteen days passage.¹¹⁸ It also retains one lone marginal topical note, which is written in red but squeezed into the gutter with no word division: ‘Ofþelif / ofanticrist’.¹¹⁹ Another copy, which is a textually important witness for the first three parts of the poem, preserves in those lines source notes but no topical notes whatsoever.¹²⁰

The general corpus offers a similar picture of only sporadic survival. Lewis and McIntosh record 115 instances of the poem’s Main Version and the Southern Recension together, of which five are short fragments. They report no marginal apparatus of any kind—no running titles, topical notes or source notes—in forty of the remaining 110. In eleven further manuscripts they only find marginal titles at the beginnings of parts of the poem. These can be sporadic themselves: in one copy, for example, there are Latin marginal titles for the third and seventh parts only.¹²¹ Lewis and McIntosh are not infallible: they omit the one marginal note in BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 175, for example.¹²² The fact that this note eluded them itself demonstrates how small and insignificant the manifestation of the marginal apparatus is in this manuscript. Among the fifty-nine other manuscripts in which they find some navigational apparatus, Lewis

¹¹⁸ For the numbering of the fourteen pains, see MS Rawl. poet. 175, f.38^r, ll.a7–31.

¹¹⁹ MS Rawl. poet. 175, f.24^r, ll.a40–41. Compare the note to l.4105 in *Morris*.

¹²⁰ LPL, Sion College MS Arch. L.40.2/E.25 (MV49), ff.48^r–83^r; on its text see *DG*, 83, and *Morris*, xxxi–xxxiv and lxv. The margins also contain a red manicule, not inconceivably the rubricator’s own work, for *Morris*, ll.854–55 (f.60^r), and numbering for the poem’s self-summary (f.53^v) and the reasons to fear death (f.73^v). The main text includes English titles for the beginnings of parts, and one subtitle in the main text, derived from a marginal topical note, ‘How þe world may be lykynd to þe se’ (f.65^v; compare the same note in the margin, MS Add. 33995, f.82^v).

¹²¹ SJC, MS D.5 (MV8), ff.16^r, 96^v.

¹²² Given the size of their task, and given that much of their work was done from microfilm, Lewis and McIntosh can hardly be blamed.

and McIntosh only report a full combination of running titles, topical notes and source notes in four copies.¹²³ The remaining fifty-five copies offer a chaotic variety of different combinations of these navigational features, often only patchily applied. We might note too the unreliable presence of running headers in some copies which have them.¹²⁴ Viewing this evidence as a whole, it is easy to slip into a Darwinian narrative in which the internal navigational aids were not fit to survive, but really their patchy survival is the product of many individual human decisions: numerous scribes chose at points in the poem's transmission not to transmit components of its navigational apparatus.

One copy, by contrast, contains what might be a deliberately enhanced apparatus, with running titles, source notes and topical notes, and—uniquely—designs in black and red ink in the boxes around marginal notes, possibly to make them more noticeable or memorable.¹²⁵ On one page, for example, the first of two source notes attributing two Latin quotations to Augustine was embellished with what is perhaps a drawing of a cross-bearing banner, while the second was integrated into a drawing of a ladder.¹²⁶ These images have no obvious relationship to the text, and individual *auctores* are not assigned particular designs; the drawings are not rebuses. Perhaps the images constitute a more basic version of the programmes of memorable, yet not apposite, images which Carruthers describes being used in earlier mnemonically attuned

¹²³ BL, MSS Harley 1205 and Additional 33995; LPL MS 260; and SJO, MS 138.

¹²⁴ For example, the copy of the poem HEHL, MS HM 125 (SR16) has helpful topical running headers—but only on ff.18^v, 19^r, 20^r, 32^r, 32^v, 34^r, 34^v.

¹²⁵ SJO, MS 138.

¹²⁶ SJO, MS 138, f.96^r, ll.7–13, 26–30.

reading.¹²⁷ Readers of this copy had access to an unusually helpful apparatus, but also a very anomalous one.

One other quirk in the evidence is the appearance of the marginal apparatus in Latin rather than English in some copies. Although the topical notes in the copy in BL, MS Add. 33995 are in English, another manuscript which may be nearly as good a witness to the early form of the poem preserves confused parts of a set of topical notes in Latin.¹²⁸ Other copies transmit them in Latin too, though with less confusion, and so it seems that the apparatus circulated in both languages; the original form of the apparatus might have been written in either.¹²⁹ This difference may be unimportant, and just a testament to easy movement between the two languages on the part of readers.

The marginal apparatus for *The Prick of Conscience* thus led a troubled manuscript life, and often survives only imperfectly, a few unusual examples notwithstanding. How did the apparatus read? Again, there is little to interpret in these notes and we must examine them not for their contents but for their function. There is less scope for internal movement than in the apparatus for *Speculum Vitae*, which

¹²⁷ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 309–15.

¹²⁸ The copy in Wellesley College, MS 8 has consistent part numbering running headers but its marginal apparatus essentially peters out during Part III, possibly because the scribe never finished adding it, or possibly because it was missing in the exemplar. After the topical notes at p.62 (the manuscript is paginated), the only other piece of marginal apparatus is the announcement of the topic of Part V on p.122. In this copy almost all of the Latin quotations are found in the margins rather than in the main column, but lines drawn from the boxes surrounding them to the correct points in the text rather suggest that the scribe knew, by the point at which he was adding the Latin quotations, that they really belonged in the main column. The scribe may have been adding the apparatus and the Latin quotations to the margins in the same campaign of work, since the quotations also disappear after roughly the same point in Part III.

¹²⁹ Other copies with Latin marginal apparatus include BL, MSS Add. 11304 and Add. 25013, BodL, MSS Ashmole 60 and Rawl. C.35. In the copies in London, Society of Antiquaries, MS 288 (MV50) and BodL, MS Douce 156 some of the marginal notes are in English and some are in Latin. From the use of marginal English in key witnesses such as BL, MS Add. 33995, I suspect that the original apparatus was written in English rather than Latin, but this is a topic which deserves separate investigation.

always offers readers an identifiable location within a logically arranged framework. In *The Prick of Conscience* the marginal notes usually report just the topic at hand, which is useful if you are searching for one topic but not if you want to relate one topic to others. Similarly, the running headers, in the copies which have them, normally only indicate which of the seven parts the reader is in, rather than several layers of organisation. Unsurprisingly, the contrasts between the sets of marginal apparatus in the two poems largely mirror the contrasts between the poems' structure and organisation.

One final feature of the poem might have been used as an internal navigational aid: its set of Latin quotations. *The Prick of Conscience* contains far more Latin within its main text than *Speculum Vitae*. The Latin quotations are deployed as blocks of prose. They are also translated, without exception.¹³⁰ Some evidence suggests that the quotations may have been used for navigation. Wilfrid, the hard-working scribe who produced the only surviving index to the poem, seems to have treated them in this way, although he was unusual. Furthermore, the Latin quotations are routinely highlighted in copies of the poem, though the method used varies: scribes used more laborious script, red or blue ink, paraphs, underlining or boxing in red or text ink, and in one case simply varying indentation.¹³¹ They would therefore have been able to serve as navigational markers, though this is not necessarily the reason that they were highlighted: the similar

¹³⁰ Hanna and Wood report three units of Latin prose in the main text in texts in the *c* branch of their stemma, best represented by MSS Cotton Galba E.ix and Rawl. poet. 175, which are not present in other witnesses and which go untranslated. They suggest that these might be remnants from the poet's working process. See *Morris*, 269–70, note to ll.1146–51, and 282, note to ll.6630–31 and ll.6791–92.

¹³¹ MS Brotherton 500; I am grateful to Michael Johnston for pointing this feature out to me. The determining factors are the amount of time and resources available in the manuscript's production, not differences in intention: all of the highlighting performs the same function.

treatment of Latin, particularly Latin from authorities, in other Middle English texts suggests that this was simply a convention of layout.

Surviving manuscripts of *The Prick of Conscience* do not, then, consistently preserve a detailed marginal apparatus. Perhaps readers used the quotations; perhaps the poem's shorter length and more explicit, less nested septenary structure meant that readers did not feel the same need as those transmitting *Speculum Vitae*. Furthermore, the slightly sporadic nature of the apparatus in even the fullest surviving versions is consonant with the discursive organisation of *The Prick of Conscience*. The kind of reading implied and encouraged by the internal navigational aids in *Speculum Vitae* seems closer to the kind of discontinuous movement within nested and explicitly organised logical structures which the broad history of reading offered by Parkes, Rouse and Rouse, Blair and Stallybrass suggests is typical of the period. They also make the small- and medium-scale structures of the poem more available for mnemonic absorption. *The Prick of Conscience*, by contrast, has an apparatus which, like its text, seems more suited to reading in longer and more continuous blocks. This contrast should not be overemphasised; I do not mean to suggest that mobile, short-term, referential reading could not be applied to *The Prick of Conscience*. But fewer scribes prepared their copies for such reading, and that kind of reading, when it did occur, might have been concentrated more on particular parts of the poem.

Physical finding aids

This is what can be learned from the structure even of 'dull' or 'normal' marginal notes and running headers, which are neither interpretative glosses nor comments by

professional readers. Readers other than book producers have not featured heavily in this chapter so far, partly because (as I noted above) they tended to leave less evidence than the scholarly focus on occasional, atypical, exciting marginalia might suggest. There is, however, some evidence left by readers, and probably not by the specialised class of readers who copied and decorated books. Again, it is evidence which at first sight seems unpromising. This evidence is the physical ‘bookmarks’ which readers left in some copies: tabs and string attached to the edges of pages. Anyone who spends much time consulting fourteenth- or fifteenth-century manuscripts will probably encounter such physical navigational markers, but there has been no detailed treatment of the practice. Possibly the only general treatment is a single paragraph in a recent primer, which suggests that physical markers had a particular utility in liturgical books where they might help readers shuttle between different parts of the service.¹³² My investigation of this topic—to my knowledge, the first such investigation—suggests that readers were more likely to add markers to *The Prick of Conscience* than to *Speculum Vitae*, indicating differences in reading practice; it also identifies two different approaches to navigating *The Prick of Conscience* taken by readers.

Markers attached to pages were not the only physical navigational tools placed in books. A strip of parchment, leather, thread or ribbon could be attached to the top of the book to form a ‘pipe’ or ‘bookmarker’, which might be moved wherever the reader wished, just like modern book-ribbons. A simple parchment pipe survives in one copy of *The Prick of Conscience*.¹³³ Such pipes have recently been taxonomised, with a focus

¹³² Raymond Clemens and Timothy Graham, *Introduction to Manuscript Studies* (Ithaca, 2007), 43–44.

¹³³ MS Rawl. poet. 138; *DG*, 115.

on the superstructures used to attach them to larger books.¹³⁴ There is also slender evidence for bookmarks in the modern sense, loose strips of material placed between pages.¹³⁵ One copy of *The Prick of Conscience* preserves an aged straw which might, possibly, have been a mobile bookmark.¹³⁶ Another carries offset marks from text in the gutter which might have rubbed off from a scrap piece of manuscript used as a bookmark.¹³⁷ More sophisticated ‘book wheels’ could be attached to any page and could indicate the column or exact line at which a reader or copyist left off, performing the same place-marking function more precisely.¹³⁸ Unfortunately the very mobility which once made book wheels, bookmarks and pipes so useful for readers removes most of their value as evidence for the history of reading: they show that readers wanted to mark their places, but they cannot show which places were marked.

By contrast, physical markers attached to pages’ edges stayed in one place after their construction, and often left signs of their presence when they were removed. Different kinds of stationary physical marker might be more common in different kinds of text, but in my experience the most common type is a tab formed either by a parchment strip glued onto the page-edge, or by two strips glued to either side of the

¹³⁴ Lois Swales and Heather Blatt, ‘Tiny Textiles Hidden in Books: Towards a Categorization of Multiple-Strand Bookmarkers’, *Medieval Clothing and Textiles*, 3 (2007), 145–75.

¹³⁵ R. A. B. Mynors, ‘Some Book-Markers at Peterhouse’, in *Studies in Medieval History Presented to Frederick Maurice Powicke*, ed. by R. W. Hunt and others (Oxford, 1948), 465–68.

¹³⁶ New York, Morgan Library, MS Bühler 13, between ff.43^v–44^r when last observed.

¹³⁷ BodL, MS Bodley 423, f.260v

¹³⁸ Jean Destrez, ‘L’Outillage des copistes du XIII^e et du XIV^e siècles’, in *Aus der Geisteswelt des Mittelalters: Studien und Texte Martin Grabmann zur Vollendung des 60. Lebensjahres von Freunden und Schülern gewidmet*, ed. by Albert Lang and others, 2 vols (Münster i. W., 1935), I, 19–27; Richard Emms, ‘Medieval Rotating Column Indicators: An Unrecorded Second Example in a Thirteenth-Century Bible (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 49)’, *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 12 (2000–03), 179–84.

page-edge and then to each other.¹³⁹ More rarely, the same structure is created by sewing rather than glueing. A marker might also be created by partly cutting a strip of parchment from the page-edge itself, and then folding it and running it through a vertical slit between it and the page-edge so that it sticks out from the book horizontally. Muzerelle notes a similarity between the construction of this type and the way in which ‘tails’ of parchment were used to seal some charters, and offers the phrase ‘signet en queue de charte’.¹⁴⁰ I shall call these ‘cut-and-fold tabs’.¹⁴¹ Yet another way to create a marker was to cut a similar slit but run a piece of thread or parchment from elsewhere through it. A piece of thread might also simply be sewn into the page-edge with its ends sticking out of the book. Thread, whether looped through a slit or sewn in, might also be tied into a thick, graspable knot, or have a label, or a ball made of cloth or leather attached to its end.¹⁴² These may explain ‘þe boke with þe knotts’ bequeathed in a 1420 will.¹⁴³

Sometimes different kinds of marker turn up in the same book. One copy of the *Alphabetum morale*, for example, contains both a marker made of undyed thread sewn into the page and a pasted parchment tab.¹⁴⁴ But it is, nevertheless, worth distinguishing between different kinds of marker. They had different material requirements: thread

¹³⁹ ‘Onglet’ in Denis Muzerelle, *Vocabulaire codicologique: répertoire méthodique des termes Français relatifs aux manuscrits* (Paris, 1985), 194 and Fig.301, Part E.

¹⁴⁰ Muzerelle, 195 and Fig.305.

¹⁴¹ Clemens and Graham, 43, offer a picture of one.

¹⁴² ‘Bouton’ in Muzerelle, 194. Clemens and Graham, 43, include an image of a missal with ball markers.

¹⁴³ James Raine and others, eds, *Wills and Inventories Illustrative of the History, Language, Manners etc. of the Northern Counties of England*, 4 vols, Surtees Society, 2, 38, 112, 142 (London, 1835–1929), I, 65. (I have replaced Raine’s y with þ.) I am grateful to Julia Boffey for mentioning this example to me.

¹⁴⁴ SJC, MS F.8, ff.65, 88.

markers would have required a needle and thread and pasted parchment tabs would have required glue and spare parchment, while cut-and-fold tabs would only have required a sharp edge, which was probably almost always to hand.¹⁴⁵ A reader carefully sewing a tab onto the page was making a greater effort than one who simply sliced a strip and a slit and folded the one through the other. Most of these kinds of marker relied to some extent on parchment's strength and resilience to hold them in the page-edge when readers grasped them and used them to manipulate the book. Cut-and-fold markers, especially, could only function because a slit or cut in parchment usually will not tear further if it is stressed, unlike similar cuts in many early papers. I have only found one set of cut-and-fold tabs in a paper manuscript (noted below).

Physical markers are thorny, uncommunicative evidence. Unlike written marginal notes, they do not allow us to imagine reading guided by marginal instructions or by a structure of navigational aids indicating sources or changes of topic. Markers which consistently appear at the locations of pre-existing divisions between texts or within a text probably just mark those textual divisions: it seems reasonable to connect the cut-and-fold tab marking the folio on which the discussion of the sacrament of penance begins in a copy of William of Pagula's *Oculus sacerdotis* with a desire to locate the beginning of that section.¹⁴⁶ But not all markers do this. It is usually impossible to be sure what within a text a marker was meant to mark, if it does not

¹⁴⁵ Margrethe de Neergaard, 'The Use of Knives, Shears, Scissors and Scabbards', in *Knives and Scabbards*, ed. by J. Cowgill, N. Griffiths and Margrethe de Neergaard, Medieval Finds from Excavations in London, 1, 2nd edn (Woodbridge, 1987; 2000), 51–61.

¹⁴⁶ Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Library, MS Codex 721, f.3. This is the only physical marker added to the book. Similarly in the copy of Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* in HEHL, MS HM 266 the sole marker, a pasted parchment tab, is located at and probably marks the transition between the text's first and second books (f.30).

appear at a textual division. A marker might have been added in response to anything written at any point in the two openings either side of the leaf carrying it. This observation raises the possibility that some programmes of physical markers were personal to the point that other readers even at the time would not have understood them.

However, physical markers also possess some evidential virtues for the history of reading. While marginal navigational notes could be inherited from an exemplar, physical markers are much less likely to have been transmitted thus. Preserving marginal handwritten notes in their correct positions did not require a significant change in activity; transferring physical markers from exemplar to copy, on the other hand, would have required a scribe to put down his pen and begin cutting, pasting or sewing. This distinction makes physical markers more definitely evidence of a particular reader's response. So, paradoxically, markers attached to page-edges could bring us closer to reading practices than written marginal apparatus can, even though each marker reveals less about those reading practices if it is taken individually. For example, the copy of Nicholas Love's *Mirror* noted above for its precise combination of a table of contents and running headers had three physical navigational markers added to it. These probably indicate interest in certain passages, but they also indicate that for at least one particular, real reader the apparatus provided in the book did not offer sufficiently rapid access.¹⁴⁷

I have found physical navigational markers, or evidence of their presence in the

¹⁴⁷ MS HM 1339: the remains of markers at f.69 (perhaps for the section on the Passion), f.76 (perhaps for the crucifixion itself) and f.96 (perhaps for the transition between the *Mirror* proper and the *Treatise on the Sacrament*).

past, in thirteen of the ninety-nine substantial manuscripts containing copies of *The Prick of Conscience* which I have checked. The six books in Table 1 contain cut-and-fold tabs or tabs otherwise made by slitting the page, predominantly marking particular passages, while the markers in the seven books in Table 2 almost all reflect the poem's pre-existing septenary division. There are only five markers in MS Harley 2377 and only six in MS Lansdowne 348 because both manuscripts have lost the leaves which once contained their other part divisions. The part divisions which are now missing probably also carried markers. Similarly, in MS Rawl. A.366 the beginnings of the first and fifth parts are missing, and probably once had markers, as the other parts do. This makes MS Rawl. A.366 the only copy I have found with both consistent part-marking and numerous markers for passages within parts.

In Table 1 the ranges of line numbers given for particular passages run from the first line of the opening before the marker to the last line of the opening after it. The markers in Table 1, which distinguish passages rather than divisions, do not usually agree in marking the same passages in different manuscripts, and such variation makes this kind of marking seem more personal and idiosyncratic. Only two passages in the poem appear to be picked out in three copies: a string of four similes detailing the world's wretchedness (beginning at l.1211), which might have its immediate source in a preaching manual;¹⁴⁸ and the fourth part's discussion of ways to help those in Purgatory (beginning at l.3566).¹⁴⁹ But in both cases three readers constitute limited evidence for the poem's general reception. Perhaps a little more telling is the absence of physical

¹⁴⁸ MS Rawl. A.366, SJC, MS E.24 and SJO, MS 138. On the source for this passage, see *Morris*, 298, and ll.1211–56.

¹⁴⁹ MS Douce 156, MS Rawl. A.366 and SJO, MS 138.

markers in the prologue and the poem's first part, though this might tell us not that readers were not interested in the first part, but rather that it was already easy to locate and navigate. There is also a concentration of physical markers in the fifth part, which discusses the day of judgement.

The markers in the copies in Table 1 might, then, represent the imposition of new navigational frameworks on the poem, but they are personal and idiosyncratic, rather than consistently organised. They must also be balanced against the markers in the seven copies in Table 2 which reinforce the poem's pre-existing structure. The existence of these sets of markers suggests that some readers found that structure useful without picking out any material within each part. If these readers felt no need for more precise physical markers, perhaps they were familiar enough with the poem to manage most smaller-scale navigation from memory.

The manuscripts in Table 1 and those in Table 2 are also distinguished from each other by a rough correlation between more systematic marking and more materially complex kinds of physical construction. In this sample the systematic marking of the text's own navigational framework of seven parts usually—but not always—entails the use of external materials such as thread or glue, and more careful activities such as sewing or pasting. The markers in both MS Harley 2377 and MS Lansdowne 348 are good examples: in both, parts of the poem are marked with blue thread which was sewn into a neat diamond pattern in the margin with its ends sticking out of the side of the book. By contrast, tabs made by cutting slits near the pages' edges, and especially cut-and-fold tabs which only used material from the pages themselves, would have been quicker and easier to make, and these markers seem usually—but not always—to be associated with the idiosyncratic marking of specific passages. The contrast between

two ways of accessing the poem is thus partly reflected by a contrast between different kinds of physical marking for reading.

The Southern Recension copy of *The Prick of Conscience* in SJC, MS B.7 is unique in my sample: it is the only copy on paper with physical navigational markers—here, cut-and-fold tabs. In this case the markers themselves, as well as the pages, are made of paper. They demonstrate the cut-and-fold technique's problems in a paper book: the folds in the cut paper strips here are sharper and more brittle than they are in parchment cut-and-fold tabs, and the tabs are less resilient.

Within a text, markers could, then, highlight pre-existing structural divisions, or they could highlight particular passages. What could they do to a book which contained several texts? Eleven of the thirteen copies of *The Prick of Conscience* considered here survive in single-text manuscripts; a twelfth, SJC, MS B.7, appears alongside *Ipotis* but dominates its manuscript. However, alongside *The Prick of Conscience* BL, MS Add. 33995 contains copies of *Speculum Vitae*, *Stimulus Consciencie Minor* and part of William of Nassington's poem 'The Band of Love'. The copy of *Speculum Vitae* carries eleven thread markers of its own.¹⁵⁰ The markers in both poems are constructed in a similar way, using similar undyed thread. Did the person who added these pieces of thread to the book—if they are all the work of one person—feel that the threads marked out parts in each *poem* or simply parts in the *book* as a whole? And would another reader at the time have perceived one or two programmes of navigational aids in this book? It is impossible to know, but the question raises the intriguing possibility that the answer might be somewhere between those two alternatives, that these markers

¹⁵⁰ MS Add. 33995, ff.6, 11, 17, 26, 29, 31, 38, 47, 56, 60 and 77.

collapsed the distinction between, on the one hand, a text written in a compiling manner—as many works from England in this period, including *The Prick of Conscience*, are—and, on the other, a physically compiled book.

Some of the programmes of physical markers discussed above distinguish parts within texts, while others distinguish texts within compilations. Sometimes, as in the Simeon Manuscript and MS Harley 632, different physical markers perform both of these tasks within the same book. If physical markers could have either role, and could sometimes fill both roles within one book, then perhaps their use in some cases supports the idea that some readers, some of the time, read individual texts as mere sections subsumed within anthologies. This possibility is consonant with now longstanding arguments for the importance of compilation in both the conception of individual texts and the transmission of groups of texts in this period.¹⁵¹ Pearsall has however expressed caution about the overenthusiastic reading of texts' co-location in books;¹⁵² and indeed, while uniform multi-text programmes of physical markers might suggest that we can consider how some texts were compiled together, they also undermine attempts to interpret order in compilations. If the reader can immediately jump to any other text in the book the grouping of texts together in the manuscript might be more significant, but the particular order in which they appear is probably less significant.

I have found evidence for the past presence of physical navigational markers in

¹⁵¹ Parkes, 'Ordinatio and Compilatio', 56–62; Alastair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, 2nd edn (Aldershot, 1984; 1988), 191–210; a line of thought extended with reference to manuscripts in Stephen G. Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel, eds, *The Whole Book: Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany* (Ann Arbor, 1996).

¹⁵² Pearsall, 'The Whole Book'.

only one other copy of *Speculum Vitae*.¹⁵³ These are selective markers rather than markers which reinforce the text's broad pre-existing divisions, but then the latter kind of navigational marking is difficult in *Speculum Vitae*. The poem does not advertise a single large-scale structure. This difference might be the reason why, compared to the surviving copies of *The Prick of Conscience*, a smaller proportion of the *Speculum Vitae* manuscripts had physical markers added—if this is not just a statistical quirk created by serendipitous survival. Perhaps some readers of *The Prick of Conscience* felt that its often spotty navigational apparatus required supplements; perhaps, too, they were spurred on by the text's less logically arranged, less mnemonically helpful content and structure.

Physical markers in copies of *The Prick of Conscience*, then, seem to have been used either to mark particular passages, often with more rapid, informal markers, or to recreate the poem's septenary structure in a usefully tangible form, often with markers which required more effort and more supplies from elsewhere. Here is one kind of codicological investigation in which contrasts in material evidence are tangibly connected to contrasts in reading practice: these markers' construction techniques speak of different levels of haste or calculation in judging the text and anticipating future reading. Thus, these physical markers can evidence some of the ways in which readers might have moved into and around this text; and certainly the ways in which particular readers—those who added the markers in the first place—expected to do so.

Markers might also have made the presence of an organisational scheme visible to anyone looking at the book even before they opened it. There is a hint of *mise en abyme*

¹⁵³ MS Stowe 951, ff.145 (possibly for the discussion of varieties of theft) and 200 (possibly for austerity and ascetic life, the fourth degree of chastity).

in *The Prick of Conscience*'s internal summary of itself: 'Þis buk', says the book, 'als itself bers wittenes / In seven partyes divided es' (ll.348–49). In some of the copies discussed here the book bears witness to the poem's septenary division even when it is closed: sometimes the sight of physical markers could thus have indicated something about a book's contents, telling prospective readers how those contents were divided up and, perhaps more importantly, simply that those contents could be divided up.

Conclusion

So, various kinds of evidence suggest that discontinuous reading could be discontinuous in a variety of ways: different text structures, different apparatuses with different states at the hands of copyists, different physical markers. I have filled in some more details for our history of reading in this period. Moreover, I have done this using codicological methods and an approach to navigational aids that approaches them more as structures than as signifiers. The evidence of the surviving copies of *Speculum Vitae* matches what we know and expect of the history of reading more closely: that is, it fits our picture of discontinuous reading for reference or cross-reference within logical and memorable structures. On the other hand, *The Prick of Conscience* seems to have been messier in its organisation, but nevertheless—or perhaps, therefore—open to the imposition of a wider range of navigational aids and markers—and it was, of course, the more successful of the two poems. Was one factor behind its greater success the fact that it was less tightly organised and more amenable to refashioning for different kinds of reading, particularly as tastes changed over time? The possible differences in the ways in which these poems were read are useful reminders that northern religious poetry in

English is not an undifferentiated mass of material, but rather a cluster of texts employing a variety of structuring devices and possessing considerable literary interest.

3. Handling

He clepyþ hyt manuel de pecchees.
Manuel ys handlyng wyþ honde.¹

Robert Mannyng's extended play on 'handling' is apparently inspired by the etymology of the word 'manuel' in his source's title. The idea of the manual as the book which fits the hand, and can be kept to hand, introduces this chapter's topic: what we can learn about reading by investigating the physical handling of books. Probably the most convenient surviving evidence for handling is books' size, shape and weight. Or, to look at it another way, 'handling' might be, for the history of reading, the interaction between reading as a practice and books' material format. If a book is to be read, any reader must take physical hold of it, as some of the preceding discussions of books' bindings and of physical navigational markers imply. By examining books' physical characteristics some of that handling might be reconstructed.

Books' size is also a material characteristic which is inextricably related to an aspect of textual form: the length of the text or texts which they contain. But size and shape, together with weight, also determine a book's ergonomics and portability. A book's size is intimately tied to the ways in which it can and cannot be handled in reading, and it is also one of the first things a potential reader will observe. Not only does it control whether a reader can do certain things with a book such as read from it while holding it in one or two hands rather than resting it on a table, it also affects readers' impressions on seeing a book for the first time. Gérard Genette acknowledges

¹ Sullens, ed., ll.82–83.

size, linking it to portability and prestige, but spends little time on it.² From within manuscript scholarship, meanwhile, Erik Kwakkel has pointed to size and shape as physical characteristics which, given the importance of commissioning in manuscript production, may allow us to ‘read the reader’.³

Consideration of size with reference to books in England before the sixteenth century has been limited. N. R. Ker once offered a very brief typology of book sizes in England in an earlier period, and size has sometimes been adduced in analyses of particular witnesses, notably by A. S. G. Edwards.⁴ Edwards and Derek Pearsall together have also provided rough figures for the average page areas of a number of canonical Middle English literary texts.⁵ Beyond this, there has been no systematic investigation of the size of English books in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, or of the different ways in which size might have related to kinds of reading. Such investigations are the preserve of a few codicologists, usually continental scholars, who

² Genette, 20–25. Sherman, ‘On the Threshold’, 67–71.

³ Erik Kwakkel, ‘Decoding the Material Book: Cultural Residue in Medieval Manuscripts’, in *The Medieval Manuscript Book: Cultural Approaches*, ed. by Michael Johnston and Michael Van Dussen, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 94 (Cambridge, 2015), 60–76 (65–67).

⁴ N. R. Ker, *English Manuscripts in the Century after the Norman Conquest* (Oxford, 1960), 40–41. A. S. G. Edwards, ‘Fifteenth-Century English Collections of Female Saints’ Lives’, *Yearbook of English Studies*, 33 (2003), 131–41; A. S. G. Edwards, ‘Journeyman Production and Lay Piety: The Hopton Hall Manuscript’, in *Medieval Texts in Context*, ed. by Graham D. Caie and Denis Renevey (London, 2008), 113–21 (114–15).

⁵ A. S. G. Edwards and Derek Pearsall, ‘The Manuscripts of the Major English Poetic Texts’, in *BPP*, 256–78 (270–71). There is also a brief quantitative treatment of size in Briggs, *Giles of Rome’s ‘De regimine principum’*, 26–29.

have deployed quantitative methods in wide surveys.⁶ And one of these, J. P. Gumbert, has suggested that ‘our knowledge of medieval book sizes’ remains ‘too rudimentary’.⁷

Readers were alert to books’ sizes and shapes. It has been argued that, at least before the fifteenth century, few people had even the sight of books.⁸ This may not, however, hold true for the fifteenth century, particularly its latter half. But if most people did have limited contact with books, this unfamiliarity might have meant that they did not take books’ size, shape and handling properties for granted. Even those with literacy and regular access to books could have been more aware of books’ formats than readers are today because readers would have spent more time with fewer books and because, as visual aids on books’ exteriors were rarer, they would have had to have become adept at identifying books by their physical size.⁹ Indeed, Gumbert quotes a mid-fifteenth-century Carthusian observing that one booklet was wrongly

⁶ J. P. Gumbert, ‘The Sizes of Manuscripts: Some Statistics and Notes’, in *Hellinga Festschrift: Forty-three Studies in Bibliography Presented to Prof. Dr. Wytze Hellinga on the Occasion of His Retirement from the Chair of Neophilology in the University of Amsterdam at the End of the Year 1978*, ed. by A. R. A. Croiset van Uchelen (Amsterdam, 1980), 277–88; Paul Needham, ‘Res papirea: Sizes and Formats of the Late Medieval Book’, in *Rationalisierung der Buchherstellung im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. by Peter Rück, *Elementa diplomatica*, 2 (Marburg an der Lahn, 1994), 123–45; and (particularly) C. Bozzolo and E. Ornato.

⁷ Gumbert, ‘Codicological Units’, 29.

⁸ Christopher de Hamel, ‘Books and Society’, in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain: Volume II, 1100–1400*, ed. by Nigel Morgan and Rodney M. Thompson (Cambridge, 2008), 3–21.

⁹ See the remarks on the learned ability to recognise particular books in Richard Sharpe, ‘The Medieval Librarian’, in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland: Volume I: To 1640*, ed. by Elisabeth Leedham-Green and Teresa Webber (Cambridge, 2006), 218–41 (225–26); and the remark on book size in earlier monastic sign language in Richard Gameson, ‘The Material Fabric of Early British Books’, in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain: Volume I, c.400–1100*, ed. by Richard Gameson (Cambridge, 2011), 13–93 (31). The written identification of books’ contents on their exterior was rare, though a few title labels survive (on BodL, MS Laud Misc. 374, for instance) and some libraries had written titles on books’ foreedges: Burnett Hillman Streeter, *The Chained Library: A Survey of Four Centuries in the Evolution of the English Library* (London, 1931), 57–58.

proportioned.¹⁰

In a brief survey of descriptions of paper size from fifteenth-century Italy Needham has shown that evidence of attitudes to the handling of books can be gleaned from descriptions of books in wills and library inventories.¹¹ An examination of similar book descriptions from England is illuminating. These traces of the period's codicological practice demonstrate that fourteenth- and fifteenth-century readers were aware of books' sizes and those sizes' implications. Wills might be self-fashioning documents, but they also attempt to solve practical problems for executors by making books which might be unfamiliar locatable.¹² Like inventories, they functioned in a context in which an owner or regular user of a library might recognise all of their books, but a reader new to the collection might struggle.

Unsurprisingly, size is frequently used to identify books. For example a member of the Nottinghamshire gentry left to his wife a 'parvum Missale' [a small missal] along with 'omnibus aliis ornamentibus capellae meae' [all my chapel's other ornaments].¹³ The inclusion of the little missal inside the group of chapel ornaments suggests that this was a portable book which nevertheless only moved around within a small physical space. The same man left another 'parvum Missale' to his chaplain.¹⁴ Elizabeth Russell, Lady of Clinton, left 'to Elisabeth the wif of George Longevile my lesse sauter [...] to

¹⁰ Utrecht, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, MS ^B102⁴, f.2r: a note observes that the booklet is 'longa et non secundum exigenciam eius lata' [tall and not wide according to its requirements]; quoted in J. P. Gumbert, *Die Utrechter Kartäuser und ihre Bücher im frühen fünfzehnten Jahrhundert* (Leiden, 1974), 139 and 141. See also Kwakkel, 'Decoding', 71; and Gumbert, 'Sizes'.

¹¹ Needham, 'Res papirea', 141–45.

¹² On problems with wills as evidence, see Cavanaugh, 9–20.

¹³ Cavanaugh, 40.

¹⁴ Cavanaugh, 40.

have me in hir remembrance'.¹⁵ If the 'lesse sauter' was a genuinely small book it might have made a suitable gift to stimulate personal memory and prayer. William Lorying, a cleric and royal bureaucrat, left among other books in his 1415 will both 'parvum meum missale' [my small missal] and 'unum magnum missale' [one large missal]; the contrast here between 'meum missale' and 'unum magnum missale'—which must also have been 'mine', since Lorying was bequeathing it—again suggests that a small format could make a book personal and a large format might make a book impersonal.¹⁶ These examples could be multiplied many times. They demonstrate that readers used size to identify books, and that some hints of connections between size and different kinds of handling for reading can be gleaned from even clipped testamentary documents.

Size and shape were also important within books. For example, the size of books was used to convey the size of other objects. D. Vance Smith has noted manuscript instances of measurements of Christ's height and of the wound in Christ's side.¹⁷ Similarly, one surviving charm requires three nails 'the length of the iij. nayles of oure lord iehsu criste', and was circulated with a drawing labelled 'iij nayles of this lenght' so that readers could calibrate their nails.¹⁸ The nail drawn in the copy in Robert Reynes's notebook is about 145 mm long and stretches across almost the page's full width; one wonders whether its length was in fact determined by the space available.¹⁹

¹⁵ Cavanaugh, 751.

¹⁶ Cavanaugh, 542.

¹⁷ D. Vance Smith, 'The Inhumane Wonder of the Book', *Chaucer Review*, 47 (2013), 361–71 (364–67).

¹⁸ See Cameron Louis, ed., *The Commonplace Book of Robert Reynes of Acle: An Edition of Tanner MS 407* (New York, 1980), 295 and 480; and S. A. J. Moorat, *Catalogue of Western Manuscripts on Medicine and Science in the Wellcome Historical Medical Library*, 3 vols (London, 1962–73), I, 491. The Wellcome example survives on a roll, London, Wellcome Library, MS 632, which Moorat suggests may have been used as a birth girdle.

¹⁹ BodL, MS Tanner 407, f.51^r.

The doctrinal and devotional importance of the Passion might have made these measurements a special case in which the length of lines drawn on the page, and the page's size itself, were consciously examined.

But there are also more ubiquitous kinds of size found inside books. In most manuscripts from this period ruled lines delineate areas for writing. The size and shape of the page and ruled area would immediately affect the reader's sense of the margins available. Readers evidently attended to these marginal areas. There are manuscripts in which medieval repairs square out and 'correct' flaws in the shape of the page even when the flaws had no effect on the text or decoration.²⁰ Leaving practical reasons aside, then, the size and shape of the page might just be expected to look a certain way, by convention. Bigger margins might provide more space for readers' marginal commentary, or indicate a generic receptiveness to marginalia. Copies of the Vulgate normally come in one layout with, among other features, very spacious margins ready for marginalia. But many copies did not receive such marginal commentary.²¹ Perhaps the Vulgate's wide margins were a feature which was only sometimes practical but was always, alongside script, columniation and marginal apparatus, a generic marker.

Columniation was another aspect of layout which had a relationship to size. Richard Gameson suggests that size normally determined columniation in the early medieval period, and my measurements suggest that this is also true in the later medieval period.²² But a quick survey of manuscripts with different layouts and sizes

²⁰ For example, HEHL, MS HM 147 has 'otiose' repairs to the page's shape at f.17.

²¹ So, for example, BodL, MS Auct. D. 3. 6, a Vulgate Bible from the second half of the fourteenth century which was used in Oxford, received extensive marginal notes; but the similarly formatted Vulgate Bibles which are now BodL, MSS Lyell 7, Kennicott 16 and Laud. Lat. 13 did not.

²² Gameson, 25–26.

suggests that in certain circumstances particular column layouts may have had generic associations. There are, for example, very small missals which are copied in two columns, even though this format may have been inconvenient and inefficient at this size.²³ It seems probable that these missals are copied in two columns at least partly because they are missals. It might be objected that in each case this layout was merely inherited from an exemplar, but layouts are never ‘merely’ inherited: a scribe or patron—whoever is making the decision—could always choose something different. Indeed, there are small missals copied in one column.²⁴

Size was, then, important in the production and reading of books, and sometimes important in ways which were consciously recognised. This chapter investigates how books’ size, and the distribution of their size into particular shapes, might have affected handling: how these material features could determine the ways in which a text might be read, or signal the ways in which a book’s producers or owners expected its contents to be read. Size, shape and weight are characteristics which were likely to have been more a matter of unconscious and habitual action on the part of book producers and readers, and so these characteristics can best be surveyed across a large sample. I begin with the largest survey yet of size and proportion in manuscripts from England in the

²³ For example, BodL, MS Jones 47, a Sarum-use missal made in England in the first half of the fifteenth century. This manuscript measures $165 \times 120 \text{ mm}^2$ and its ruled area (both columns together) measures $105 \times 72 \text{ mm}^2$. M. B. Parkes, *English Cursive Book Hands, 1250–1500* (Oxford, 1969), xiii, remarked that in the production of at least some liturgical books ‘the appearance of the book was a most important consideration’. But Gameson, 26–27, suggests that a bi-columnar layout was sometimes desirable when copying in a small script, to prevent excessively long lines.

²⁴ Such as BodL, MS Wood empt. 19: another Sarum-use missal made in England in the first half of the fifteenth century. This manuscript measures $150 \times 98 \text{ mm}^2$ and its ruled area measures $117 \times 66 \text{ mm}^2$. The fact that the ruled area in this manuscript is taller and only slightly narrower than that in MS Jones 47—it is, in fact, 162 mm^2 larger than the ruled area in MS Jones 47—suggests that the scribe was not forced into a single-column layout by the smaller space (if, given that either book may have been trimmed, the available space in MS Wood empt. 19 was smaller initially).

fifteenth and later fourteenth centuries. The results suggest that there may have been connections between books' contents and their shape. It also establishes some new criteria with which to pick out atypically proportioned manuscripts of particular interest. The second part of the chapter studies how size, shape and weight conditioned books' portability, where and how they might be handled. A study of the measurable implications of different kinds of binding opens up some consideration of very portable copies of the primary texts, but, importantly, also copies which were handled in unusually stationary ways because they were chained or simply too large for easy movement.

Size and Shape

What is the best way to measure books' sizes in order to understand their handling? There is no easy answer. Manuscript catalogues record size in a variety of different ways, and, as Joseph A. Dane has observed, the measurements used in catalogues never adequately represent manuscripts as experienced objects.²⁵ Each kind of measurement has drawbacks.

The number of folios in a book is a measure of what, if the book is considered simply as a cuboid, can be thought of as the book's depth. But fourteenth- and fifteenth-century parchment and paper vary significantly in thickness, making comparison between manuscripts using this measurement difficult: fifty folios of thick, stiff parchment which tends to rumple will be deeper than fifty thin, flexible parchment

²⁵ *Abstractions of Evidence in the Study of Manuscripts and Early Printed Books* (Farnham, 2009), 5.

folios which sit comfortably flush against each other.²⁶ Paper folios usually sit quite flush against each other, though thicker and rougher stocks might not compress as well as fine-grade paper.

Another measurement is the folios' height and width, their dimensions. 'Raw' size of this sort is sometimes used as a sorting attribute by libraries, as in the Bodleian Library's nineteenth-century Western manuscript accessions.²⁷ This is also the measure used in the studies by Gumbert and by Bozzolo and Ornato. Both studies acknowledge problems with this measurement. Gumbert points out that parchment tends to shrink over time and that, usually, not all leaves in a book are the same size.²⁸ Some catalogues, including the Bodleian's *Summary Catalogue*, record the height and width of the binding rather than of the pages, and, due to rebinding, binding measurements are rarely useful information for the medievalist.

Both Gumbert and Bozzolo and Ornato also note that many manuscripts have been trimmed, and that it is not always clear whether a manuscript has been trimmed, or how much material has been lost. Bozzolo and Ornato report that in a test sample of sixty manuscripts fifty-three percent (presumably thirty-two manuscripts) show visible signs of trimming.²⁹ Furthermore, a book might have been trimmed at any point in its history. It might have been trimmed during its first binding, if, for example, its first owner wished to dispose of signs of production such as pricking and quire signatures,

²⁶ On the thickness and weight of parchment, see J. P. Gumbert, 'The Bearable Lightness of Parchment', *Gazette du livre médiéval*, 59 (2012), 70–72.

²⁷ R. W. Hunt and Francis F. Madan, *A Summary Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford*, 7 vols (Oxford, 1953), I, xlv–xlvi.

²⁸ Gumbert, 'Sizes', 277–79.

²⁹ Bozzolo and Ornato, 245–46.

and this trimming act would be relevant to how the book was probably read. Indeed, book producers probably expected that some of their books would be trimmed by owners, and this probability raises further questions: is the size a book is trimmed to by its first owner then sometimes the book's 'real' size? And if a book was produced with the expectation of trimming but has by chance survived untrimmed, is it somehow 'misleadingly big'? Or, when a copy of *The Prick of Conscience* appears to have been trimmed within the fifteenth century, but probably not by its first owner, are we to take its dimensions as still in some way more authentic evidence than a copy trimmed in the late sixteenth century? For example, Woolhampton, Douai Abbey, MS 7 has a (rebacked) fifteenth-century binding, and its dimensions are the result of fifteenth-century trimming which was probably not carried out by the first owner because it destroys various things.³⁰ Yet it is also true that many books have been trimmed, or trimmed again, by post-medieval owners. In one copy of *The Prick of Conscience* someone, probably the scribe, drew decorative penwork elaborations on the boxes around the catchwords: evidently this person expected the final book to be larger than it now is, as a later owner has trimmed the book straight through the designs.³¹ Such decoration of catchwords was not unusual and when it occurs it might be evidence of a certain minimum expected page size.

In response to these evidential problems, Gumbert rounds measurements to the nearest full centimetre, remarking that '[g]reater precision seemed unnecessary'.³² As his study included more than 6500 manuscripts, Gumbert could treat individual

³⁰ Such as the drolleries on f.2^r.

³¹ BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 175, f.48^v.

³² Gumbert, 'Sizes', 277.

manuscripts in a relatively imprecise way, ignoring trimming, and still expect broad trends to emerge. Unfortunately manuscripts of practical pastoral verse in Middle English are both too numerous to allow a detailed study of every copy and yet too few to allow such unconcern about imprecision.

The area ruled for writing, the ruled area, and the area actually occupied by writing, the written area or text-block, are measurements which both avoid the above problems, but entail others. In a copy of a poem the written area often has no defined right-hand edge, as the length of the lines varies. The ruled area, meanwhile, represents a scribal expectation before copying happens, an expectation which was not always met: it is quite normal for lines to cross ruled columns' right-hand edges, which suggests that many scribes treated these ruled lines as guides rather than absolute boundaries.³³ Finally, apart from the number of folios, all of these different kinds of measurement can vary from leaf to leaf within a single book. However, despite these problems, the ruled area may be the most useful of the available measurements: it is usually unaffected by trimming and can be measured in both prose and verse texts.

An Initial Survey

Since every measurement has its problems, I will use both the ruled area's dimensions

³³ Which is not to deny that special circumstances might make this happen more often, as it does in the unusual two-column copy of *Piers Plowman* in CUL, MS Dd.i.17, III, ff.1^r–31^r. It is likely that the copy's combination of long lines and narrower columns caused this.

and the page's surviving dimensions for a quantitative survey.³⁴ Lewis and McIntosh do not record ruled area dimensions, but I have collected these measurements for ninety substantial manuscript copies of *The Prick of Conscience*.³⁵ Besides copies which I did not measure, this survey also excludes a few others which are fragmentary or anomalous.³⁶ It includes copies copied by multiple scribes, but these present a methodological problem. When scribes disagreed in their sizing of the ruled area it is simple enough to treat them as separate individuals making separate decisions about how the poem can be presented. However, quite frequently collaborating scribes use a consistently sized and consistently shaped ruled area. I have decided to treat these as representing a single decision about the appropriate presentation of the poem. This approach helpfully prevents single manuscripts with many scribes who agree on one ruled area from unjustifiably weighting the results, but it naturally requires some

³⁴ To measure the ruled area I have measured the dimensions of the exterior ruling lines closest to the written area, as this measurement is the best representation of the scribe's conception of the written area when ruling (not necessarily reflecting the written area in practice). I have not thoroughly surveyed the styles, pricking and number of ruling lines used in ruling in all the manuscripts. These features are important and deserve study in their own right but their primary use is as evidence for the production histories of individual manuscripts and for diachronic and diatopic codicological trends. (On which see N. R. Ker, 'Elements of Medieval English Codicology (1944)', *English Manuscript Studies 1100–1700*, 14 (2008), 246–50; and Matti Peikola, 'Guidelines for Consumption: Scribal Ruling Patterns and Designing the *Mise-en-page* in Later Medieval England', in *Manuscripts and Printed Books in Europe 1350–1550: Packaging, Presentation and Consumption*, ed. by Emma Cayley and Susan Powell (Liverpool, 2013), 14–31.) The scribe could shape the ruled area with single or double lines: what matters here is the shape he chose.

³⁵ These copies are listed in Table 3.

³⁶ I exclude the copies in the Vernon and Simeon manuscripts as they are exceptional, following other scholars' past practice: Edwards and Pearsall, 270. I exclude the copies in GCC, MS 386/606 and BL, MS Cotton Appendix VII which appear to have no ruling; the copy in BL, MS Harley 6923, in which the ruled area has no right-hand or bottom edges; the BL, MS Sloane 1044 fragment; the two very short fragments in BodL, MS Rawl. D.913, which are so darkened that it is hard to identify ruled lines; and the fragment in BodL, MS Selden Supra 102. I also exclude the copy in BodL, MS Rawl. C.319 because it is copied partly on parchment ruled for other purposes, and partly on palimpsest parchment, and is therefore a special case in its ruling as in other ways. Michael Johnston and Rebecca Pope kindly took detailed measurements from the Arundel Castle manuscript (which has no shelfmark) and Canterbury Cathedral Library, MS Lit D. 13, respectively, for me.

interpretative decisions about whether a new scribe's ruling is 'sufficiently different' to be considered separately.

In their study of pages' dimensions, Bozzolo and Ornato record the sum of a page's height and width and call this *taille* [size]. Gumbert has rejected the use of *taille*, but his argument applies primarily to larger-scale quantitative studies which use only one measurement rather than smaller-scale studies which use multiple measurements.³⁷ I will use *taille*, because it permits easy comparison to the figures provided by Bozzolo and Ornato and because *taille* offers a precise indication of area without involving the very high, and therefore hard to comprehend, numbers that area calculations generate: the smallest manuscript here has a ruled area of about 9150 mm². This survey is an experiment, and its numbers must be treated cautiously, but it can highlight and contextualise individual case-studies, and may indicate real trends in book production.

Indeed, even in an initial look at the results there are hints that attention to the ruled area as well as the size of the page yields dividends. For instance, BL, MSS Harley 4196 and Cotton Galba E.ix are linked by the closeness of their texts and by the fact that they reproduce the same lines on each page, both duplicating a lost exemplar. Yet they have significantly different page sizes: by the most common measurement of books' size they are different sizes. However, the table shows that while these two manuscripts have significantly different page sizes, in *The Prick of Conscience* their ruled areas are, in both size and shape, almost identical. In other words, the two manuscripts are even more similar than has previously been noticed, and the book

³⁷ J. P. Gumbert, 'Livre grand, livre petit: un problème de taille', *Gazette du livre médiéval*, 38 (2001), 55–58. Gumbert concludes that studies using multiple measurements are a separate and more complex matter (58).

producers may have been precisely duplicating the exemplar's ruled area, as well as its lineation. In a time when owners might be expected to trim books, duplicating the ruled area might have been a more important part of imitating an exemplar than duplicating the whole page's size.

There is no obvious relationship between date and size or columniation in this sample, and there is also no compelling clustering around a particular size. The median average ruled area *taille*, 279, is a little lower than the mean average, 292.4, or in other words a majority of manuscripts, fifty-three, have a ruled area *taille* lower than the mean average, and this is revealing: it suggests a sample primarily composed of smaller, though not necessarily small, manuscripts, with the mean average raised by the larger size of a few special examples. This is likely to be a real reflection of the trend in the production of all the manuscripts, not just a trend in the sample that survived: smaller copies were probably less likely to survive, and therefore if more small copies than large copies survive it is likely that more small copies were made. This was probably, then, a text which was often copied in smaller sizes. That might have been done in order that it might be easily handled and kept to hand. Large copies were not unknown—Simeon and Vernon have not been included here—but they were perhaps not common.

Hanna records ruled area dimensions in his descriptions of manuscripts containing *Speculum Vitae* so it is possible to compare these two sets of

measurements.³⁸ Again, I have excluded some manuscripts.³⁹ The mean average ruled area *taille* of the copies of *Speculum Vitae* is larger than that of the copies of *The Prick of Conscience* surveyed here (292 mm compared to 313 mm). It is at the top end of the range of sizes that the two corpora differ most significantly: *The Prick of Conscience* sample has nothing quite as big as Princeton, University Library, MS Taylor Medieval 11 ($280 \times 190 \text{ mm}^2$, in two columns), and although in the *Speculum Vitae* sample the majority of ruled areas are still below the mean average ruled *taille*, a higher proportion of manuscripts sit towards the high end of the range. In a sample that is less than half the size of that used for *The Prick of Conscience*, there are almost as many copies with a ruled *taille* above 350 mm. The difference is not dramatic, but copies of the two poems can be contrasted a little in their size.

It is also striking that a higher proportion of copies of *Speculum Vitae* were copied in two columns. Thirteen of the forty-five surviving copies and fragments of *Speculum Vitae*—just less than a third—are in two columns (the Vernon and Simeon copies are in three). Despite the prevalence of double-column layouts in the group of textually significant northern copies of *The Prick of Conscience*, only twelve of the

³⁸ See Table 4. Hanna terms the area ruled for writing the ‘written area’. I have checked Hanna’s figures for all copies in BL and BodL and have found them to be correct, but for BodL, MS Rawl. C.884, which has no visible ruling, Hanna gives the dimensions of the actual area covered by writing, and so I exclude it.

³⁹ The Vernon and Simeon manuscripts; BodL, MS Rawl. C.884, which has no ruling; MS Cotton Tiberius E.vii, which was so badly burned in the fire at Ashburnham House that most evidence of its ruled area was lost; the first, probably abandoned copy of the poem in TCC, MS R.3.13, ff.i–ii; BodL, MS Marl. C. 31, which has been trimmed down to its written area; the fragments described in Hanna, ‘Two New Fragments’ and Weiskott; and Stafford, Staffordshire Record Office, MSS D (W) 1734/4/1/6–8, which only survives as trimmed strips used to wrap other text. Hanna gives no dimensions for the copy in Toshiyuki Takamiya, MS 15, because he consulted it in facsimile, but I have been able to consult the manuscript itself and have added my own measurements to the sample.

ninety copies measured are in two columns.⁴⁰ The early two-column format for *The Prick of Conscience* apparently lacked longevity, as also seems to have been the case for its marginal apparatus. Was *Speculum Vitae* simply harder to adapt into a different material form than *The Prick of Conscience*? *Speculum Vitae* is substantially longer than *The Prick of Conscience*. Given the same ruled area and module, a copy of *Speculum Vitae* will therefore be noticeably fatter than a copy of *The Prick of Conscience*, and will require more materials and more labour time. These considerations might have pushed more scribes towards space-efficient double-column layouts and larger ruled areas. Other factors also probably made growth in the pages' dimensions preferable to growth in the depth of the book: as the number of leaves increases, so will the number of quire divisions, and each quire division is a vulnerable point in the book's structure; and when an excessively deep book is opened near its middle, each half will have enough independent weight to strain and damage the spine or the sewing supports.

That a text seems to exist in big books because it is long might seem a fairly mundane observation, but it highlights the significance of length as an aspect of form. Literary critics generally acknowledge this connection at the level of the line—*Piers Plowman* is written in alliterative long lines—and at the level of the stanza—a rhyme royal stanza has seven lines—but not always at the level of the entire text.⁴¹ Formal length and material size are connected. Before decisions are made about module, ruled

⁴⁰ Again, the Vernon and Simeon copies are in three columns. I exclude MS Sloane 2275 from this calculation as it is copied as prose, albeit in two columns. The significant Northern copies of the poem in two columns are: BL, MSS Add. 33995, Cotton Galba E.ix and Harley 4196; MS Rawl. poet. 175; and LPL, MS 260. Wellesley College Library, MS 8 was copied in one column despite being closely related to MS Add. 33995.

⁴¹ Although see Catherine Gallagher, 'Formalism and Time', in *Reading for Form*, ed. by Susan J. Wolfson and Marshall Brown (Seattle, 2006), 305–27.

area and script, this connection is loose. But for a verse text, once those decisions are made, length and size are connected precisely and proportionally: if forty lines will fit on one page, a text that is 6400 lines long will take up forty bifolia, exactly ten quires if the book is quired in eights.⁴² Book production forced this kind of thought on scribes.

Sometimes the connection between textual length and material size was captured in a text's title, as in the *Parvum volumen*, and in Middle English *The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye*.⁴³ In one manuscript which contains *Stimulus Consciencie Minor* followed by *The Prick of Conscience*, the larger and older poem is introduced as 'þe langer pryck of conscience'.⁴⁴ *Speculum Vitae* names shortness as one of the Pater Noster's virtues (ll.153–60). Although the prayer 'es short in worde wrought; / It es in sentence lange in thoght': its written or spoken length is dramatically at odds with its full meaning (ll.171–72).

In sentence it es lange to se
For þe mare deuocioun þarein suld be.
For þe naked lettre þat es noght heuy
Men suld say by mouth anely,
And alle þe sentence of it
Vnderstande and in hert knytt. (ll.179–84)

Speculum Vitae is structured by the Pater Noster, is sometimes called 'the Book of the

⁴² Forty lines per page is the quantity promised in Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, ed., Guillaume de Machaut, *Le Livre dou Voir Dit (The Book of the True Poem)*, facing trans. by R. Barton Palmer, Garland Library of Medieval Literature, 106A (New York, 1998), letter 45, 612: 'Et tenra environ .xij. quohiers de .xl. poins' [And it will be in length about twelve quires of forty lines] (Palmer's translation). As Leech-Wilkinson notes (750), Machaut is, strictly speaking, counting the pricking rather than the lines themselves here.

⁴³ 'Libelle', from the Old French *libel*, itself from the Latin diminutive of *liber*, *libellus*, could mean a little book as well as a legal document; in the Early Version of the Wycliffite Bible 'libel' is used where *libellus* is used in the Vulgate (Numbers 5. 23 and Deuteronomy 24. 1); the Later Version uses 'litol book'. See *MED*, 'libelle (n.)' and *OED*, 'libel (n.)'.

⁴⁴ Wellesley College, MS 8, p.12, l.19.

Pater Noster' in colophons and titles, and might make a reasonable claim to be part of, if not all of, the prayer's 'sentence lange'. Perhaps, then, the size of a copy of *Speculum Vitae* might have vouched for this claim. The perceptual immediacy of the promise that the meaning 'es lange to se' rather than, for example, to understand, focuses attention on the appearance of the book being read (or read from), allowing its size to render the prayer's 'sentence' tangibly 'lange'. Similarly, the poem's closing assurance that 'Alle es wryten here on þis boke' (l.16043) might carry extra weight when read from one of the larger, heavier copies. Tethering readings of a poem to the forms in which it survives, which must have often gone unremarked by the poem's readers, can be dangerous. But is it not the case today that one is impressed and reassured by the large, authoritative size of certain kinds of books, such as manuscript catalogues?

Proportion

Something more can be said about shape. Both Gumbert and Bozzolo and Ornato observe that page proportions in large samples of later medieval books tend to cluster around a particular ratio which is, if it is expressed as the width divided by the height, about 0.7.⁴⁵ If a hypothetical book has a proportion of 0.7, its width is slightly more than two thirds of its height. As the hypothetical book's proportion rises above 0.7, it looks increasingly squat for its size; as the proportion falls below that, it looks increasingly narrow. A sheet with this proportion produces two sheets of roughly the same proportion if it is halved horizontally, and so the use of sheets with a proportion of

⁴⁵ Gumbert, 'Sizes', 279, offers 0.7; Bozzolo and Ornato, 287, with a larger sample, offer 0.701 for fourteenth-century manuscripts and 0.708 for fifteenth-century manuscripts.

around 0.7 allowed book producers to fold and re-fold to produce smaller books while maintaining the same look.⁴⁶

Ruled areas have proportions too, although they are not measured or addressed by Gumbert or Bozzolo and Ornato.⁴⁷ Attention to ruled areas' proportions can yield interesting results. For example, in one manuscript copy of the Middle English prose *Brut* by multiple scribes, the first two scribes used differently sized ruled areas, which therefore have different *tailles*.⁴⁸ However, calculating these ruled areas' proportions reveals that both ruled areas have exactly the same *shape*. This might be a coincidence, or it might be the result of the scribes, independently or together, homing in on a particular proportion but ruling it for their own different hands.

Vincent Gillespie has noted that *The Prick of Conscience* often appears in manuscripts which are relatively narrow.⁴⁹ Do the numbers bear this out? In these samples the mean average page proportion for copies of both poems is 0.67. There are plenty of examples with the page proportion below 0.67, and so this is not a case in which a few narrow books pull the average down. Therefore, on the evidence of the limited sample available, and if the numbers produced by Bozzolo and Ornato and Gumbert are representative, both poems tend to exist on pages which are slightly narrower for their area than is normal for books in the period.

The root cause of this discrepancy may be the fact that many of these manuscripts are wholly or predominantly verse manuscripts. If, as Gumbert argues,

⁴⁶ Needham, 'Res papirea', 126; standard medieval paper sizes also followed this proportion. See also Graham Pollard, 'Notes on the Size of the Sheet', *The Library*, 4th series, 22 (1941), 107–37 (114–15).

⁴⁷ Peikola, 'Guidelines for Consumption', 23, does comment on size.

⁴⁸ BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 32.

⁴⁹ 'Vernacular Books', 169.

scribes were very sensitive to ‘proper’ page proportion, then it seems likely that they were sensitive to ‘proper’ ruled area proportion too.⁵⁰ And if scribes were sensitive to these things then it seems likely that at least some other readers were also sensitive to them. Any verse which is not in long lines is likely to have a narrower column, which will look ‘incorrect’ if the pages are not also narrower. If the pages stay the same width, they will appear to be wider than normal pages thanks to the contrast with the narrower ruled area. Scribes therefore had to make pages narrower in order to make readers perceive those pages as being ‘the right width’.

To explore this possibility, I have compared the page proportion figures for these two poems to three other bodies of evidence which were, admittedly, assembled opportunistically: twenty-five copies of the Middle English prose *Brut*, twenty copies of *Piers Plowman*, and a heterogeneous collection of 120 manuscripts from the period which do not contain the primary texts.⁵¹ None of these groups is large compared to the number of surviving or once extant manuscripts, nor in any way representative; I offer these bodies of data as evidence which is better than nothing rather than as an ideal study. Despite all these qualifications, the third group of manuscripts does have one strength: fifty-one of this third group of manuscripts survive in medieval bindings, and so these books witness shapes and sizes which were considered acceptable by at least some medieval readers.

The group of prose *Brut* manuscripts has a mean average page proportion of 0.7, just as predicted by previous larger studies, and a median average page proportion of

⁵⁰ Gumbert, *Die Utrechter Kartäuser*, 139–41

⁵¹ See Tables 5, 6, 7 and 8. Some of the measurements for copies of *Piers Plowman* are taken from C. David Benson and Lynne S. Blanchfield, *The Manuscripts of Piers Plowman: The B-Version* (Cambridge, 1997). I took all the *Brut* manuscript measurements and measured the third group myself.

0.7: the manuscripts cluster at 0.7 and higher, and only a few have strikingly lower page proportions.⁵² This provides some limited support to the possibility that verse manuscripts were slightly narrower, since these prose manuscripts from the same period and country are on average squatter. *Piers* manuscripts offer an interesting point of comparison because the verse is in long lines. The mean average page proportion in the group for which I have data is 0.68, and again this is also the median. The contrast with the *Brut* in prose might hint that even manuscripts dominated by verse in long lines tended to be a little narrower. The third group of 120 manuscripts divides into ninety books dominated by prose and thirty books dominated by verse. Here, however, the data refuse to yield a convenient contrast, for both groups have a mean average page proportion of 0.68. Perhaps, then, manuscripts containing verse were not shaped to fit their contents; or perhaps I need more data. The trend of squatter page proportion among prose *Brut* manuscripts remains suggestive.

There are a few manuscripts containing *Speculum Vitae* or *The Prick of Conscience* which have unusual proportions. One copy of *The Prick of Conscience*, that in Leeds University Library, MS Brotherton 501, has exceptionally wide proportions: 0.72 for the ruled area and 0.91 for the page. The immediate cause is the copying of the poem with a full couplet on each line.⁵³ Apart from this example, the only particularly dramatic aberrations are copies with a lower page proportion, copies which are narrower

⁵² Notably BodL, MS Tanner 188, which has a page proportion of 0.61.

⁵³ See below, 185–88.

for their size. Three copies of each poem have a page proportion below 0.56.⁵⁴ Of these, the copy of *The Prick of Conscience* in MS Peniarth 395 was identified by Gisela Gudat-Figge as a possible ‘holster book’.⁵⁵ This is a tall and narrow book format, produced by folding the sheets of writing material which will become bifolia along their length rather than along their width. A well-known example measures 418 × 140 mm², and so has a proportion of 0.33; its pages are three times as tall as they are wide.⁵⁶ It was thought that such a book would be easily carried in a holster attached to a belt or a saddle.⁵⁷ Gudat-Figge disposed of previous theories connecting these manuscripts directly to recitation by minstrels, although she thought that they might nevertheless have some advantage for reading aloud.⁵⁸ Andrew Taylor has extended and sharpened Gudat-Figge’s reservations, doubting even the connections to oral recitation and to holsters: as he rightly notes, we have yet to find a provably holstered book.⁵⁹ References to the holster book concept since have been guarded.⁶⁰

The concept of the holster book thus seems to have porous edges. Gudat-Figge also identified MS Harley 2260 as a possible holster book, but this manuscript has a

⁵⁴ Chicago, Newberry Library, MS 33 (MV18), BL, MS Egerton 657 (MV29) and BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 139 (MV82); Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Peniarth 395, Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS McClean 130 and BodL, MS Greaves 43 (MS Greaves 43 is a thirty-seven folio fragment).

⁵⁵ Gisela Gudat-Figge, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Middle English Romances*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur englischen Philologie, 4 (München, 1976), 31.

⁵⁶ BodL, MS Ashmole 61.

⁵⁷ The earliest reference to the idea that I am aware of is in G. S. Ivy, ‘The Bibliography of the Manuscript-Book’, in *The English Library before 1700*, ed. by Francis Wormald and C. E. Wright (London, 1958), 32–65 (64, n.71).

⁵⁸ Gudat-Figge, 30–31.

⁵⁹ Andrew Taylor, ‘The Myth of the Minstrel Manuscript’, *Speculum*, 66 (1991), 47–73 (57–59).

⁶⁰ Horobin, ‘Rawlinson Poetry 137’, 19; Finlayson, 635.

page proportion of 0.65, which is narrower than 0.7 but relatively unremarkable compared to something like MS Ashmole 61.⁶¹ Discussing printed books D. F. Foxon noted the term ‘agenda format’, although he preferred more precise bibliographical terminology (‘long 12°’, ‘long quarto’).⁶² Since the narrow shape seems also (or, perhaps, rather) to have been used for accounts, I prefer Elisabeth Salter’s phrase ‘ledger book’ for the shape, but this phrase has also been used with a different sense simply to describe very large books.⁶³ ‘Agenda format’ seems a workable pre-existing phrase to use for now, even if it is anachronistic. This format could influence reading. Although focusing on printed books, Foxon plausibly suggests that the agenda format sacrificed convenience when read on a table for the sake of convenience when read in two hands: ‘each hand supports one of the covers and the fingers can reach round the spine while the thumbs control the pages’.⁶⁴ Erik Kwakkel, meanwhile, has suggested that the weight distribution in agenda format manuscript is gentler than in normal books, making agenda format manuscripts more comfortable for situations in which the reader might need to hold the book up for a long time, such as singing or teaching.⁶⁵ It is also entirely possible that some agenda format manuscripts with literary contents are the shape they are because the writing supports happened to be prepared for actual

⁶¹ Guddat-Figge, 32.

⁶² D. F. Foxon, ‘Some Notes on Agenda Format’, *The Library*, 5th series, 8 (1953), 163–73 (163, 172–73). Foxon also notes (173) the narrow Talbot book of hours which is now Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 40-1950.

⁶³ Elisabeth Salter, ‘Evidence for Devotional Reading in Fifteenth-Century England: A Comparative Analysis of One English Poem in Six Manuscript Contexts’, in *Vernacularity in England and Wales, c.1300–1550*, ed. by Elisabeth Salter and Helen Wicker, *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy*, 17 (Turnhout, 2011), 65–97 (71). P. R. Robinson, ‘The Vernon Manuscript as a “Coucher Book”’, in *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, ed. by Derek Pearsall (Cambridge, 1990), 15–28 (17–18).

⁶⁴ Foxon, 173.

⁶⁵ ‘Decoding’, 71–72.

ledgers.⁶⁶

Chicago, Newberry Library, MS 33 has a page proportion of 0.52 and a ruled area proportion of 0.43. Although the truncation of a manicule shows that it did suffer horizontal trimming after it had already been in use, its ruled areas are unusually narrow and contain an unusually high number of lines, thirty-nine, with a larger-than-average amount of space—4.75 mm—per line, so it was probably always a narrow book.⁶⁷ The available evidence suggests that this was not a copy of the poem which had to be on awkwardly shaped writing supports because they were the only option. *The Prick of Conscience* is written in a hand modelled on anglicana formata. Variation in the shape of graphs and an emphasis on curves suggest a relatively fast execution for a set hand, but most graphs are set and some features of the hand, such as the control of the thickness of strokes at different points in a graph, are very regular. The couplets are marked by rhyme braces which require two separate strokes, one of them broken. The rhyme braces also alternate between red and blue ink, an unusual characteristic which places them among the more expensive and time-consuming programmes of bracing. The poem is copied on parchment which is not rife with blemishes or leg-holes. These features suggest a manuscript produced deliberately and with some care. They do not suggest a manuscript designed to be portable or produced on the cheap. This appears simply to be a tall book.

Perhaps there is room for a distinction within the class of books with page proportions below 0.6: genuinely very thin books such as MS Ashmole 61, in which the

⁶⁶ See the abandoned accounts in TCC, MS O.9.38, f.1^r, and the comments in A. G. Rigg, *A Glastonbury Miscellany of the Fifteenth Century: A Descriptive Index of Trinity College, Cambridge, MS O.9.38* (London, 1968), 1, 42 and 102.

⁶⁷ Chicago, Newberry Library, MS 33, p.14 (manuscript is paginated).

width is about a third of the height, are modelled on ledgers or were originally planned as ledgers, while merely quite thin books such as Newberry MS 33, in which the width is about half the height, are designed to be more easily handled as Foxon suggests. It is also true that for certain sizes of bifolium, folding the bifolia parallel to their longer side to produce a tall, narrow book would make more efficient use of parchment sheets if a book's main purpose was to contain verse in single columns. Perhaps, therefore, this may be another aspect of size and shape which was sometimes directly related to the verse form, and which might sometimes have signalled form to readers.

Interproportion

So much for the shape of the page. What about the shape of the ruled area, and the nature of the relationship between ruled area and page? It is possible to express the relationship between the proportion of the ruled area and the proportion of the page quantitatively. Dividing the ruled area's proportion by the page's proportion yields a number expressing the relationship between the two, which I will call the 'interproportion'. If the interproportion is below one, the page is squatter than the ruled area. Conversely, if the interproportion is above one the ruled area is squatter than the page. It is important to note that this is a numerical representation of the relationship between two proportions on the page, not of a specific appearance: two pages can share the same interproportion without resembling each other, and in this interproportion differs from proportion.

The proportions of the ruled areas of copies of both texts differ from their page proportions. The mean average ruled area proportion for *The Prick of Conscience* is

0.58; for *Speculum Vitae*, it is 0.56. Although *Speculum Vitae* copies have a different range of proportions for the page from the copies of *The Prick of Conscience*, both samples offer very similar ranges of proportions of the ruled area. It might be expected that ruled areas with multiple columns would be squatter than single-column ruled areas, but, in general, this does not seem to be the case. The possibility of trimming means that we can only put weight on very broad trends in interproportion, but there is at least one such trend. As noted above, the ruled area's proportion is almost always noticeably less than 0.7. Consequently the interproportion is lower than one in almost every case. In other words, the ruled area is almost always taller for its area than the page and the page almost always looks squatter than the ruled area. This usually holds true whatever proportion the page may have itself: in books which are tall and thin for their size, the ruled area is usually even taller and thinner for *its* size. MS Brotherton 501 has unusually squat proportions, but the relationship between the proportions of the ruled area and of the page is not dramatically different: the interproportion is an unremarkable 0.79.

There are a few exceptions to the trend of pages which are squatter than their ruled areas. In the production of each of these exceptions there was unusual pressure on the page layout, and therefore they strengthen the possibility that an interproportion below one was a generally-held rule. The unusually reduced and rearranged copy of *The Prick of Conscience* in BL, MS Sloane 2275 has an interproportion of 1.06. This is the manuscript in which the poem is lineated as prose in two columns. The ruled area's dimensions and bi-columnar layout are consistent throughout the book, which is

otherwise entirely given over to Latin religious prose.⁶⁸ In this manuscript or in an exemplar somewhere in its ancestry, therefore, *The Prick of Conscience* may have been slotted into a pre-ruled format designed for different material and was afforded something of the status of religious prose for Latinate readers. Given this appearance, readers might have handled the text—literally and metaphorically—with greater attention to its use of authoritative Latin quotations and its ability to gloss and expand on them; in some ways, the reading experience offered by this copy might then have been similar to that in the copy of the poem indexed by the scribe Wilfrid.⁶⁹

The second exception is the copy of *The Prick of Conscience* in MS Ashmole 52 which is the result of a miniaturisation effort, producing an easily handled, highly portable book. The scribe squeezed *The Prick of Conscience* into a mere sixty-five small folios, using a two-column layout and a textura hand with a small module. The textura may be partly used to save space. But the hand is determinedly set and includes numerous relatively laborious features.⁷⁰ Furthermore, despite the limited space available the scribe still felt able to offset the lines' first letters slightly as *literae notabiliores*. Unusually in a manuscript from this period a few bifolia were copied on

⁶⁸ *DG*, 70. See below, 189–203.

⁶⁹ See above, 83–88.

⁷⁰ For example, the top of the **I** bifurcates thanks to a tick to the top of the ascender; **p** and **y** are not distinguished, but the graph used for both consistently has a dot above it; **i** is ticked; majuscule **O** has a dot in its centre; and a *punctus* marks the end of every line. Cadel capitals, sometimes incorporating human heads, decorate the initial letters of some columns. Occasionally the heads seem to be the product of conscious whimsy: the only mitred head is attached to the **N** of 'Ne to pope bischope ne prelate', and the only pair of heads decorates the **B** of 'Betwen þies times þies prophetes two', although the two heads may simply have been suited to the two-compartment graph (BodL, MS Ashmole 52 (MV60), f.13^v, l.b1; and f.31^r, l.b1; the equivalent lines in *Morris* are ll.1886 and 4499).

palimpsest.⁷¹ In all four cases the palimpsest bifolia appear—whoever scraped the parchment was very thorough—to be formed from the bottom parts of single folios from a much larger and possibly liturgical manuscript in which the text was copied in textura with a large module.⁷² The scraped text appears at the top of the bifolia as they are now and runs out partway down the page: in these bifolia *The Prick of Conscience* was mostly copied into what used to be the bottom margin. The parchment stock in the rest of the book seems very similar and so might have been an abandoned project from the same production context. Even if the financial costs of material are kept down: the use of palimpsested parchment spends someone's time to save money, since the parchment must at some point be scraped and possibly bleached with enough skill to avoid damaging it excessively. This is an unusual copy of the poem, and its interproportion above one is the result of its extreme miniaturisation for convenient handling. It is also a reminder that, although larger manuscripts might have required more time and money than smaller ones, beneath a certain size the costs perhaps began to rise again in the effort to miniaturise.

The third manuscript with an interproportion above one is BodL, MS Hatton 19, which contains a copy of *Speculum Vitae* by a scribe who names himself as Thomas Doule. This copy's page layout seems to have been determined by a desire to use space efficiently: the text is copied into two columns with narrow lateral margins, and Doule incorporated parts of the marginal apparatus of navigational and source notes usually

⁷¹ MS Ashmole 52, ff.35–38 (as noted by Hanna and Wood) and also ff.27–30. These folios constitute the innermost two bifolia of the book's fifth and fourth quires, respectively. Two other copies of the poem use some palimpsested leaves: BL, MS Add. 11305 (ff.115–16, 121–23); and MS Rawl. C.35 (ff.27, 42–43, 49, 51–52, 55–57, 60–62, 64, 66–67, 69–70, 71–94, 97–100 and 103–18).

⁷² The minims are 4–5 mm high.

transmitted with *Speculum Vitae* into the main column of text.⁷³ Again, an interproportion above one correlates with a production subject to unusual pressure, often pressure related to space.

The three manuscripts in which the interproportion is above one are, then, all exceptional cases.⁷⁴ This sample is too small to allow definitive statements about the handling of the page in book production in England in the period, but the evidence at least suggests that in verse manuscripts an interproportion above one might be correlated with unusual handling in production. At the same time, the existence of aberrant examples such as these shows that keeping the interproportion below one was not a rule which was followed at all costs, but rather, and more interestingly, one which could be broken under pressure.

Was this an accepted preference in book aesthetics in this period, or a preference specific to verse, or to these texts? The three additional samples of manuscripts (discussed earlier) can be useful here too. The mean average interproportion of the *Brut* copies is 0.95; for the *Piers* copies it is 0.92; for the heterogeneous manuscripts containing prose it is 0.93; and for the heterogeneous manuscripts containing verse it is 0.91. These differences are slight, but perhaps there is a spectrum here from verse generally in short lines at the narrowest ruled area, through verse in long lines and prose texts in general, to very substantial prose texts such as the *Brut*, which perhaps

⁷³ The evidence of MS Hatton 19, f.39^v, l.a42 demonstrates that Doule was moving the marginal notes himself rather than copying their positions from his exemplar: here he began to copy a line of the text as normal but then realised that he had to leave space for an incorporated marginal note and corrected himself.

⁷⁴ The correlation in these samples between an interproportion above one and unusual production circumstances demonstrates this measurement's usefulness, for it has not turned up any copies which otherwise seem normal and whose odd interproportion is just the result of later trimming.

encouraged greater use of lateral space. Indeed, since the *Brut* manuscripts already had an unusually squat page proportion, their relatively high mean average interproportion suggests two moves to obtain extra space: a wider page, and then a wider ruled area within the already-widened page. These figures also seem to support the earlier finding that book producers did not in general shape the page to suit the material, as they may have shaped the ruling, since if pages were narrowed in verse to suit narrower ruled areas book producers would be maintaining the same interproportion as prose manuscripts.

In all samples however, even including the *Brut* books, there is still a strong preference for an interproportion below one. Only two in twenty-two copies of the prose *Brut* and three in twenty copies of *Piers Plowman* have interproportions above one. Only five in thirty heterogeneous verse manuscripts have an interproportion greater than one, alongside only eleven in ninety-four prose manuscripts. Why was an interproportion below one—a ruled area which was narrower for its size than the page—preferable or useful? One factor might be the different roles of the lateral margins as opposed to the top and bottom margins: the lateral margins are more useful for precise annotation or marginalia. While some texts received only very limited marginal commentary from readers, it might nevertheless still be the case that visibly being open to commentary was a quality which had an aesthetic value for readers. External lateral margins, the right-hand margins on recto pages and the left-hand margins on versos, are also more likely than the top and bottom margins to be handled in reading. They are effectively handles. Margins are, also, practically useful as protection for the text. So there are possible aesthetic and practical reading reasons for having an interproportion below one.

These wider margins for annotating or handling might prompt us to ask just how much of the page is taken up by carrying the text. With sizes available for both pages and ruled areas, the amount of each book taken up by marginal space as opposed to the ruled area can easily be calculated.⁷⁵ The mean average amounts of the page given over to the margins in copies of *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae* are forty-eight and forty-nine percent respectively. In the copies of the prose *Brut* the mean is forty-nine percent; in the copies of *Piers Plowman* it is forty-five percent; in the heterogeneous group of other manuscripts, it is fifty-four percent. The seeming narrowness of the margins in books is an optical illusion caused by the margins' distribution around the edges of the page. The probability of the loss of some of the margin through trimming in some manuscripts, which is a problem for many aspects of this quantitative study, actually strengthens this point: even though some of these manuscripts have certainly been trimmed and others have probably been trimmed, the average percentage of the page occupied by the margins remains strikingly high.⁷⁶ The discussion of the distribution of different sizes in relation to the mean and median average above suggests that these texts were often in small books which were manual and suitable for handling, but an examination of their margins suggests that even small books were not bluntly utilitarian productions straining to make the most efficient possible use of space.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Calculate the areas of the page and of the ruled area by multiplying their respective heights and widths. Subtract the smaller area from the larger to learn the area of the margins; divide this by the area of the page and multiply the result by 100 to learn the percentage of the page occupied by the margins.

⁷⁶ *The Prick of Conscience* in MS Brotherton 500, for instance, has been trimmed quite brutally.

⁷⁷ This phenomenon has been noted with reference to earlier books: Erik Kwakkel, 'Half Full, Half Empty: The Peculiar Medieval Page', *medievalbooks*, 5 June 2015
<<http://medievalbooks.nl/2015/06/05/half-full-half-empty-the-peculiar-medieval-page>> [accessed 5 June 2015].

This survey has pilot-tested new tools for rapidly assessing and expressing the relationship between a book's proportions and the proportions of its ruled area. Copies of *The Prick of Conscience* tend, as might be expected, to be a bit smaller than copies of *Speculum Vitae*; they also vary more in size, and do not stick to the bi-columnar layouts of their early precedents. Copies of both poems tend to be in books which are narrower for their size than we might expect from previous, larger and less focused quantitative surveys. But comparisons to other samples offer a mixed picture, in which the dimensions of *Brut* manuscripts do seem more squat for their size than normal manuscripts, but a heterogeneous group of manuscripts primarily containing prose also has a narrower mean average page proportion than the figures offered by Bozzolo and Ornato and by Gumbert. Format could be one of the unconscious and materially determined factors affecting book production and susceptible to codicological study discussed above in my introduction.

Portability

These smaller sizes and handy margins might suggest a concern for portability, a characteristic intimately linked to size and shape and important in determining how and where a book might be read. The relatively small average size of the manuscripts of the primary texts might suggest concern for easy handling on the move. But the idea of portability deserves more interrogation. What can we learn about the ways in which books might have been read if we consider their portability? Where did people read these texts and what particular kinds of reading might have been associated with particular places? What were the literary implications of designing a book for handling on the move, or alternatively for handling in one place forever?

A very small book could be kept to hand at any time. The tiny, intimate books of hours which proliferated in the fifteenth century probably form the most widespread body of books which were primarily portable for this reason.⁷⁸ A broader range of portable books could be particularly useful for mendicants.⁷⁹ Portability did not have to be a matter of just a smaller size: girdle books had bindings terminating in knots or loops for attachment to one's clothing.⁸⁰ The most portable writing-containers were not codices at all, but rather folded pieces of parchment or paper which could compress a great deal of information, often in tables or diagrams, into a tiny physical space.⁸¹ In some girdle books each leaf might fold out, creating a codex of folding almanacs; in one such example the limp parchment binding terminates in a loop for string, and the main block of the object measures about $110 \times 65 \text{ mm}^2$.⁸² Sets of wax tablets, too, could be very portable, though writing on them would be ephemeral.⁸³

⁷⁸ For example, Leeds University Library, MS Brotherton 3 measures about $95 \times 65 \text{ mm}^2$.

⁷⁹ David d'Avray, 'Portable *Vademecum* Books Containing Franciscan and Dominican Texts', in *Manuscripts at Oxford: An Exhibition in Memory of Richard William Hunt (1908–1979)*, ed. by A. C. de la Mare and B. C. Barker-Benfield (Oxford, 1980), 60–64; and D'Avray, 'Printing, Mass Communication, and Religious Reformation'.

⁸⁰ See the discussion of two portable girdle books in Monique-Cécile Garand, 'Livres de poche médiévaux à Dijon et à Rome', *Scriptorium*, 25 (1971), 18–24.

⁸¹ Examples include BL, MS Harley 3812, BodL, MSS Ashmole 8 and Rawl. D. 939. On these objects see Hilary Carey, 'What is the Folded Almanac? The Form and Function of a Key Manuscript Source for Astro-Medical Practice in Later Medieval England', *Social History of Medicine*, 16 (2003), 481–509; Hilary Carey, 'Astrological Medicine and the Medieval English Folded Almanac', *Social History of Medicine*, 17 (2004), 345–63; and John B. Friedman, 'Harry the Haywarde and Talbat his Dog: An Illustrated Girdlebook from Worcestershire', in *Art Into Life: Collected Papers from the Kresge Art Museum Medieval Symposium*, ed. by Carol Garrett Fisher and Kathleen L. Scott (East Lansing, 1995), 115–53. But note that the text in MS Rawl. D.939 which Friedman identifies as part of *The Prick of Conscience*, NIMEV 2794, on the fifth folding piece of parchment, is not directly from the Main Version or Southern Recension of the poem, though it treats the same topic as *Morris*, ll.7618–83.

⁸² BodL, MS Ashmole 6.

⁸³ Elisabeth Lalou, 'Inventaire des tablettes médiévales et présentation générale', in *Les Tablettes à écrire de l'Antiquité à l'époque moderne*, ed. by Elisabeth Lalou, *Bibliologia*, 12 (Turnhout, 1992), 233–88; Sonia O'Connor and Dominic T. Tweddle, 'A Set of Waxed Tablets from Swinegate, York', in Lalou, ed., 307–22.

The portability of books was reflected in language. The words ‘portiphorium’ and ‘porthors’ suggest the intersection of portable books and religious writings in England: both mean a portable breviary.⁸⁴ Etymologically both come from phrases for, roughly, ‘a thing carried outside’; using the Latin adverb *foris* or its French descendant, *hors*. ‘Portiphorium’ appears frequently in book bequests in wills in Latin, as ‘portiforme’ does in English wills. Here is a kind of book which is outright defined by at least hypothetical portability. And there clearly were portable portiphoria: the 1458 will of Thomas Chaworth, knight, includes ‘a litel Portose, the which the saide Sir Thomas toke *with* hym alway when he rode’. Given wills’ self-presentational nature, one wonders whether Thomas really always carried his portiphorium, but this was evidently a plausible statement, or at least an appropriately pious one.⁸⁵ The monk and the merchant’s wife in the Shipman’s Tale both swear on the monk’s ‘portehors’, which he apparently has to hand as he walks in the garden: he is indeed carrying his book outside.⁸⁶ There might be a certain stress laid on the portiphorium’s convenience here by contrast with the merchant’s use of less convenient books at the same time:

His bookes and his bagges many oon
 He leith biforn hym on his countyng-bord,
 Ful riche was his tresor and his hord,
 For which ful faste his countour-dore he shette.⁸⁷

Unlike the monk, the merchant is locked indoors and is using several account-books,

⁸⁴ *MED*, ‘portiforme (n.)’ and ‘porthors (n.)’, and *OED*, ‘portiforium (n.)’ and ‘porteous (n.)’.

⁸⁵ Cavanaugh, 182. See also Gavin Cole and Thorlac Turville-Petre, ‘Sir Thomas Chaworth’s Books’, in *The Wollaton Medieval Manuscripts: Texts, Owners and Readers*, ed. by Ralph Hanna and Thorlac Turville-Petre (York, 2010), 20–29. Only three of Chaworth’s books survive; all are very large.

⁸⁶ *The Canterbury Tales*, in Larry D. Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1987), VII.131, 135 and 92–93.

⁸⁷ *Canterbury Tales*, VII.82–85.

which might be inconveniently big or—if they are tall and narrow agenda format books—awkwardly shaped; instead of being carried for use, they are laid out on the ‘bord’ with which they and the bags they track are associated by alliteration.⁸⁸ In the B-version of *Piers Plowman*, meanwhile, Anima says that a ‘porthors’ is a good priest’s plough, to be carried when officiating, in preference to the ostentatious objects worn by priests who ‘syngeþ service bokelees’.⁸⁹

But it is perhaps unlikely that the etymologies of ‘porthors’ and ‘portiphorium’ were always consciously felt. Indeed, charmingly, a 1424 inventory of the belongings of John Mersdon, rector of Thurkeston in Lincolnshire, lists ‘unum portiphorium portatile’ [a portable portiphorium], while in his will of the same year he leaves ‘unum magnum portiphorium’ [a big portiphorium], presumably another book, to the church of Colne, Lancaster.⁹⁰ Similarly, the will of William Loryng mentions three portiphoria: one large, left to a church perpetually for the use of poor priests; ‘unum de parvis portiforiis meis’ [one of my small portiphoria]; and ‘aliud portiphorium’ [the other portiphorium].⁹¹ Some decades earlier, the 1374 will of Thomas Madefrey left his books to a church—except for a small portiphorium.⁹² Here perhaps the book’s size made it personal and therefore of little use to the church. One final and particularly grand example: in his 1394 will, John de Pykeryng, Rector of St Mary’s Castlegate, York left

⁸⁸ The bags here are probably money-bags rather than book-bags. But book-bags do appear in Chaucer’s work and elsewhere in Middle English literature: see Megan G. Leitch, ‘Locating Authorial Ethics: The Idea of the *Male* or Book-Bag in the *Canterbury Tales* and Other Middle English Poems’, *Chaucer Review*, 46 (2012), 403–18; and Gillespie, ‘Bookbinding’, 151–57.

⁸⁹ George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson, eds, William Langland, *Piers Plowman: The B Version: Will’s Visions of Piers Plowman, Do-Well, Do-Better and Do-Best* (London, 1975), XV, ll.122–27.

⁹⁰ Cavanaugh, 583–84.

⁹¹ Cavanaugh, 542.

⁹² Cavanaugh, 549.

to that church ‘unum portiphorium notatum, in duobus voluminibus’ [a portiphorium with musical notation, in two volumes].⁹³ In this case the word’s previous meaning has disappeared—and some portiphoria have become large and impressive—requiring a distinction between nominal and real portability. But the fact that, once the word had lost its original bite, another word had to be added to specify when a ‘small’ or ‘portable’ portiphorium was meant indicates the continuing importance of size and portability in distinguishing books.

Weight

Size alone is, however, not the only thing which affects portability. What about weight? All other things being equal, a larger book will be heavier than a smaller one; but in book production in this period all other things are never equal. Parchment is heavier than paper, and both kinds of writing support vary in weight although parchment varies more.⁹⁴ After handling a series of parchment manuscripts, a paper manuscript can feel somehow too light for its size even today, and perhaps in a context in which parchment was the dominant writing support—not just a manuscript culture but a parchment manuscript culture—this effect would be stronger. This possibility is more relevant to paper copies from the late fourteenth century or the early fifteenth century.⁹⁵ It is possible that the desire for a light, portable book was one motivation behind the use of

⁹³ Cavanaugh, 654.

⁹⁴ Gumbert, ‘Lightness of Parchment’.

⁹⁵ Such as the copies of *The Prick of Conscience* in BodL, MSS Digby 99 and e Musaeo 88, or the copy of *The Prick of Conscience* and extracts from *Speculum Vitae* in LPL, Sion College MS Arch. L. 40. 2/E.25.

paper in these books, particularly in cases such as MS Digby 99 in which there are other signs indicating practical and perhaps portable use. But we cannot rule out other considerations: in each of these cases the scribe may have simply had access to stocks of paper and not parchment.⁹⁶

A book's binding would also significantly affect its weight. The majority of English gothic bindings which survive use thick oak boards, and it seems reasonable to assume that many of the manuscripts which now have modern bindings were therefore once heavier in their previous bindings.⁹⁷ Wooden boards were, however, not the only option. MS Bodley 99 is one of only six substantial copies of *The Prick of Conscience* which survive in pre-modern bindings according to Lewis and McIntosh; moreover, it is the only example I know of with a limp parchment binding.⁹⁸ Although Lewis and McIntosh call this manuscript's binding 'medieval' it is possible that it is early modern, as limp parchment binding structures did not dramatically change at the boundary established by modern periodisation. However, that very continuity itself means that this manuscript's binding may still be useful evidence for medieval practice. In its present binding MS Bodley 99 can be held up in one hand and although it will not simply sit open there, it can be held open with the thumb much as one might read a modern paperback one-handed. Although the manuscript as it survives today measures about $210 \times 155 \times 33 \text{ mm}^3$ and consists entirely of parchment, it weighs less than half a

⁹⁶ Orietta Da Rold, 'Materials', in *PBE*, 12–33 (23–24).

⁹⁷ Szirmai, 216–17.

⁹⁸ The other substantial copies of the poem with bindings probably from before the sixteenth century are BodL, MSS Laud Misc. 486 and Laud Misc. 601; University College, MS 142; Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Library, MS Codex 218; and Wellesley College, MS 8. MS Laud Misc. 601 is a Southern Recension copy. The compendium of religious material which is now MS Rawl. C.285 contains a very short extract from the poem and retains a very early binding, as does one copy of the Latin translation, MS Bodley 159.

kilogram. The limp binding clearly made it lighter and therefore even more portable, but by how much? No exactly comparable manuscript in a binding with wooden boards is available, but other manuscripts in bindings from the period do survive, and a rough comparison can be made by calculating these books' weight by volume, as indicated in Table 9. The figures for weight here are imprecise, because the scales used measure weight only to the nearest 50 g; because although these books retain their boards and at least some of their covering, some of them have been rebacked; and because holes on the rear boards of several (such as BodL, MS Laud Misc. 601) suggest that they once had metal catchplates which are now lost. The calculations of volume are also imprecise: they treat books as simple, sharp-edged and sharp-cornered cuboids, when in fact these books' boards have bevelled edges and protrude beyond the edges of the pages. Furthermore, several of these books, such as MS Rawl. C.319, are less thick at their spine than at their page-edges; clasps, now missing, probably applied pressure that evened these books out into something more straightforwardly cuboid.⁹⁹ I therefore measured each book's depth halfway along its width, as a rough workaround.

Despite these qualifications, the exercise makes some broad distinctions possible. The exercise confirms the qualitative impressions of weight offered by these manuscripts. MS Bodley 99 weighs substantially less than the two next-lightest books, MSS Laud Misc. 486 and Rawl. C.319. When the weight by volume, or density, figures are compared, MS Bodley 99 is still firmly separated from the other manuscripts, which are evenly distributed in the 0.000481–0.000621 g/mm³ range. One of the lightest and

⁹⁹ MS Rawl. C.319, for example, is 38 mm deep at its spine and 55 mm deep at its page-edges, if no pressure is applied. Its binding used to include two leather straps closing to catchplates or pins in the middle of its back board.

smallest manuscripts, MS Laud Misc. 486, is also the most dense. Perhaps wooden boards become less weight-efficient towards the smaller end of the range of manuscript sizes: while boards' height and width could vary easily, they must have had to have a certain minimum thickness in their core area (which would normally thin out with bevels leading to each edge) in order to hold together and resist damage.

So, then, the binding of MS Bodley 99 definitely did make the book lighter, smaller and less dense. Since only the first ten quires survive, the manuscript is lighter than it would be if it contained a complete copy of *The Prick of Conscience* but, assuming the other quires were also copied on similar parchment, its weight per cubic millimetre would change little.¹⁰⁰ MS Bodley 99 demonstrates that size and weight work together to determine whether or not a book is portable. The book's portability perhaps strengthens the possibility of rapid referential use raised by its physical finding tags.¹⁰¹ MS Bodley 99 also demonstrates that at some point in time someone thought that a limp parchment binding would fit what they perceived to be the purpose of *The Prick of Conscience*: they thought that they should enable the reading of the poem in a wider range of physical situations.

Stationary Books

Not all books, though, needed to be portable in use: there were also stationary books. The most obvious examples are manuscripts in chained libraries. Chaining carried its own costs, sometimes entailing a complete rebinding, and so books were not chained

¹⁰⁰ It is of course not impossible that the other quires were never copied in the first place.

¹⁰¹ Discussed above, 114–25.

without thought.¹⁰² Chained books were not portable but chaining could, somewhat counter-intuitively, carry books' contents to more readers. By making theft much more difficult, chaining allowed libraries to extend their membership. For example, more than sixty keys to the library of the church of St Walburga, Zutphen were distributed beyond the church's own personnel and this breadth of access was probably only thinkable because the library was chained.¹⁰³ Library access outside private institutions was rare in England but it was not unknown.¹⁰⁴

An inventory reveals that in 1472 one copy of *The Prick of Conscience* was chained in the library of St Margaret's, New Fish Street, London.¹⁰⁵ The inventory tells us little about the copy of *The Prick of Conscience* itself. Pamela Robinson notes a Southern Recension copy, BL, MS Royal 18.A.v, which has the same *secundo folio* and was elsewhere in London at the time but, as she says, a *secundo folio* is less useful as an identification tool for verse texts than for prose texts.¹⁰⁶ The *secundo folio* can, however, be used to recover aspects of size and layout: if the 'whan' recorded in the inventory is

¹⁰² Roger Lovatt, 'College and University Book Collections and Libraries', in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland: Volume 1: To 1640*, ed. by Elisabeth Leedham-Green and Teresa Webber (Cambridge, 2006), 152–77 (164).

¹⁰³ A. J. Guerts, 'Boeken in de Sint-Walburgiskerk te Zutphen vóór 1600. Een nadere beschouwing', in *De Sint-Walburgiskerk in Zutphen: Momenten uit de geschiedenis van een middeleeuwse kerk*, ed. by M. Groothedde and others (Zutphen, 1999), 232–45 (242).

¹⁰⁴ James Willoughby, 'Common Libraries in Fifteenth-Century England: An Episcopal Benefaction', in *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. by Kantik Ghosh and Vincent Gillespie, *Medieval Church Studies*, 21 (Turnhout, 2011), 209–22 (214–16). Nigel Ramsay, 'The Library and Archives to 1897', in *St Paul's: The Cathedral Church of London, 604–2004*, ed. by Derek Keene and others (New Haven, 2004), 413–29 (415–16). Libraries with a public aspect were a growing fifteenth-century phenomenon but unchained ones required more supervision and any lending might involve bonds; see Karl Christ, *The Handbook of Medieval Library History*, rev. by Anton Kern, trans. and ed. by Theophil M. Otto (Metuchen, 1984), 315–18.

¹⁰⁵ Robinson, 'Prik of concience cheyned'. The inventory is now London, Guildhall Library, MS 1174, ff.8–15; Robinson prints a transcription, 219–21, from which all my quotations of the inventory come. Incidentally, the inventory includes both 'a portois [...] cheyned' and 'a litel portois [...] for þe organs'.

¹⁰⁶ Robinson, 'Prik of concience cheyned', 215–16.

the beginning of the Main Version's seventieth line, then the St Margaret's copy was probably a single-column copy with around thirty-five lines per page.¹⁰⁷ But the inventory calls the manuscript 'a boke of the Prik of concience'. Main Version copies are more likely to use the Latin title, *Stimulus Consciencie*, although they do not do so exclusively, while Southern Recension copies are, from the limited sample surviving, more likely to use the English title—particularly in their colophons. Perhaps, then, the copy in question is more likely to have been a Southern copy. There is no full edition of the Southern Recension, but in at least two copies an equivalent to 'whan' opens the sixty-third line, and so the St Mary's copy might have had around thirty lines per page, rather than thirty-five.¹⁰⁸ Texts of the Southern Recension are always at least a little shorter than the full Main Version, but their level of reduction varies. Taking the most and least reduced surviving copies as possible extremes, and assuming that the book contained the poem alone or at least primarily, the St Margaret's manuscript might have had between 120 and 150 folios. Thirty lines to a page is relatively low, and, in writing with a normal module, would produce quite a small book—very small, in fact, for chaining. It therefore seems likely that this copy was written with a larger module. It may have resembled—although thanks to the *secundo folio* we know it cannot be identified as—the Southern Recension copy in Lichfield Cathedral Library, MS 16. This book is neither exceptionally large nor exceptionally small (its page *taille* is 443 mm) but its copy of the poem is written in an impressive textura hand with a large module, and it has even fewer lines to a page: only twenty-two.

¹⁰⁷ Morris, 1.70. Here I expand on the method outlined in Rundle, 'Lectio probatoria, cave lector'.

¹⁰⁸ BodL, MS Lyell empt. 6, f.1^v, 1.30, 'Whanne'; Lichfield Cathedral Library, MS 50, f.2^r, 1.7, 'Qwan'.

If this conjectural reconstruction is at least roughly correct, the St Margaret's copy could then have been a medium-sized but expensive object, not small, but small enough that it could be moved around at a lectern or desk while reading.¹⁰⁹ This would not have been a private book, and as Robinson suggests might have been a source of preaching material or inspiration for the church's staff. It is not inconceivable, however, that it had lay readers too. Robinson rejects the idea that the books in St Margaret's were chained in the nave for the 'local community', because the collection was predominantly in Latin, was too large for the nave, and was most likely held in the vestry to help the church's priests in their pastoral work.¹¹⁰ But the inventory does not claim to list only the books in only one part of the church, and indeed it indicates that at least some of the books were in different locations. So it is at least possible that this copy of *The Prick of Conscience* was available to the local laity some of whom, since this was in later fifteenth-century London, might well have been interested and able to read it. This stationary book might have served a wide readership.

Other extant copies of Middle English religious instructional poems confirm the possibility that this material could be chained for access by a group. One copy of *Speculum Vitae* carries the remains of a staple that probably attached it to a chain.¹¹¹ A. I. Doyle has proposed that the request in another surviving copy that the reader pray for the 'sir Roberte [...] þat gaf þis boke to þis place' might indicate that the book was donated to and chained in an institution of some kind, and the deixis in this request is

¹⁰⁹ On furniture in chained libraries see Streeter, especially 57–62.

¹¹⁰ Robinson, 'Prik of conscience cheyned', 216–17.

¹¹¹ MS Bodley 446.

certainly suggestive.¹¹² This is a slightly smaller book, which might not have originally been designed for chaining, if it had previously been in the hands of individuals.¹¹³ Finally, the copy of *The Prick of Conscience* in MS Laud Misc. 601 has a medieval binding which retains the remnants of a structure, attached to the bottoms of both the front and back boards, which may have been an extra clasp. There are other hints that this book was kept and handled in an unusual physical context, because the binding retains holes from ten metal fittings, perhaps decorative plates of some kind, five on the front board and five on the back, each attached using four pins, nails or screws. These plates were probably part of the original form of the current binding, which probably dates from before c.1450.¹¹⁴ Again, this book is too large to be carried for personal reading.¹¹⁵ With so much metal decoration on both sides this manuscript is unlikely to have stacked politely with many others. Instead, it was probably stored and handled in some relatively spacious environment and the large amount of metal might have embellished it in a way appropriate for public display.

None of these chained books are especially huge. Chaining allowed portability and handling within a defined limit, rather than rendering books completely stationary. Some books, by contrast, were so massive that handling them at all was very difficult.

¹¹² CUL, MS II.i.36, f.225v; Doyle, 'Survey', I, 84.

¹¹³ Its page *taille* is 388, below the mean average for copies of the poem, but not dramatically so.

¹¹⁴ This is because the holes for the extra metal fittings are the same size as the holes for the fastening straps, and may well have been made using the same tools. Therefore it is fairly likely that the extra metal fittings were added during the same campaign of work as the fastening straps, which are as far as I can see part of the binding's original form. This is a binding in plain skin, not in the decorated leather which became common after the middle of the fifteenth century. Note that there is nevertheless no guarantee that this binding is the manuscript's first binding.

¹¹⁵ Its page *taille* of 525 mm is well above the corpus mean average of 400 mm but well below the size of, for example, MS Harley 4196, which has a page *taille* of 657.

Two copies of *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae* are almost as immovable as those in chained books: these are the copies in the massive Vernon and Simeon manuscripts.¹¹⁶ These books' size would have functioned as a claim for their importance, and in some ways perhaps that effect continues to be felt in modern scholarship.¹¹⁷ But that same size makes it unlikely that they have particularly interesting reading or handling histories. Both manuscripts are so large that doing any serious reading in either of them is a physical challenge. Books on such a monumental scale, without the kind of very large module which might allow for group singing or recitation, were perhaps in a sense designed to hinder any actual reading so that they might preserve their contents and function as exemplars or preservation devices.¹¹⁸ In this case, the size and shape of books suggest difficulties in handling which might offer a history of books *not* being read.

¹¹⁶ MS Eng. poet. a.1, ff.265^r–284^r and 231^v–265^r; BL, MS Add. 22283, ff.62^r–78^v and 33^r–61^v. See Wendy Scase, ed., *The Making of the Vernon Manuscript: The Production and Contexts of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. a.1*, Texts and Transitions 6 (Turnhout, 2013); Derek Pearsall, ed., *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript* (Cambridge, 1990); A. I. Doyle, *The Vernon Manuscript: A Facsimile*; and Wendy Scase, ed., *A Facsimile Edition of the Vernon Manuscript*, DVD-ROM (Oxford, 2011).

¹¹⁷ Scase, 'Patronage', 247–48.

¹¹⁸ Bella Millett notes that despite its comparatively late date the text of *Ancrene Wisse* in Vernon received 'no significant adaptation for its late-fourteenth-century readers other than modernization of vocabulary, and the omission of at least some material from Part 8': *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 402, with Variants from Other Manuscripts*, 2 vols, EETS, o.s., 325 and 326 (Oxford, 2005–06), I, xliii. Might this be because, unlike many other copies of the text, the Vernon copy had no specific expected readership?

Conclusion

So, can we add to the history of reading by examining handling through books' size shape and weight? Yes, with qualifications: many of this chapter's observations are complex or paradoxical.

Readers were sensitive to size, and possibly to shape. Quantitative methods, some of them new, permit more precise comments about the trends in copies of a particular text. In the cases of *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae* production seems to have revolved around many medium-sized and small-sized copies (with the mean average sizes of the samples being pulled up by a few large examples). These were probably personal copies, and in some cases portable copies. These trends are consonant with the observation in the first chapter that these texts were more often owned by individuals, even if those individuals sometimes read in institutional contexts.

There is more variation in size among copies of *The Prick of Conscience* than among copies of *Speculum Vitae*. Greater variety in format might suggest a greater variety of different kinds of handling, not unlike the greater variation in navigational apparatus for the poem compared to that for *Speculum Vitae*. This might be another hint that one reason for the success of *The Prick of Conscience* was that it was fairly easily manipulated, in this case because its textual form was smaller and could more easily fit into smaller physical objects. Or is it the case that the poem was manipulated a lot because it was successful? Perhaps the two phenomena fed each other in a virtuous circle.

Format might indicate the kinds of reading which the people involved in shaping the book expected it to receive. But this is not simple. While certain formats might

make certain kinds of reading physically impossible, it would be possible to, for example, have a highly portable copy of the poem which was in practice never carried beyond its owner's household. Format might sometimes be more reliable as evidence of expected reading than it is as evidence of actual reading. Examining books' shapes quantitatively suggests that the ruled area probably responded to the nature of the book's contents and there are hints that, perhaps more surprisingly, the shape of the page itself and therefore of the whole book might have been affected. Scribal decisions about the shape of the ruled area might have been driven by practical considerations about marginal commentary and the handling of the page, or by aesthetic rules and traditions, or by a mixture of the two: particular configurations might have brought pleasure precisely because they were traditional and useful. Examining the areas of writing supports left empty in books reminds us that the shaping of books was not simply a matter of cost. And cost itself was complicated, with costs perhaps falling as manuscript grew smaller, and then rising again when miniaturising them began to take effort.

Studying the actual size and shape of books can be usefully complemented by studying wills and inventories, not only to understand what people were reading—intellectual history—important as that is, but also to collect and understand fleeting details about how people thought about books and their physical properties. Size did matter: it was understood and appreciated as a useful way to identify books, and handling characteristics were integrated into book vocabulary. But binding, as well as size, was important in determining how easy a book was to handle: the examination of manuscripts' density reveals that at least some small books, such as MS Laud Misc. 486 were inconveniently heavy due to their bindings. There were also very portable books,

which might be associated with just-in-time reference and private reading. Some copies of both texts were chained, though it is difficult to know how many, and for how long. Chaining fixed books in place so that they could be made more accessible to a wider audience. Finally, egregiously large copies in extraordinarily big books may have been designed not to be handled and maybe not to be read at all.

4. Rhyming

While form has never been entirely abandoned in English studies, recent years have seen more conscious theorising of it as an explicitly designated topic.¹ Medievalists have also participated in the general re-ignition of interest in form in recent work.² Modern students of poetry are advised to be alert to form, including matters of layout and decoration.³ We cannot assume that scribes, decorators and later readers in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were consciously sensitive in this way. Did medieval readers think about form? This chapter investigates the reading of one aspect of the form of verse, rhyme, through the ways book producers—as readers and as those preparing texts for other readers—presented it. I contend that readers approached poems, including religious instructional verse, with close attention to rhyme, reading in ways that emphasised rhyme as a crucial organisational feature in verse. In other words,

¹ See, for instance, Susan J. Wolfson and Marshall Brown, eds, *Reading for Form* (Seattle, 2006); Marjorie Levinson, 'What Is New Formalism?', *PMLA*, 122 (2007), 558–69; John Richetti, ed., *Form and Formalism in the British Eighteenth-Century Novel*, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 24.2 (2011); Nicholas Birns, ed., *New Formalism of/on the Contemporary*, *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, 4.1 (2012); Verena Theile and Linda Tredennick, eds, *New Formalisms and Literary Theory* (Basingstoke, 2013); and Allison K. Deutermann and András Kiséry, eds, *Formal Matters: Reading the Materials of English Renaissance Literature* (Manchester, 2013). This is not an exhaustive list of examples.

² Shannon Gayk and Kathleen Tonry, eds, *Form and Reform: Reading across the Fifteenth Century* (Columbus, 2011); Eleanor Johnson, *Practicing Literary Theory in the Middle Ages: Ethics and the Mixed Form in Chaucer, Gower, Usk, and Hoccleve* (Chicago, 2013); and Grady and Galloway, eds, *Answerable Style*. Christopher Cannon, *The Grounds of English Literature* (Oxford, 2004) is foundational for some of this interest; see also Christopher Cannon, 'Form', in *Middle English*, ed. by Paul Strohm (Oxford, 2007), 177–90; and Christopher Cannon, 'From Literacy to Literature: Elementary Learning and the Middle English Poet', *PMLA*, 129 (2014), 349–64.

³ For example, in John Lennard, *The Poetry Handbook*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1996; 2005), 81–188.

while touching on the history of form, this investigation, as part of an exercise in the history of reading, studies the history of reading for form or the history of formalism.

The available manuscript evidence of attention to form should not be ignored.⁴ As with the size and shape of books, this evidence is often the result of habitual and unconscious work, but it can, surveyed broadly, reveal some of the assumptions made in this period about the permissible or thinkable ways to read verse. For instance, rhyme was widespread, and like size it could be used in inventories to identify books as verse rather than prose.⁵ The return of form as a topic for modern criticism has not stimulated much specific discussion of rhyme.⁶ Manuscript evidence shows that book producers presented rhyming verse in ways which emphasised rhyme in particular.⁷ The behaviour of scribes and decorators suggests that they often read rhymes rather than lines as the primary, basic divisions in verse.

It might seem odd to seek formalist attention to rhyme in texts concerned with pressing, practical problems of salvation and damnation. However, in the religious instructional poems discussed here, rhyme is used in such a way that to emphasise rhyme is also to emphasise meaning, ease the reading process and aid memory. When readers encountered these texts they probably took pleasure in the rhyme but not in a way which can conveniently be separated from practical, instructional considerations. In

⁴ See the application of 'new' formalism to manuscript pages in the essays in Arthur Bahr and Alexandra Gillespie, eds, *Medieval English Manuscripts: Form, Aesthetics, and the Literary Text*, *Chaucer Review*, 47.4 (2013).

⁵ Richard Beadle, 'Sir John Fastolf's French Books', in *Medieval Texts in Context*, ed. by Graham D. Caie and Denis Renevey (London, 2008), 96–112 (104).

⁶ A notable exception investigates romances: Judith A. Jefferson, Donka Minkova and Ad Putter, 'Perfect and Imperfect Rhyme: Romances in the *abab* Tradition', *Studies in Philology*, 111 (2014), 631–51.

⁷ It has been argued that scribes also corrected with particular attention to rhyme: Wakelin, *Scribal Correction*, 217–45.

the reading of form that can be recovered, the rhyme unit is the basic building-block of a pattern which is both enjoyable and mnemonically and rhetorically useful—useful because it is enjoyed, and perhaps sometimes enjoyed in part because it is useful.

Because this chapter entails the study of unusually lineated copies of verse, it must range more widely to find comparable evidence, and so sometimes turns to copies of texts outside the range of religious instructional verse, such as Lydgate's *Dietary*. The first part of the chapter recovers how rhyme might have been read by examining cases where scribes knowingly copied rhyming verse in atypical lineation. Without normal verse lineation, scribes fell back on punctuation to mark the regular divisions in verse. These unconventional cases illustrate more explicitly how the punctuators might have expected to read conventional copies of the same verse texts. The punctuation used suggests that scribes often regarded divisions between rhyme units as major divisions between complete structures, and divisions between verse lines merely as medial divisions within structures. The second part of the chapter turns to conventionally lineated copies, and to the phenomenon of rhyme bracing. The frequent appearance of rhyme braces in verse from this period has been noted before but, for the first time, I offer a thorough quantitative study of braces in a large corpus, together with some selected qualitative assessments. Although only a minority of manuscripts contained rhyme braces, this minority is too large to be easily dismissed. Furthermore, when scribes and decorators emphasised rhyme schemes with braces they attended closely to accuracy—though, paradoxically, while highlighting the aural patterning of the text, they themselves sometimes relied on eye-rhyme rather than on heard rhyme.

Most of the evidence discussed here is punctuation, broadly construed.

Punctuation in modern English has a set of marks with specific, standardised and widely

understood functions. However, as Malcolm Parkes demonstrated, medieval punctuation worked as a hierarchical structure of relationships between sets of symbols in their specific contexts, rather than through individual symbols' abstracted 'meanings'.⁸ Scribes would agree that *punctus* marked more significant divisions than *punctus elevati*, but they observed that convention while still using these marks in quite different ways depending on their training, their preferences and what they had to copy. Such variation might be greater in Middle English, which lacked Latin's history of formal punctuation for various well-understood purposes. The arguments below partly turn not on scribes' consistent use of particular marks, but on their consistent observance of particular relationships: the marks' uses may vary, but when circumstances forced scribes to punctuate rhyming verse's structure they routinely punctuated as though rhymes, not individual lines, were complete objects.

This kind of punctuation must have had implications for reading. A passage of writing with minimal or no punctuation continuously requires more engagement from its readers, though that engagement might become habitual. A passage of writing with standardised punctuation, as in modern English, takes many decisions out of readers' hands. Punctuation that sits somewhere between these two states, with loosely understood marks which can be deployed in a variety of ways, probably requires a high level of engagement from readers when they first encounter an unfamiliar copy of a text, until they work out how this particular copy is punctuated and can allow the punctuation to guide them in ways that unpunctuated text cannot.

⁸ Parkes, 'Punctuation and the Medieval History of Texts', 265; and M. B. Parkes, 'Punctuation in Copies of Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*', in *Pages from the Past: Medieval Writing Skills and Manuscript Books*, ed. by P. R. Robinson and Rivkah Zim (Farnham, 2012), VIII, 47–59 (47).

Did readers require such guidance? Parkes took what might be called a functionalist view of punctuation: scribes punctuated ‘only when they thought it was necessary to avoid possible confusion’.⁹ Did the scribes discussed below feel, then, that readers should read for rhyme, but could not be trusted to do so by themselves? Perhaps. On the other hand, Elizabeth Solopova, writing specifically about the punctuation of some Chaucer manuscripts, uses the vocabulary of ‘tradition’ and ‘fashion’.¹⁰ Particularly by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it might be possible to abandon a fully functionalist account of punctuation for English and to posit trends, expectations and perhaps even fashions. From this point of view the emphasis on rhyme created by punctuation may simply demonstrate how verse was read normally, rather than suggesting that readers could not be trusted.

Rhyme (more so than the topics of my other chapters) also raises questions of orality and the probable use of poems for reading aloud, or as sources excerpted into spoken sermons.¹¹ Any oral presentation is difficult to recover from manuscripts. In a codicological study it is much easier to find evidence demonstrating, for example, how someone moved through a book as they read than evidence revealing whether they were reading silently or aloud, alone or in company. No single manuscript contains

⁹ Parkes, *Pause and Effect*, 72 and 106.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Solopova, ‘The Survival of Chaucer’s Punctuation in the Early Manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales*’, in *Middle English Poetry: Texts and Traditions: Essays in Honour of Derek Pearsall*, ed. by A. J. Minnis (York, 2001), 27–40 (28).

¹¹ On poetry in preaching, see Siegfried Wenzel, *Verses in Sermons: ‘Fasciculus morum’ and its Middle English Poems* (Cambridge, 1978); and Siegfried Wenzel, *Preachers, Poets, and the Early English Lyric* (Princeton, 1986).

conclusive evidence that it was read aloud. But some of them surely were, and it is fair to speculate in some cases.¹²

Moreover, the general conclusion of this chapter might bear on our understanding of orality. Joyce Coleman has shown how widespread the practice of reading aloud was in this period, although she explicitly excludes religious texts from her study.¹³ Her rejection of previous teleological binary histories of orality's decline and literacy's rise, and her argument for the prevalence of 'aurality' suggest one way in which this chapter's evidence might relate to reading aloud.¹⁴ If even the silent, habitual activity of scribes and decorators adding unpronounceable marks to their work was intimately attentive to rhyme, might that be because normal reading practices possessed more 'aurality' and a greater interest in sound patterning than we instinctively expect? This possibility is consonant with Jessica Brantley's recent argument for the possibility of a performance element in even very private, meditative reading.¹⁵

Punctuating rhyme units

A rhyme unit is the shortest perceptibly complete cycle of rhyme, which in the verse discussed here means a short stanza or, most often, a couplet. Before examining

¹² Indeed, Helen Spencer regards all these poems not only as texts useful for preaching and teaching, but also as texts which grew out of those activities in the first place: H. Leith Spencer, *English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1993), 153–54. For similar speculation from codicological evidence in manuscripts from another period, see Rudolf, 94–95.

¹³ Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public*.

¹⁴ Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public*, 1–75. See also Joyce Coleman, 'Aural Illumination: Books and Aurality in the Frontispieces to Bishop Chevrot's *Cité de Dieu*', in *Orality and Literacy in the Middle Ages: Essays on a Conjunction and its Consequences in Honour of D. H. Green*, ed. by Mark Chinca and Christopher Young, *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy*, 12 (Turnhout, 2005), 223–52.

¹⁵ Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness*, conclusions summarised 301–5.

evidence for readers' perception of rhyme units in surviving manuscripts, it will be useful to consider how rhyme units are used in these texts themselves. Do these poems invite readers to read in rhyme units? Readers can read or hear rhyme units in a variety of ways, and a crucial factor is the relationship between rhyme units and units of sense. Units of sense can align completely with rhyme units, or they can be constructed using multiple rhyme units, or they can run across rhyme units' boundaries and have transitions within rhyme units. I propose that, generally speaking, verse in which units of sense consistently align with rhyme units, or, if they are composed from multiple rhyme units, at least begin and end in step with divisions between rhyme units, is easier to follow and easier to memorise than verse in which units of sense do not align with rhyme units, or even run in deliberate counterpoint. So, in substantial religious instructional poems, do rhyme units and units of sense align with each other?

Although modern readers sometimes associate them with trite two-line unities, J. Paul Hunter has argued persuasively that couplets shine in sophisticated multi-couplet structures.¹⁶ Indeed, readers might need to encounter multiple rhyme units in a row before perceiving an extended and repeating pattern and therefore identifying individual couplets: it is possible that couplets are only fully registered when they are read in relation to other couplets.¹⁷ *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae* are both constructed from blocks of sense which often stretch over two or more couplets. *The Prick of Conscience* begins by violating the duality of a single couplet with the Trinity,

¹⁶ J. Paul Hunter, 'Formalism and History: Binarism and the Anglophone Couplet', in *Reading for Form*, ed. by Susan J. Wolfson and Marshall Brown (Seattle, 2006), 129–49.

¹⁷ Simon Jarvis, 'Why Rhyme Pleases', *Thinking Verse*, 1 (2011), 17–43 (27–29). See also Susan Stewart, 'Rhyme and Freedom', in *The Sound of Poetry / The Poetry of Sound*, ed. by Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin (Chicago, 2009), 29–48.

the most striking conceptual unit of three available, and then closing the disjunction in its fourth line which unites the three and neatly echoes the ‘myght’ and ‘almighty’ of the first line in a moment of pleasurable resolution:

Be myght of þe Fader almyghty
 Be witt of þe Son al-wytty
 And þe gudnes of þe Hali Gast
 A Godde and lorde of myghte mast. (ll.1–4)¹⁸

The poet thus immediately establishes, for anyone who reads the poem from the beginning, his willingness to build sense units and rhetorical units across couplet-divisions. This itself is only one unit within a larger whole: the first four lines are a subordinate clause naming the addressee of the prayerful imperatives of the poem’s first sentence. Compare the similar but less adventurous invocation of the Trinity which opens the *Northern Homily Cycle*:

Fadir and sonne *and* haligaste
 Þat anefald god es aye stedfaste
 Worthi drightine in trynite
 A god allmighti *and* persones thre.¹⁹

Here each couplet is a more isolated unit. The *Cycle* poet is perhaps more attached to the individual couplet, and sometimes uses the same rhyme in two couplets in a row in

¹⁸ Morris, ll.1–4. In the quotations from prologues here, I have removed the editorial punctuation to allow readers to assess the links and separations between clauses and lines themselves.

¹⁹ BodL, MS Ashmole 42, f.1^r, ll.1–4. I quote from this manuscript as no complete edition of the text exists. The most substantial edition is Anne B. Thompson, ed., *The Northern Homily Cycle* (Kalamazoo, 2008), which relies on this manuscript for most of its length. One later revision has been edited: Saara Nevanlinna, ed., *The Northern Homily Cycle: The Expanded Version in MSS Harley 4196 and Cotton Tiberius E vii*, 3 vols, Mémoires de la Société néo-philologique à Helsingfors, 38, 41 and 43 (1972–73 and 1984).

order to extend and unify a unit of sense.²⁰ However the poet of *The Prick of Conscience*, despite his willingness to run sense across individual couplets, also routinely ends units of sense at the end of the second line of a couplet. He does, therefore, preserve the integrity of couplets as the smallest meaningful unit of form in his text.²¹

The poet of *Speculum Vitae* had read *The Prick of Conscience* and clearly felt himself to be writing within the same tradition, also represented by the earlier *Cursor Mundi* and *Northern Homily Cycle*, as the similarities between the beginnings and endings of all four poems demonstrate.²² The manner in which he relates units of sense to the rhyme scheme is similar: he too relies on the arrangement of such units across multiple couplets but avoids conclusive pauses in the middle of couplets.²³ This does not force him to write stilted verse.²⁴ For both poets the individual couplet needs a degree of internal unity but can be flexibly integrated into larger external structures.

²⁰ For example MS Ashmole 42, f.1^r, ll.23–26; f.2^v, ll.1–4 (Thompson, ed., ll.115–18); f.154^v, ll.32–35 (Thompson, ed., Homily 46, ll.55–58); and the beautiful ‘wyse’ | ‘chastise’ | ‘chastiste’ | ‘criste’ sequence, a chain of speech describing the conversion of Paul linked by a gentle shift in rhyme matching the shifting tense, at f.206^r, ll.1–4 (Thompson, ed., Homily 54, ll.95–8). But not all sequences of rhyme lasting longer than two lines work in this way: for instance f.148^v, ll.33–38 (from Homily 43, not in Thompson, ed.) all rhyme on ‘-and’ but do not form a single unit of sense.

²¹ The most common type of potential exception is the single-line English introduction for a Latin quotation, which might be presented (as it is by Hanna and Wood’s punctuation) as a single-line unit which forces the previous unit to end in the middle of a couplet (for example, l.3164 and l.6738). However, these usually begin with ‘And’ and I regard them as part of the preceding material, tying it to the quotation which authorises it in each case.

²² As argued in *Morris*, xxxv–vi and 267–90; and *SVRE*, II, 535–36. See also Vincent Gillespie, ‘Religious Writing’, in *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English, Volume I: To 1550*, ed. by Roger Ellis (Oxford, 2008), 234–84 (246–52).

²³ As Venetia Nelson, ed., 26 and 28, notes.

²⁴ Vincent Gillespie has noted the flexibility and power of the *Speculum Vitae* poet’s couplets: ‘Literary Form’, I, 140.

Cursor Mundi displays the same tendencies with perhaps a greater focus on individual couplets and fewer long multi-couplet structures. But the poet is clearly capable of writing in more extended structures, and does so to describe the key event in his universal history: for the Easter narrative the *Cursor*-poet employs rhyming long-lines, normally but not exclusively in *aaaa* quatrains, with regular caesurae splitting each line into a four-stress block and a three-stress block.²⁵ In *Handlyng Synne*, meanwhile, the couplets are basic building-blocks which can be combined but not divided, as in *Speculum Vitae* and *The Prick of Conscience*. The poem's opening lines are not as adventurous as the treatment of the Trinity in *The Prick of Conscience*, though they display Mannyng's delight in focusing readers' attention on perhaps too-familiar words through *traductio*:

Fadyr and sone & holygost
 þat art o god of myȝtys most
 At þy wrschepe shul we bygynne
 To shame þe fend & shewe oure synne
 Synne to shewe vs to frame
 God to wrschepe þe fende to shame.²⁶

So, although these different poets demonstrate different formal fascinations and habits, they all lend rhyme units considerable organisational and mnemonic importance by co-ordinating the ends of speech units with the ends of rhyme units. Therefore, to emphasise rhyme units when reading these texts and when preparing them for reading by others is to aid the poems' purposes. Did book producers and readers respond by emphasising this aspect of form when transmitting and reading these and other texts?

²⁵ Morris, ed., *Cursor Mundi*, ll.14937–17100. In BL, MS Cotton Vespasian A.iii, after six lines of inertia as he fills out an existing column, the main scribe copies each long line over two lines with the second indented, and marks each stanza with a marginal text ink capitulum mark: f.82^r, ll.a35–46, b1 and onwards.

²⁶ Sullens, ed., ll. 1–6.

Rhyme in unusual lineation

Verse texts were—and are—not normally placed on the page in rhyme units. Rather, they had standard verse lineation. Indeed, since lineation is the formal feature most obvious and most different from prose at a glance, it might be the single most important aspect of form in establishing for readers that they are approaching poetry. But verse lineation is as contingent and historically determined as, for example, the convention that line-initials should be upper-case or (historically) majuscule letters, a convention which was recently abandoned.²⁷ In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the vast majority of copies of poems were laid out with one line of verse for one line on the page. But this was not the case in the earlier history of English, and even in this period there were exceptions, which fall into two groups: some copies fit two verse lines on each written line, while others have only prose lineation, with no relationship between verse form and lineation at all. The decisions which scribes took while laying out and punctuating these atypically lineated copies reveal which divisions in verse they felt, as readers themselves and as people preparing texts for reading, were most significant.

The normal punctuation of verse in the Middle Ages was metrical rather than syntactical or grammatical, in that it marked out the basic, recurring division of the poem into metrical units.²⁸ This punctuation probably served a Latinate understanding

²⁷ Nicolas Barker, *Things Not Reveal'd: The Mutual Impact of Idea and Form in the Transmission of Verse 2000BC–AD1500* (Otley, [?2001]) offers an extremely macroscopic survey of the written presentation of verse over time.

²⁸ On the contrasting rhetorical punctuation of prose see Jeremy J. Smith, 'Punctuating Mirk's *Festial*: A Scottish Text and its Implications', in *Preaching the Word in Manuscript and Print in Late Medieval England: Essays in Honour of Susan Powell*, ed. by Martha W. Driver and Veronica O'Mara, Sermo, 11 (Turnhout, 2013), 161–92 (166–67).

of verse as a series of individual verses, each with two parallel hemistichs, an understanding ultimately derived from the paradigmatic verse, the Psalms in the Vulgate.²⁹ Examinations of punctuation in the copying of Middle English verse in the thirteenth century and earlier in the fourteenth century have suggested that scribes then regarded the couplet as the standard unit in English, each line being similar to a hemistich. Attachment to couplets seems to have been strong enough that texts which we might regard as a series of *abab* quatrains were laid out and punctuated as long-line couplets whose lines also rhyme at their caesurae.³⁰ When verse was copied in prose lineation scribes continued to punctuate metrically but did so more consistently, to make up for the fact that the layout no longer indicated metrical units.³¹ Elizabeth Solopova has suggested that although Chaucer's decasyllabic poetry was punctuated by some scribes rhetorically rather than metrically, the pre-Chaucerian tradition of metrical punctuation nevertheless survived into the fifteenth century.³² But did the perception of the rhyme unit, not the line, as the essential building-block of verse also survive into

²⁹ Parkes, *Pause and Effect*, 102–08.

³⁰ Elizabeth Solopova, 'Layout, Punctuation, and Stanza Patterns in the English Verse', in *Studies in the Harley Manuscript: The Scribes, Contents, and Social Contexts of British Library MS Harley 2253*, ed. by Susanna Fein (Kalamazoo, 2000), 377–89. See also Eric Stanley, 'What Six Unalike Lyrics in MS Harley 2253 Have Alike in Manuscript Layout', in *Middle English Texts in Transition: A Festschrift Dedicated to Toshiyuki Takamiya on His 70th Birthday*, ed. by Simon Horobin and Linne Mooney (York, 2014), 125–33. For a parallel study of similar issues in twelfth- and thirteenth-century copies of German poems, see Nigel F. Palmer, 'Manuscripts for Reading: The Material Evidence for the Use of Manuscripts Containing Middle High German Narrative Verse', in *Orality and Literacy in the Middle Ages: Essays on a Conjunction and its Consequences in Honour of D. H. Green*, ed. by Mark Chinca and Christopher Young, *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy*, 12 (Turnhout, 2005), 67–102. Examining verse written in prose lineation Palmer finds a substantial number of copies with punctuation emphasising couplets over individual lines (79), and some copies using the *punctus elevatus* to mark couplets' midpoints and *punctus* to mark couplets' ends (83–84).

³¹ Solopova, 'Layout, Punctuation, and Stanza Patterns', 382–83.

³² Solopova, 'Chaucer's Punctuation', 29.

this later period? Would readers of *The Prick of Conscience* and similar texts have perceived them as sequences of lines or of couplets?

One copy of *The Prick of Conscience* is the most extensive example of any Middle English poem copied with two verse lines on one line known to me.³³ This book is a compilation of religious instructional material, copied on paper probably in the second half of the fifteenth century.³⁴ In this manuscript the poem is copied with a whole couplet on each written line. The transition between the two verse lines within each couplet is marked with a double virgule. A double virgule was often used in book production in general to indicate that the rubricator should add a paraph, but this is probably not its role here: the rubricator did add a stroke of red to each remaining line-initial so he probably could have rubricated the virgules with paraphs, yet chose not to.

The copying of a couplet on each line obscures the rhyme scheme slightly, but any reader engaging with the text for more than a few seconds might notice it. The presentation of a whole couplet on each line does present whole rhyme units as unified entities, and foregrounds some other features of the poem which operate on the level of the couplet rather than the line. For example, at times the poet uses lists which itemise sometimes by the line and sometimes by the couplet:

A party for penawns þat ys a ioynt // *and* not fulfyllyd at dethys poynt

³³ Leeds University Library, MS Brotherton 501, ff.1^r–58^v.

³⁴ The manuscript has a complex collation sequence and is now bound out of order: see *MMBL*, III, 67–70; Ralph Hanna, ‘Leeds University Library, MS Brotherton 501: A Redescription’, *Manuscripta*, 26 (1982), 38–42; and Oliver Pickering, ‘Brotherton Collection MS 501: A Middle English Anthology Reconsidered’, *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s., 21 (1990), 141–65. The booklet containing *The Prick of Conscience* begins with the poem, although the original first quire is missing, and continues with other texts to f.91^v. The text which immediately follows (*IPMEP* 560, ff.58^r–67^v) begins in the same quire but ends in the next, and so cannot have simply been filler. A note in the scribe’s hand in the same booklet as *The Prick of Conscience* reads ‘Anno domini.1465.’ (MS Brotherton 501, f.65^r, l.20), and the watermarks suggest paper stocks from the middle of the fifteenth century, one possibly dated 1448–51 (Pickering, 161, n.4).

A party for venyal sennys dere // a party for sennys forȝetyn here
 A party for ouer lytyl penawns // a party for ouyr lytel repentauns
 A party for penauns ioynynd and done // ouyr reklesly *and* ouyr done
 A party for penauns þat enioynynd es // *and* ys forȝetyn thurgh reklesnes.³⁵

Here the lineation unites the parts of the list in individual lines and the parts written in rhyme units in the visual pattern created by the repetition of ‘A party for’; in normal copies of the poem only the part of the list which is written in line-units is visually glued together this way. Similarly the lineation in this manuscript means that the initial listing of the fourteen pains of hell, in which each pain fills a single couplet, is presented as a series of convenient single-line blocks, much more noticeable as a list on the page and perhaps more easily read off from it:

The fyrst ys fyre full hoot to rekyn // þat no maner of thyng may yt slekyn
 The second ys callyd as seyth som // grete colde þat no hete may ouyr com.³⁶

The fact that the fourth and fifth pains share a couplet rather mars the effect, and also forces the scribe to put two numbers on one line in his marginal Arabic numbering of the pains.³⁷ Perhaps moments like this would have let readers see that the lineation is unorthodox. And these local effects highlighting rhetorical patterns are almost certainly unintended. The overall effect for readers of the copying of couplets on single lines would have been a shift of responsibility for clarifying the poem’s lineation and sound-pattern from the scribe to the reader—but only a small shift, for individual lines are still marked within the couplets.

If the scribe did not lay out the poem like this as a formalist experiment, which is improbable, why did he do it? The other verse texts in this book are a version of the

³⁵ MS Brotherton 501, f.21^r, ll.1–5; equivalent to *Morris*, ll.3902–09.

³⁶ MS Brotherton 501, f.39^r, ll.6–7. Compare *Morris*, ll.6553–56.

³⁷ MS Brotherton 501, f.39^r, l.9.

Gast of Gy and some stories from the *South English Legendary*.³⁸ The *Gast of Gy* is also copied two lines to a single manuscript line, with its *abab* quatrains appearing as couplets with internal rhyme at the caesurae.³⁹ The *South English Legendary* material does have a couplet rhyme scheme, but its long lines fit the unusual layout. The first page of one of the *South English Legendary* excerpts, the story of Theophilus, features rhyme braces marking the first six couplets.⁴⁰ The braces were first executed in text ink and then redrawn in red ink.⁴¹ The initial use of text ink suggests that these braces are the work of the scribe, and that he recognised that this text, unlike the other verse he copied, was being lineated conventionally in his unusually wide layout.

Possibly this book's shape drove the scribe to copy his texts in this way: the pages are almost square.⁴² So the unusual execution of *The Prick of Conscience* here might be the end product of material constraints which forced the scribe to use an inconveniently sized stock of paper. Or the scribe might have been influenced by the tradition of imposing couplet layout on *abab* texts such as the *Gast of Gy*, or by the format and form of the *South English Legendary*, in which the long lines demand lateral space. The *South English Legendary* could have been an inconvenient text: in another

³⁸ *The Gast of Gy*, IMEV 2785: MS Brotherton 501, ff.93^r–99^v; stories from the *South English Legendary*: the exaltation of the cross, NIMEV 3389/20, ff.107^r–101^v—these leaves bound in reverse—and Theophilus, NIMEV 3266/13, ff.117^r–122^v. Both texts revised: Manfred Görlach, *The Textual Tradition of the 'South English Legendary'* (Leeds, 1974), 121.

³⁹ MS Brotherton 501, ff.93^r–99^v.

⁴⁰ MS Brotherton 501, ff.117^r–122^v. Versions of this text were edited in Carl Horstmann, ed., *The Early South-English Legendary, or, Lives of Saints*, EETS, o.s., 87 (London, 1887), 288–93; and in Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, eds, *The South English Legendary*, 2 vols, EETS, o.s., 235 and 236, (London, 1956 for 1951 and 1952), I, 221–38. The version of Theophilus' story in MS Brotherton 501 is (with variants) the longer version edited by D'Evelyn and Mill, not the short text edited by Horstmann.

⁴¹ MS Brotherton 501, f.117^r, ll.3–8 in text ink, ll.3–12 in red ink.

⁴² About 225 × 205 mm².

copy, on pages perhaps not shaped for the purpose, the poem is copied in long lines in the outermost column on each page, and in half-lines in a second, very narrow column closer to the gutter.⁴³ Either of these scenarios would imply that, despite its dominance in the surviving manuscript, *The Prick of Conscience* might not have been the text which initiated the production and determined that manuscript's size and shape. Here the poem's verse layout might have been determined by a set of constraints designed for other texts.

There are three other examples of this treatment of *The Prick of Conscience*, with two verse lines on one written line, in three copies of an extract. Lewis and McIntosh suggest that two of them were copied either from the third, or from that copy's own lost exemplar.⁴⁴ This group may therefore represent one decision to copy the poem this way, and two more decisions to preserve the lineation rather than altering it. A popular rhyming Latin proverb follows immediately after the extract in two manuscripts.⁴⁵ In one of them the scribe copied the proverb over two lines and added a text ink brace, demonstrating that he was perfectly capable of copying couplets with standard lineation. This evidence of alertness lends more of an air of intention to the choice or retention of a single-line couplet layout for the extract.⁴⁶ The scribe of the other copy preserved this lineation and brace for the Latin couplet.⁴⁷ In all three cases

⁴³ BodL, MS Laud Misc. 463.

⁴⁴ MS Rawl. C.285, f.39^r; CUL, MS Dd.v.55, f.101^v; and MS Ff.v.40, ff.113^v–114^r. MS Rawl. C.285 is the possible exemplar. *DG*, 150–52 and 157. The two Cambridge manuscripts share some texts and may be related collections, although they are the work of different scribes.

⁴⁵ BodL, MS Rawl. C.285 and CUL, MS Ff.v.40.

⁴⁶ MS Rawl. C.285, f.39^r, ll.32–33: 'Mortis. vt vite . brevis est vox ite venite / Aspera vox ite . Vox est iocunda venite.' [Of death, as of life, the voice is short. Go, come! / Go bitter voice! Come pleasant voice!] (This translation assumes that the second 'est' is a scribal error.)

⁴⁷ MS Ff.v.40, f.114^r, ll.10–11. The text here offers 'vel' for 'ut': 'Of death, or of life'.

the preceding and following material is prose in single columns. All three scribes used *punctus elevati* for the divisions within couplets and marked the end of each couplet and written line with a *punctus*, demonstrating a uniform assumption that each written line is a complete unit with a medial subdivision.

The scribe of the Rawlinson copy did, however, space out the gap between the first and second halves of each couplet, beginning all the second halves at roughly the same point across the page. The initial letter of each couplet's second line was also rubricated, just like the initial letter of the first half. This spacing and rubrication could have misled readers into thinking initially that they faced two separate columns of verse, had the scribe not also extended the upper part of each *punctus elevatus* rightwards to indicate the connection. All three scribes whose copies of this excerpt of the poem survive thus presented the rhyme unit as the primary unit of division for reading.

Rhyme in prose lineation

Copies of poems in prose lineation can offer us stronger evidence for reading which prioritised rhyme because they place even more emphasis on punctuation.⁴⁸ Many—but not all—pieces of verse with only prose lineation are integrated into a prose text or are copied within miscellaneous collections of texts which are primarily prose, and so again the pressure of context might explain why they have unusual layouts.⁴⁹ That does not,

⁴⁸ I prefer to term this phenomenon verse 'copied in prose lineation', not 'copied as prose' because, as I will show, in this period it is usually clear that scribes knew they were not copying prose. They punctuated what they were copying differently precisely because it was verse.

⁴⁹ A. S. G. Edwards, 'Editing and Manuscript Form: Middle English Verse Written as Prose', *English Studies in Canada*, 27 (2001), 15–27 (21–22).

though, mean that this submission to local pressure was inept or unthinking. Most examples of verse copied with only prose lineation appear to be the work of scribes who knew their business and who were careful to punctuate verse as verse.

That said, a few exceptional instances might be the product of non-comprehension. In one copy of the widespread poem ‘Erthe upon erthe’ in prose lineation, for example, individual lines initially might be separated by spaces but might not be—the fact that it is hard to tell is itself telling—and as the poem continues the individual lines are definitely not so spaced.⁵⁰ There is no conclusive evidence that this scribe understood that he was copying verse, although it could be that he expected readers to be adept enough to recognise verse and read accordingly; the widespread dissemination of this poem and the resulting possibility that it might have been familiar might support this scenario.

One copy of Lydgate’s *Dietary* offers another example of possible non-comprehension of verse.⁵¹ Here verses are usually separated by only a text ink *punctus* and it is far from obvious on encountering the page that the text is a poem. There is something like a real line-break at the end of the eighth stanza: the rest of the ruled space in this line, about a third of it, is left blank and the next stanza begins on the following line. This might perhaps be a distorted remnant of a stanza division in an exemplar but its uniqueness in this copy suggests that it is preserved only accidentally. Perhaps the scribe was copying without comprehension of form from an exemplar in

⁵⁰ *IMEV* 3985; HEHL, MS HM 744, ff.11^v–12^v. This witness is not in Hilda M. R. Murray, ed., *The Middle English Poem Erthe upon Erthe Printed from Twenty-Four Manuscripts*, EETS, o.s., 141 (London, 1911), but its text is similar to that in LPL, MS 853, pp.35–38 (manuscript is paginated): Murray, ed., 14–16.

⁵¹ BodL, MS Add. B.60, f.122^v l.18 to f.124^r l.21.

which another scribe had deliberately copied the text without verse lineation, accidentally failing to strip out the end of the eighth stanza. Alternatively the scribe may have been stripping out lineation himself, forgetting to do so completely in the eighth line. So, both of these instances of possible non-comprehension might also be examples of scribes who understood their work. Whatever the facts, such possible non-reading is rare in the many manuscripts I have consulted.

Most other scribes who copied verse in prose lineation, by contrast, knew quite well what they were doing. Elsewhere, Lydgate's *Dietary* appears in prose lineation but nevertheless clearly marked as verse: in one copy, for example, every line begins with a red-slashed majuscule graph and finishes with a double virgule.⁵² The even distribution of the rubrication and the virgules makes the form of the text fairly recognisable.

There are even cases in which it is possible to see scribes in the act of trying out different systems for marking unlineated verse. One scribe copying a medical poem began by rendering it with a single couplet on each line, and a *punctus elevatus* dividing the lines within each couplet. He did this for the three couplets which introduce the poem, copying these in red as though they were an *incipit*.⁵³ He then switched to text ink and copied the text in prose lineation with a *punctus elevatus* dividing each couplet's two lines and a double virgule dividing each couplet from the next.⁵⁴ After copying nine couplets in this way he changed tack again, retaining the *punctus elevatus* for internal divisions but using a *punctus* and a virgule followed by a space of eight to

⁵² BodL, MS e Musaeo 52, f.80^v l.16 to f.81^r, l.19.

⁵³ *IMEV* 3425.5; BodL, MS Ashmole 391, Part II, f.4^v, ll.13–15.

⁵⁴ MS Ashmole 391, Part II, f.4^v, ll.16–24.

twelve millimetres to separate couplets from each other.⁵⁵ The following leaf which contained the rest of the poem is lost, so it is impossible to know whether this was the last of his approaches to the problem. The poem as we have it in this copy presented a curious puzzle to readers: it is clearly verse but in reading it one must repeatedly jump from one convention to another. Its punctuation demands engagement from readers.

Significantly, however, in all three approaches to presenting the text the scribe carefully maintained the distinction between the divisions between rhyme units and the divisions between individual verse lines. Here, then, is a scribe who consistently makes the rhyme unit the primary unit of division regardless of the exact combination of layout or punctuation he is using. That is, despite seeming to present verse ‘as prose’, in fact he shows recognition of the verse’s form—and shows it more clearly than the many scribes who copy verse lineated conventionally, without hitches but also without obvious reflection.

The *punctus elevatus* was frequently used to mark the division between lines within couplets, both in couplets copied on single lines and in unlineated verse. While this use of the *punctus elevatus* was perhaps just a convention to these scribes, that convention itself might nevertheless be the result of a logical past extension of the mark’s established use. Parkes observed the continuing use of the *punctus elevatus* as a mark for a ‘major medial pause’, but he also proposed that it had some more specific functions introducing the second halves of various balanced whole structures, indicating the arrival of something which illustrates, complements or concludes what came

⁵⁵ MS Ashmole 391, Part II, f.4^v, ll.24–36.

before.⁵⁶ Parkes also noted the use of *punctus elevati* in conventionally lineated Middle English verse to indicate the ends of lines which run on, or in other words divisions with continuity rather than disjunction.⁵⁷ These functions are not so far removed from the aural process of couplet rhyme, in which each couplet's first line demands and is complemented by the line that immediately follows. Due to its history, the *punctus elevatus* may have 'felt right' to some scribes for this purpose, without necessarily being consciously thought of as a mark specifically for the mid-point of the rhyme unit.⁵⁸

Even in cases which do not feature *punctus elevati*, however, the hierarchical use of punctuation to prioritise rhyme units over individual lines is common. So, for instance, another copy of the same medical poem in prose lineation has red paraps at the divisions between couplets and red *punctus* at the divisions within them.⁵⁹ Similarly, a fragment survives from a copy of *Speculum Vitae* in which the verse was copied into prose lineation.⁶⁰ Here a red paraph marks the division between each couplet, while a red virgule marks the division between the two lines within each couplet. Again, then, although the marks involved varied, and *punctus elevati* are not used, the rhyme units are still clearly marked out as complete objects which have subdivisions. The scribes

⁵⁶ *Pause and Effect*, 69, 73 and 153.

⁵⁷ *Pause and Effect*, 106.

⁵⁸ Similar uses for the *punctus elevatus* are noted in Solopova, 'Layout, Punctuation, and Stanza Patterns', 385. Some later scribes, on the other hand, could use the *punctus elevatus* in very specific ways: John Burrow, 'Intonation and Punctuation in the Hoccleve Holographs', *Notes and Queries*, 60 (2013), 19–22.

⁵⁹ *IMEV* 3425.5; BodL, MS Selden Supra 90, f.16^{r-v}.

⁶⁰ Weiskott; the flyleaf guards in New Haven, Beinecke Library, printed book 2008 2479.

involved know their business and expect and encourage readers to perceive the rhyme unit, not the line, as the major division.

This is the usual practice, but two rarer examples of the more sustained copying of verse in prose lineation offer two quite different approaches to the marking of rhyme units. In one the exact punctuation practice varies considerably but the scribe, as was normal, carefully emphasised whole rhyme units over their subdivisions. In the other the punctuation is inconsistent and gradually dwindles away.

The first example is a small manuscript containing three differently versified hagiographies of female saints all copied in prose lineation.⁶¹ There are, though, some subtleties in the scribe's punctuation of rhyme units. In the first text, St Margaret, composed in long-line couplets, an initial in alternating red and blue ink introduces each couplet, a *punctus* marks the caesura within each line, and an unusual symbol marks line-divisions within couplets. Edwards proposes that this symbol combines a colon and a double virgule, since it is two thin slanting lines with a point above and below.⁶² This is possible, but the angle of the slanting lines is unusually shallow—in fact, they are identical to the shallow double slanting hyphens used in this manuscript, as in many others, to mark words which run over line breaks—see Figure 2.⁶³ I have found some other examples of this combination of colon and hyphen being used very like a *punctus elevatus*, and Parkes states that it is in fact a specialised form of *punctus elevatus* found

⁶¹ CUL, MS Add. 4122 has pages measuring about 125 × 85 mm². The texts it contains are: a life of St Margaret (*IMEV* 2672, ff.6^r–38^v), a life of Mary (*IMEV* 1835, ff.39^v–145^v) and a life of St Dorothy (*IMEV* 2447, ff.145^v–166^v). See Edwards, 'Female Saints' Lives'.

⁶² Edwards, 'Female Saints' Lives', 132.

⁶³ For example, CUL, MS Add. 4122, f.14^r, ll.2 and 4; compare the unusual symbol on this page at ll.1, 6 and 8.

in fifteenth-century English textura script.⁶⁴ The mid-points of couplets are therefore marked with *punctus elevati* which resemble the symbol used in the same manuscript to indicate the midpoints of words which are incomplete with a second part on its way—again suggesting that it is the couplet that was read as a complete unit.

The second text, narrating the wedding of Mary, is written in more conventional short line couplets. The *punctus elevatus* is not present here but the hierarchical prioritisation of the unit of rhyme over individual lines continues: alternating red and blue initials mark the start of each couplet and the scribe used *punctus* to mark line divisions. In the third text, St Dorothy, in quatrains rhyming *abab*, alternating coloured initials mark the quatrain's start, *punctus* mark the divisions between the first and second lines and the third and fourth lines, and the *punctus elevatus* returns to mark the quatrain's midpoint, the division between the second and third line. In this book, then, the *punctus elevatus* appears to be specifically for the middle of the complete rhyme unit, whether that unit is a couplet or a quatrain.

There is variation between the punctuation systems in the three poems. Was this confusing for readers? What probably happened is that in practice readers understood the *punctus elevatus* and *punctus* to be components in a relational system, not a set of immutable rules, and simply adjusted to each text without thinking much of it. That, at least, seems to be what the punctuation anticipates. Edwards has suggested

⁶⁴ BodL, MS Rawl. C.208, containing the text known as the Testimony of William Thorpe, edited in Anne Hudson, ed., *Two Wycliffite Texts: The Sermon of William Taylor, 1406; the Testimony of William Thorpe, 1407*, EETS, o.s., 301 (Oxford, 1993)—f.8^r appears in this edition's opening plate, ii, and the unusual symbol can be seen here in ll.10 and 17. Oxford, Keble College, MS 14, a Sarum book of hours, which is pictured (f.64^r) in Parkes, *Pause and Effect*, 201, Plate 24; the unusual symbol appears here in ll.2, 5, 7, 9, 12, 14 and 17. See also the inscription in the common profit book BL, MS Harley 993, for example, f.38^r, ll.6, 11 and 14. For Parkes's discussion of the symbol see *Pause and Effect*, 42, 201.

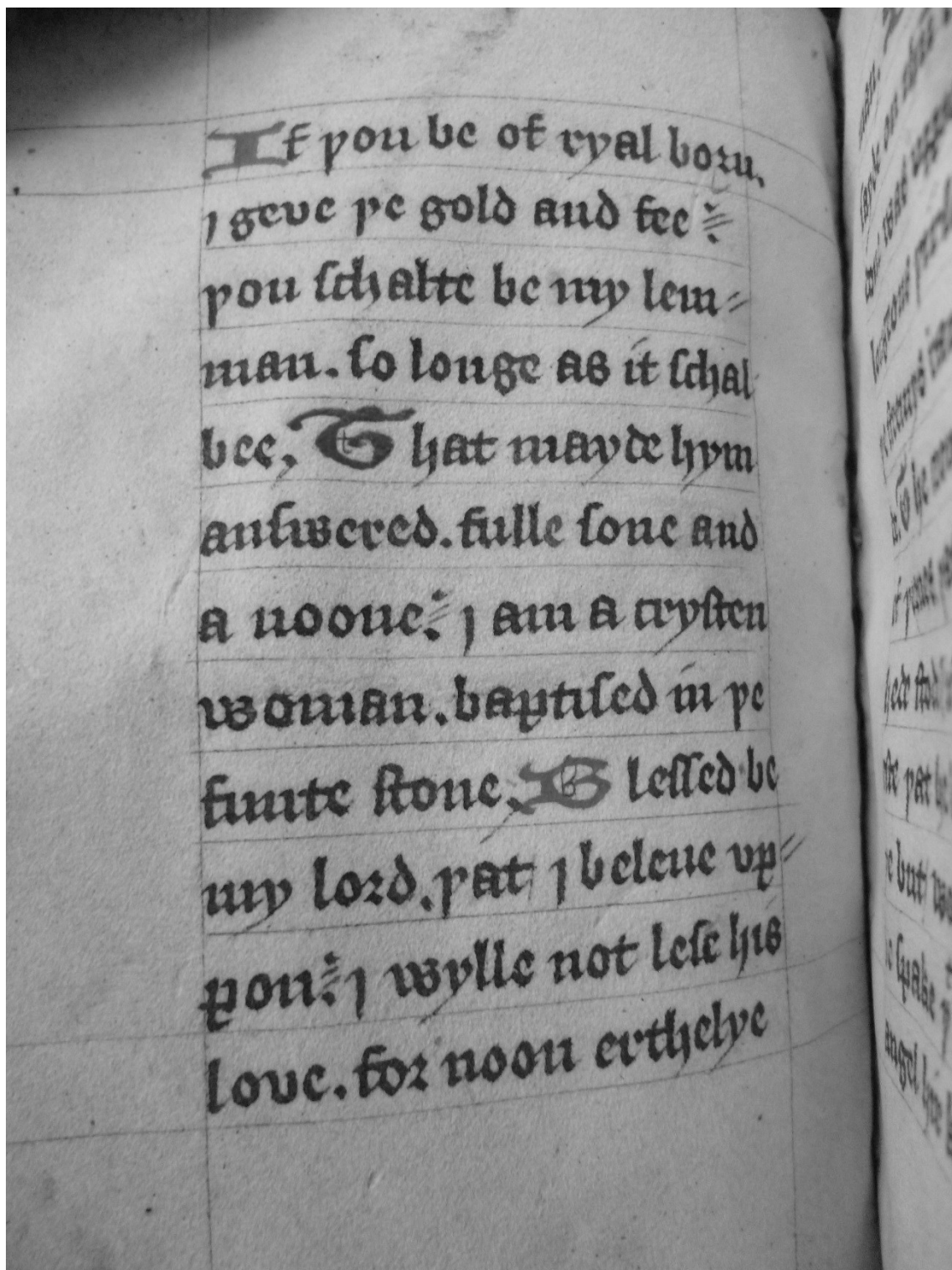


Figure 2

CUL, MS Add. 4122, f. 14^v: punctus elevatus used for couplet divisions, hyphen used for words divided by line breaks. Approximately 210% of actual size.

that the prose lineation in this book may have been an intentional response to the book's size and, possibly, to an expected female readership.⁶⁵ It may be that the punctuation systems in this book anticipate less well-trained and less active readers, that the extensive punctuation expected and inculcated more passive reading, as Edwards and Barker hint. However, the presence of multiple punctuation systems in the book, marking the different rhyme units of the three texts and so separating out their different formal properties, might itself have required some quite active reading initially to unpick the relationship between punctuation and verse form in each poem. The putatively female readership for this book might have been expected to engage in some close reading on first contact with it, and it might be unwise to imagine the scribe assuming less competence among female readers.

In the demands that it places on its readers this collection of hagiographies is a useful point of comparison for the unique copy of *The Prick of Conscience* in prose lineation.⁶⁶ Besides its specific interest, I believe this is the longest example of a single Middle English poem copied in this way. It survives in a parchment manuscript from perhaps the first half of the fifteenth century. *The Prick of Conscience* is the only Middle English text in the book as originally produced.⁶⁷ It also contains seventeen Latin texts which range from meditative material such as Rolle's *Incendium amoris* to pieces of practical preaching advice such as a collection of quotations from John of

⁶⁵ Edwards, 'Verse Written as Prose'; and 'Female Saints' Lives'. Barker, 43, makes the same suggestion.

⁶⁶ MS Sloane 2275, ff.150^r–183^r; discussed briefly above, 152–53. Since submission of this thesis Ralph Hanna's article 'Making Miscellaneous Manuscripts in Fifteenth-Century England: The Case of Sloane 2275', *Journal of the Early Book Society*, 18 (2015), 1–28 has become available; I regret that I was unable to incorporate it into my arguments but would like to signal its existence to readers here.

⁶⁷ *DG*, 70–71. The most recent full description of this manuscript is available at an unstable URL within <<http://searcharchives.bl.uk/>> [accessed 19 October 2014]. *IMEV* 1709.5 and 2602.4 appear on the first rear flyleaf, f.245^r, in later handwriting.

Wales's *Forma praedicandi*.⁶⁸ The kinds of reading invited by the contents therefore vary. The manuscript might have been constructed as a compendium of material useful in different ways to someone with a pastoral occupation. *The Prick of Conscience* is copied at the end of the manuscript's central booklet.⁶⁹ The poem may have been copied in prose lineation in order to fit the book's other contents, and, if the parchment was ruled in advance, to fit the layout of two fairly narrow columns, which would not suit verse.

At the beginning of this copy of the poem the line-initial letters are rubricated and *punctus* are common but inconsistently applied:

Þe mizt of þe fadre almitzi. **Þe** witt of son alwitti. **A**nd þe godenesse of þe holi gost **G**od *and* lorde of miztes most. **B**e *with* vs *and* help *and* spede **N**ow *and* euer in al oure nede. **A**nd speciali at þis begynnyng **A**nd bryng al to gode endyng **B**efore er any thing was wrought. **A**nd er begynnyng was of oght. **A**nd be fore alle tymes as we shal trowe **Þe** same god euer was þat is now. **Þ**at wonet euer in his godhede **I**n thre persones *and* on onhede.⁷⁰

Individual line divisions are clearly marked by the rubrication of line-initial majuscules. Text ink *punctus* sometimes mark couplets' ends, but they also appear at couplets' midpoints, and some couplets feature no *punctus* at all. The word 'endyng', which ends a couplet and the poem's opening prayer, is ironically not followed by a *punctus*.

It is difficult to know how to read the punctuation here, and I am not convinced that a fifteenth-century reader would have known either. As demonstrated above, other

⁶⁸ MS Sloane 2275, ff. 73^r–109^v.

⁶⁹ The poem ends on the recto of the seventh leaf of the eighteenth quire (MS Sloane 2275, f. 183^{r-v}). The verse was left unruled, and the quire's eighth and final leaf was cancelled. This suggests that the poem was the end of a planned production campaign.

⁷⁰ MS Sloane 2275, f. 150^r, ll. a39–b9; equivalent to *Morris*, ll. 1–14. Bold type here indicates letters which have been rubricated. This transcription does not attempt to reproduce the manuscript's relatively narrow columns, which might aid comprehension.

poems in prose lineation do consistently mark rhyme units. The rubrication of line-initial letters—a feature which in this manuscript only appears in *The Prick of Conscience*, and which might perhaps be a reflex inherited from a copy with normal lineation and this fairly standard decorative feature—ceases during the poem’s fifth part, despite the continuation of this copy’s other (limited) decoration.⁷¹ *Punctus* appear less frequently and even the use of majuscules at the beginnings of lines becomes unstable:

As I finde *in holi* writ an Iob sais þat witnes hit Capita aspi dum suggest þe
 heuedes of edders þat on hem shal fast þai shal souke he sais for thirst strong
 pain of thrist þen haue þai When þai shal souke sicke venim Aie þat shal þai
 haue quen þai come þidre an sharp hongre bothe to gidre þat neuer shal cece as I
 said ere For þese *with* other ben endeles þere.⁷²

At this point in the copy some lines begin with normal minuscule letters, and *punctus* have become very rare. Parsing the text as verse requires considerable effort.

⁷¹ The rubrication of line-initials ceases at MS Sloane 2275, f.165^v, l.b23, but there are three-line blue large initial capitals for the beginnings of the sixth and seventh parts on ff.169^v and 178^r with red penwork decoration. In all the preceding texts red-ink paraps added according to a scheme of double virgule marks left by the scribe mark subdivisions below the level of large initials. In the booklets after the end of *The Prick of Conscience* subdivisions at this level are not marked.

⁷² MS Sloane 2275, f.175^v, ll.25–39; equivalent to *Morris*, ll.6765–72 and 6781–84.

This deterioration of the punctuation of the copy is matched by changes in the grade of the hand.⁷³ At ‘Aie’ the scribe has wrongly used his single-compartment majuscule A rather than using a majuscule thorn for the following ‘pat’, which is the next line-initial word. He was probably not hearing the rhymes of the poem in his head when he made this error. Despite its deterioration, the hand is still set rather than cursive, so he might have been copying *litteratim* and therefore potentially paying little attention to the words being copied. Such a scenario might explain the odd word division of *aspidum*. For a set hand this is relatively rapid work, however: perhaps, instead, he was self-dictating chunks from the exemplar to himself, as scribes are thought to have done when copying at speed, but not always matching the divisions between chunks of remembered text to the divisions between rhyme units or individual lines.⁷⁴ Whatever the cause, the second half of this copy seems to have undergone a copying process which involved little or no attention to rhyme.

Perhaps the scribe was ‘prosifying’ the material more actively than the copyists of the other instances discussed above—in other words, this could be a true example of verse copied ‘as prose’. Having a stock of pre-ruled parchment in the narrow two-

⁷³ The scribe’s hand varies throughout the book but it usually features regular biting in **de**; a textura **d** with a stubby, unlooped ascender; both the short textura **r** and the ‘z-shaped’ textura word-final **r**; and a **g** with a broken stroke on the left side of its tail, creating a straight, thin line leading back up to the top compartment. The scribe normally writes this script with a fairly squat ductus, the letters splaying laterally, although at points, as in the copy of *Speculum ecclesie* which begins the booklet following that containing *The Prick of Conscience*, the splaying is limited and the script begins more closely to resemble the compact textura often found in working Bibles and collections of academic texts (MS Sloane 2275, ff.184^r–191^r). Over several stint changes in *The Prick of Conscience* all biting disappears; the scribe uses a normal looping anglicana **d**; **g** tends to have a straightforward lower loop, although instances with a broken stroke do still appear; and the script overall is executed in a much more upright way. For example stint changes see MS Sloane 2275, ff.159^v, l.a16; 156^v, l. a20; and 157^r, l.b5. The scribe raises his standards slightly for the poem’s seventh part, beginning on f.178^r, l.b32, so that, for example, the textura **d** and biting reappear, but the hand does not return to its state at the beginning of the poem.

⁷⁴ Daniel Wakelin, ‘Writing the Words’, in *PBE*, 34–58 (51–52).

column prose format used in the rest of the book might have driven this but it would not cause the increasing lack of care for the form and the deterioration of the hand. Two further possible explanations occur. First, the scribe might not have expected this copy of the poem to be read as a poem. Perhaps *The Prick of Conscience* appears here as a supplement to the surrounding Latin prose texts for its useful content rather than for its form. Second, perhaps the scribe did expect the poem to be read as verse, but by highly competent readers able to recognise and vocalise versification while reading regardless of its presentation. The abbreviated Latin in the rest of the book would only be accessible to someone fully literate, and the scribe might have decided that, especially since *The Prick of Conscience* is in the reader's probable first language, any likely reader of the book as a whole could read this copy of the poem easily too. This scenario would be something of a return to the copying practices routinely applied to Old English verse by Anglo-Saxon scribes.⁷⁵

Whatever the truth of the matter, the contrasting example of this scribe, who decided not to clarify rhyme units visually, strengthens the case that the scribes who punctuated verse consistently were paying attention to the rhyme scheme knowingly. What we can conclude about the reading of verse in general from these specific and atypical examples hinges on a question about the purpose of punctuation: does punctuation anticipate and seek to help incompetent readers or simply seek to fall into line with what competent readers are already doing? In a functionalist account, the presence of consistent punctuation marking rhyme units and lines within them would

⁷⁵ In the scheme of 'transitional literacy' proposed by Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, such a lack of 'graphic cues' indicates a text 'read by applying oral techniques for the reception of a message', not incompetent copying. O'Brien O'Keeffe, 21.

suggest that scribes assumed that readers would need these features consistently clarified. As learned and persuasive as Parkes's general account of medieval punctuation is, I find it hard to believe that these specific scribes punctuating verse rather than lineating it anticipated readers incapable of grasping simple rhyme schemes in long texts; instead, Solopova's account of fashions and traditions seems more appropriate to these contexts. It seems likely to me, therefore, that the general picture is not one of scribes providing the bare minimum of explicatory scaffolding and so assuming that their readers needed constant help to perceive verse form. Rather than being explicatory scaffolding for hapless readers, the punctuation of rhyme units in verse lineated as prose simply suggests that book producers usually read rhyming verse themselves with a focus on rhyme, and expected their readers to do this too—whatever they thought of those readers' abilities.

Of course, one element of a poem's form cannot be isolated from the others, but this finding should give us confidence in reading those rhymes with closer attention today. In religious instructional poems such as *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae* reading for rhyme was closely allied to reading for the texts' sense, because the poems' units of sense are constructed from blocks of complete rhyme units. In punctuating these poems as a series of rhyme units, scribes therefore encouraged and anticipated reading in which pastoral utility and formalist pleasure marched together.

What about the reading of conventionally lineated verse, which is much more common in this period? After examining verse with unusual lineation, it is easier to see conventional verse lineation for the contingent, historically determined practice that it is, rather than as poetry's natural state. Verse in normal lineation in this period often lacks punctuation, or has punctuation to mark the caesurae, mark pauses, or end-stop

particular lines.⁷⁶ Although the majority of copies of *Speculum Vitae* and *The Prick of Conscience* have either no punctuation or only minimal punctuation, those which are punctuated reflect this general picture.⁷⁷

This lack of punctuation, or primarily metrical use of punctuation, in conventionally lineated verse might suggest a lack of interest in reading rhyme. However, considering all aspects of the presentation of poetry, and thinking in the light of the punctuation of unconventionally lineated verse, it seems more likely that there was no need to punctuate rhyme in conventionally lineated verse. Indeed, conventional verse lineation already puts the rhyming elements of the text in close proximity, and frees punctuation up for other tasks. Perhaps, then, the fact that scribes lineated most copies of *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae* normally is itself, in a trite way, evidence of reading for rhyme. But in this period conventionally lineated copies of verse sometimes also feature another kind of ‘punctuation’ which highlights rhyme: rhyme bracing.

⁷⁶ Parkes notes one scribe who copied *Confessio Amantis* with virgules marking quite subtle moments where the reader’s voice might pause, but only briefly: *Pause and Effect*, 107–08.

⁷⁷ The copy of *Speculum Vitae* in CUL, MS Ll.i.8 uses occasional *punctus* to clarify hesitations (for instance, f.163^r, l.24) and to mark changes of speaker (f.131^v, l.5). The copy of *The Prick of Conscience* in Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS F.4.18 has a *punctus elevatus* at every line’s major caesura and a *punctus* at every line’s end, which looks like metrical punctuation retaining the medial connotations of *punctus elevati*. Throughout the copy of *The Prick of Conscience* in Cambridge, MA, Houghton Library, MS English 515 *punctus* mark end-stopped lines which conclude sense-units, suggesting punctuation for the reading of sense as manifested in metre. Every line of *The Prick of Conscience* in University of Pennsylvania, MS Codex 196, has a caesura marked with a *punctus*; sometimes two caesurae are marked within the same line. These examples could be multiplied. One copy, in JRL, MS English 50, has punctuation which emphasises the complete rhyme unit, like copies with unconventional lineation: each couplet’s first line finishes with the upper element from a *punctus elevatus*, and the closing line of each couplet finishes with a *punctus*.

Rhyme bracing

Rhyme braces—also called ‘rhyme brackets’ or ‘tie lines’—do not appear in the majority of copies of Middle English verse, but they appear often enough that a reader who came into contact with more than a few books containing verse in their lifetime would be likely to recognise them. Rhyme braces are interestingly difficult to classify: they are both a form of punctuation, in the broad sense of the word which includes such techniques as spacing and alterations in module, but also in at least some instances, where they were executed with considerable care, a form of decoration.

How did braces in verse function? The only rhyme braces which have prompted sustained discussion are those attached to some copies of Chaucer’s *Tale of Sir Thopas*.⁷⁸ Jessica Brantley proposes a connection in these braces to the idea, though not necessarily the practice, of performance, but remarks after examining a range of analogues and antecedents that ‘the horizon of expectations established by this form is so broad and varied that it almost ceases to exist’.⁷⁹ Something similar can be said of bracing in general. The braces in Robert Reynes’s notebook sometimes do not correspond to the rhyme scheme or are attached to poems which do not rhyme, leading

⁷⁸ Judith Tschann, ‘The Layout of *Sir Thopas* in the Ellesmere, Hengwrt, Cambridge Dd. 4. 24, and Cambridge Gg. 4. 27 Manuscripts’, *Chaucer Review*, 20 (1985), 1–13; Rhiannon Purdie, *Anglicising Romance: Tail-Rhyme and Genre in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge, 2008), 66–78; and Aditi Nafde, ‘Laughter Lines: Reading the Layouts of the *Tale of Sir Thopas*’, in *Performance and the Page*, ed. by Kate Maxwell, James R. Simpson and Peter V. Davies, Pecia, 16 (Turnhout, 2013), 143–51.

⁷⁹ Jessica Brantley, ‘Reading the Forms of *Sir Thopas*’, *Chaucer Review*, 47 (2013), 416–38 (429–31). Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, ‘Major Middle English Poets and Manuscript Studies, 1300–1450’, in *Opening Up Middle English Manuscripts: Literary and Visual Approaches*, ed. by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Maidie Hilmo and Linda Olson (Ithaca, 2012), 39–94 (59–63) touches on the use of displacement bracing in texts which have bobs and wheels but do not use a tail-rhyme stanza; Daniel Wakelin, ‘The Carol in Writing: Three Anthologies from Fifteenth-Century Norfolk’, *Journal of the Early Book Society*, 9 (2006), 25–49 (27 and 29) notes the appearance of similar structures in carols. These could be added to the range of analogues for the ‘graphic’ or ‘displayed’ tail-rhyme discussed by Tschann, Purdie and Brantley.

the editor to suggest that in this manuscript braces may indicate the idea of verse rather than the idea of rhyme.⁸⁰ Rhyme bracing is really only a facet of the wider use of braces to indicate any kind of connection. The Latin of thirteenth-century England supplies a striking example of braces used to indicate conceptual rather than aural links: the diagrams in Robert Grosseteste's *Templum Dei*.⁸¹ In one copy there are two overlapping programmes of braces: one in text ink, added as the text was copied, presumably partly to help the scribe control the layout of the text's many diagrams; and a second, dressier set in red ink, using more elaborate and more spatially inefficient braces which required more strokes and eschewed the previous programme's shortest possible lines.⁸² This more purely organisational use of bracing in *Templum Dei* is echoed in later organisational experiments such as the tables associated with the Wycliffite Bible: in one copy of the New Testament, for instance, braces group items and clarify structure in the initial table of contents; in another, they tie readings to dates and occasions in a table of lessons at the book's end.⁸³

Some braces seem to have been simply decorative: in an expensive copy of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, for example, braces which are perhaps primarily decorative appear attached not to the rhymes but to some of the two-line marginal notes indicating which princes are being discussed.⁸⁴ The full range of braces' uses are on display in one

⁸⁰ MS Tanner 407; Louis, ed., 15–16.

⁸¹ Joseph Goering and F. A. C. Mantello, eds, Robert Grosseteste, *Templum Dei* (Toronto, 1984).

⁸² BodL, MS Laud Misc. 112, ff.317^r–324^v.

⁸³ BodL, MSS e Musaeo 110, ff.1^r–5^v; and Gough Eccl. Top. 5, ff.235^v–243^r. I am grateful to Elizabeth Solopova for bringing these comparanda to my attention. For discussion of tables of lessons see Peikola, 'Orthodox Appropriation'; and 'Tables of Lections'.

⁸⁴ MS Hunter 5, ff.15^r, 17^r, 21^r, 34^r, 35^r, 84^v, 92^r, 98^{r-v}, 99^{r-v}, 115^v, 123^{r-v}, 124^{r-v}, 131^v, 140^r, 145^v, 146^v, 169^r, 170^r, 173^v, 181^r, 200^v, 205^r and 206^r.

copy of *Speculum Christiani* which contains accurate couplet rhyme braces for English verse, but also braces which, like some of those in the notebook of Robert Reynes, simply decorate and highlight shorter passages of English verse without marking rhyme; meanwhile, the same scribe's table of contents for the whole manuscript employs a sophisticated system of organisational bracing.⁸⁵ As with other punctuation, then, readers were probably expected to interpret braces on a case-by-case basis, rather than as marks with a very specific and delimited set of associations.

Where might readers have encountered rhyme braces? As with the question of braces' function, there appears to be no single, simple answer. Rhyme braces have been associated with 'manuscripts at the lower end of the commercial range', though they appear in manuscripts of all sorts.⁸⁶ Bracing could appear in aspirational gentry books: in the Paston manuscript that is now BL, MS Lansdowne 285, William Ebesham's copies of Lydgate and Burgh's *Secrees of Old Philisoffres* and of the verses connected to the coronation of Henry VI are braced, the braces indicating both stanzas and individual rhymes.⁸⁷ There are braces in a fifteenth-century Carthusian miscellany.⁸⁸ Bracing programmes had a long history in earlier writings from England. Rhyme braces appear, not always entirely accurately, in eight of the English and Anglo-Norman texts in the late thirteenth-century miscellany that is now BodL, MS Digby 86, including

⁸⁵ For the first kind of bracing see BodL, MS Bodley 61, f.27^r, ll.3–12 and 18–23; for the second see f.8^r, ll.23–26 and f.16^v, ll.3–6. The table is on f.vi^{r–v}.

⁸⁶ Edwards, 'Verse Written as Prose', 23.

⁸⁷ BL, MS Lansdowne 285, ff.155^r–199^v and 5^v–7^r.

⁸⁸ BL, MS Add. 37049; Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness*, 122 and 271. For *The Prick of Conscience*'s role in this manuscript, see 147–51.

Ragemon le bon and the debate between body and soul.⁸⁹ Braces executed in the same v-shaped style with zigzag lines mark stanzas, but not individual rhymes, in the text of the *Sayings of St Bernard* in a late thirteenth-century roll.⁹⁰ Malcolm Parkes's history of punctuation discusses braces' use in Latin leonine verse, and in various Latin and vernacular stanza layouts.⁹¹

Did poets themselves brace their texts, picking out one aspect of form for their readers? There is at least one braced autograph manuscript from later medieval England, Capgrave's copy of his *Life of St Norbert*, and his work demonstrates how rhyme braces evidence medieval readings of rhyme.⁹² The book concerned was a presentation copy for a known reader, John Wygenhale, Abbot of the Premonstratensian house in West Dereham, and so braces must have been an acceptable addition to polite gift books for public circulation. Since this is not a first draft the braces do not reveal Capgrave's compositional practice, but they are a representation of rhyme that he disseminated for reading, and possibly added himself. It is therefore interesting that in marking the rhyme royal stanza the braces do not precisely reflect the rhyme. Rather, they mark the first four lines as an interlaced quatrain and the last two lines as a couplet, leaving an isolated mark similar to the comma-shaped upper component of a *punctus elevatus* next to the fifth line. In effect the braces suggest that the stanzas rhyme *ababxccc*.

As I read the sense units in *St Norbert*, the stanza's fifth line often is a turning point: the reader is only rarely expected to read straight from the fourth to the sixth with

⁸⁹ BodL, MS Digby 86, ff.162^r–163^v, 177^r–182^v and 186^v–200^v. For an example of inaccurate bracing see f.200^r, ll.22–26.

⁹⁰ BodL, MS Add. E.6, ll.1–180 of the roll's interior.

⁹¹ Parkes, *Pause and Effect*, 99–100, and Plate 45 at 238–39.

⁹² HEHL, MS HM 55.

no hesitation.⁹³ This may be true of Middle English poetry in general: modern literary criticism certainly treats the fifth line as a floating element which can attach either to the previous four lines or the following two.⁹⁴ Capgrave's use of rhyme braces here thus offers us 'authorised' fifteenth-century evidence supporting twenty-first-century formalist observation. The same bracing system with an isolated fifth line is used for rhyme royal stanzas elsewhere—in one scribe's copies of Hoccleve's *De Regimine Principium*, *Tale of Gerelaus* and *Tale of Jonathas*, for example.⁹⁵ Furthermore, Wakelin has noted that the fifth line of the rhyme royal stanza is particularly prone to being lost during copying.⁹⁶ The fifth line of the rhyme royal stanza was perhaps both consciously regarded by some readers as in some way separate, and unconsciously felt to be out-of-place—so out-of-place that some scribes sometimes failed to perceive it.

These cases of rhyme royal bracing exemplify the manner in which rhyme braces are at once both a reading of form and an exertion of agency on later readings of the same form: Capgrave marked something different about the fifth line of his rhyme royal stanza and his braces guide his reader to notice the same thing. The awkwardness attached to the fifth line of the rhyme royal stanza might have been caused by the emphasis on complete rhyme units in reading in this period. If rhyme units as complete objects were important to the reading of verse then it should not be surprising that some

⁹³ In a sample of the first seventy-nine stanzas in the poem I judge there to be a significant stop and turning point either at the start, at the end or at the caesura of the fifth line in sixty-five stanzas. The atypical fifth lines are Cyril Lawrence Smetana, ed., *The Life of St Norbert by John Capgrave, O.E.S.A. (1393–1464)*, Studies and Texts, 40 (Toronto, 1977), ll.26, 47, 68, 96, 103, 138, 166, 264, 299, 320, 355, 362, 369, and 439.

⁹⁴ For example, Johnson, 82–86.

⁹⁵ BodL, MS Digby 185, ff.80^r–164^r.

⁹⁶ Daniel Wakelin, private communication; for records of this phenomenon in two copies of *The Fall of Princes* see Wakelin, *Scribal Correction*, 254–55.

scribes and at least one poet marked the fifth line as though it did not rhyme with the fourth: perhaps for some readers the fifth line did ‘rhyme less’ with the fourth line than the fourth line does with the second, the fifth line’s rhyme sound being at least partially muted by its position. Here, then, rhyme braces do not just show us an expectation that readers were interested in complete rhyme units; they also show us how a particularly complex stanza form combining two rhyme units might have been read.

Bracing and *The Prick of Conscience*

Sustained couplet bracing programmes are reported by Hanna in one of the twelve fragments and eight of the surviving thirty-three reasonably complete copies of *Speculum Vitae*.⁹⁷ Braces also appear quite frequently in copies of *The Prick of Conscience*. Since there are so many copies of the poem, and since the poem presented certain challenges (discussed below) to book producers who wished to brace it, its surviving manuscripts offer a chance to investigate how different readers read the poem’s rhymes and expected others to read them.

The examples discussed above show that the braces added to *The Prick of Conscience* are a manifestation of a widespread, pre-existing practice deployed in a variety of poetic, diagrammatic and decorative situations. However, they also differ from many of the examples presented above because they are less practically useful, and because they required more labour.

In poems which are short or stanzaic or both, bracing has an obvious practical

⁹⁷ The fragment is in MS Greaves 43. The eight reasonably complete copies are in CUL, MSS Gg.i.14 and Ll.i.8; GCC, MS 160/81; Liverpool University Library, MS F.4.9; BL, MS Add. 33995; and BodL, MSS Eng. poet. d.5, Hatton 18 and Lyell 28. See also the manuscript descriptions in *SIRE*, I, xiv–lx. Hanna has described bracing as a ‘familiar’ feature of copies of the poem: ‘Two New Manuscript Fragments’, 223.

function, helping readers to navigate the rhyme scheme, to navigate any stanza divisions in the poem and to recognise the poem's form.⁹⁸ If the text might be read aloud, the braces could help readers to recover their place after looking up. Similarly, setting a carol's refrain or a tail-rhyme in narrative drama to the side clarifies these slightly more complex forms and lets singers and readers track their positions more easily (although it would be unwise to use braces as straightforward evidence for performance).⁹⁹ But *The Prick of Conscience* is a long poem entirely in couplets. It is difficult to see how a rhyme scheme of uniform couplets for more than nine thousand lines can be made any clearer for readers. Furthermore, couplet bracing is little help to a reader who wants to track a position on the page, for the units that couplet bracing makes visible are so numerous that they are little more helpful than basic lineation.

The rhyme braces added to this text are not, then, obviously aids to the navigation of the page or to oral delivery, although they might perhaps have been a vestigial sign of orality: braces could have signalled that the text was theoretically suitable for reading aloud without practically helping anyone to do so, a possibility which is consonant with Brantley's proposal that they might indicate the *idea* of performance. This is not to say that bracing programmes had no practical purpose in *The Prick of Conscience*. Bracing might, for example, have been a way to check textual integrity, and certainly bracing sometimes appears to have led to the discovery and addition of missing lines.¹⁰⁰ But while this function highlighting missing lines might

⁹⁸ Parkes, 'Medieval Punctuation and the Modern Editor', 341.

⁹⁹ Purdie, 78–85.

¹⁰⁰ For example, the addition of BL, MS Lansdowne 348, f.12^v, l.30, below the bottom ruled line; this line's absence was probably discovered because it made the braces on f.13^r inaccurate. See also Wakelin, *Scribal Correction*, 266–7.

have made couplet bracing in long poems useful to scribes, it would not have made it useful to readers.

The second characteristic which distinguishes bracing programmes in long poems in couplets is the amount of labour they required: using the simplest two-stroke v-shaped braces, a full set for a reasonably complete copy of *The Prick of Conscience* would require more than nine thousand pen-strokes. This combination of a high labour requirement and less immediate utility for future readers makes these bracing programmes an interesting record of book producers' commitment: even if they were imitating their exemplars, those adding braces were nevertheless choosing to spend a lot of time and ink highlighting the poem's rhymes. How did the people who spent substantial amounts of time drawing braces expect them to be read?

At this point, two terminological notes are necessary. I call those responsible for the braces 'bracers'. Braces were probably added before binding: in many of the surviving braced copies the gutter and the recto part of the book would have obstructed the hand of anyone bracing the verso pages after binding. However, it would be unwise to assume that the bracer was always the same person as the scribe, and 'bracer' avoids this assumption. Second, the common feature of design in these bracing programmes is the use of a mark distinct from a normal brace to indicate a single line of a couplet split from its companion-line by a page or column division. I call these marks 'half braces'. Like braces, half braces vary in style. They can be literally half of a brace, and they can

look quite different, sometimes more like the manuscript's line-fillers.¹⁰¹ In one copy, lines left isolated by page transitions are often simply linked to the nearest full couplet brace.¹⁰² However, despite this variation in half braces' style, their widespread occurrence suggests that they might have been a standard component of bracing programmes for poetry in couplets.

How many manuscripts of *The Prick of Conscience* contain programmes of rhyme braces? Among the substantial manuscript copies which I have checked, thirty-one, or just under a third, have sustained bracing programmes.¹⁰³ This number should be treated cautiously, as such a simple count of manuscripts conceals considerable variation. For instance, there are substantial lacunae in the bracing in BL, MSS Harley 2394 and Lansdowne 348, but both programmes constitute sustained attempts to brace the whole poem, unlike bracing which ceases after a few leaves.¹⁰⁴ There is no clear clustering of these copies by date, textual affiliation or scribal dialect, and any such clustering would be unlikely to be reliable, due to the sample's small size and the difficulties of dating and placing manuscripts securely. Nonetheless, it might be

¹⁰¹ Newberry MS 33 uses half of a brace for half braces; see for example p.14, ll.1 and 39. BodL, MS Douce 126 is an example of a manuscript in which half braces look very different: there are two distinct styles, an arrow or bird's foot shape drawn with three strokes, as on f.20c^v, l.a32; and a line ending in a simple trefoil, as on f.57^r, l.a1. For examples of line-filler half braces, see MS Rawl. poet. 175, f.13^r, ll.a44–b1; f.52^v, l.b44; and f.53^r, l.a1. For the use of this mark in line-fillers see f.34^r, ll.a38 and b6.

¹⁰² BL, MS Harley 2394: for example, f.19^r, ll.1–3. This practice is distinguishable from error because it occurs not only at pages' beginnings, but also at their ends, where it would be hard to misconstrue the rhyme.

¹⁰³ Table 10.

¹⁰⁴ BL, MS Harley 2394 is a complex copy of the poem, in four hands, the last of which, on ff.128^r–129^r, is post-medieval; perhaps the third scribe did finish copying the poem, but his final leaves were lost and then later replaced by a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century enthusiast. For the substantial lacuna in the bracing see ff.58^v–98^r. In MS Lansdowne 348 there is no bracing from f.94^v onwards.

significant that compared to the *Speculum Vitae* corpus (noted above), a higher proportion of this sample of copies of *The Prick of Conscience* is braced.¹⁰⁵

I selected fifteen substantially braced copies of the poem for a detailed survey of bracers' corrections.¹⁰⁶ While this is only a small sample of manuscripts the many thousands of braces reveal much about scribes' labour reading the poem's rhyme scheme. Such reading is especially evident in the majority of manuscripts which contain corrections to braces which have fallen out of step with the rhyme scheme.

The lack of corrections in a few other manuscripts deserves separate treatment, and appears to be an effect which was sometimes achieved by maintaining rhyme units' integrity. There is some evidence in two of these manuscripts, BodL MSS Digby 14 and Digby 87, that the scribes braced the couplets in text ink as they copied them, and so these two manuscripts may be free of bracing corrections because this immediate bracing was always correct. The strongest evidence for this scenario can be found in MS Digby 87, in which there is one brace which begins as an extension of the last stroke of a written line.¹⁰⁷ A bracing process in which the scribe added a brace to each couplet as it was completed might explain the unusual ichthyoid style of Digby 87's braces, which were executed in one looping stroke. The evidence for a similar practice in MS Digby 14 is less solid, but its braces were also added in text ink, and appear to have been executed rapidly, although they require multiple strokes. Conversely, the bracing

¹⁰⁵ Although in BL, MS Add. 33995 *Speculum Vitae* is braced while *The Prick of Conscience* is not. One scribe in this manuscript copies *Speculum Vitae* and *Stimulus Conscience Minor*, and another copies *The Prick of Conscience* although, as Hanna and Wood note, the structure of *The Prick of Conscience*'s first quire suggests that they were collaborating; see *Morris*, xxiv.

¹⁰⁶ Table 11.

¹⁰⁷ BodL, MS Digby 87, f.102^v, l.28.

programme in Newberry MS 33 probably avoided error thanks to its complexity.¹⁰⁸ Two more copies, MS Rawl. poet. 175 and BL, MS Cotton Galba E.ix, are both free from bracing errors and have similar faint black v-shaped braces. These manuscripts are closely related and they share this style of bracing with a third related copy, containing only one bracing error (which goes uncorrected), BL, MS Harley 4196.¹⁰⁹ Again, these braces might have been added by scribes as they copied, or they might be unusually careful later work. In other respects all three manuscripts were quite carefully produced.

The risk of bracing errors is reduced in MSS Cotton Galba E.ix and Harley 4196 in particular because, as Hanna and Wood note, they share the same lineation, in which the length of the Latin quotations varies to ensure that for most of the poem every column ends in a complete couplet.¹¹⁰ The shortest Latin quotations, which occupy one line only in most other copies of the poem, take two lines here, and when quotations lasting an odd number of lines do occur they usually occur twice within the same column, thus guaranteeing that the column will still even out.¹¹¹ In both copies two Latin quotations lasting an odd number of lines did disrupt the alignment of columns'

¹⁰⁸ This is the only copy surveyed which uses alternating red and blue braces, and the bracer probably braced every other couplet in one colour before returning to add the alternating braces in the other. Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS F.4.18 features an even more complex combination of red and blue ink with yellow wash. The act of skipping every other couplet when adding the first set of braces must have required more care than a normal single-colour bracing programme would, and so perhaps the bracer was unusually alert.

¹⁰⁹ For the relationships between these manuscripts see the descriptions in *Morris*, xv–xxiii. See also Ralph Hanna, *Introducing English Medieval Book History: Manuscripts, their Producers and their Readers* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 96–131; Hanna, 'Some North Yorkshire Scribes', 167–69; and Ralph Hanna, 'Yorkshire Writers', in *2002 Lectures*, ed. by P. J. Marshall, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 121 (Oxford, 2002), 91–109. For the sole error in the bracing in BL, MS Harley 4196, see f.223^v, ll.b23–6.

¹¹⁰ *Morris*, xxi.

¹¹¹ For example, the two-line treatment of 'Mors omnia soluit': MS Cotton Galba E.ix, f.84^r, ll.b13–14 and MS Harley 4196, f.224^v, ll.b13–14. For an example of two single-line Latin quotations in one column see MS Cotton Galba E.ix, f.104^v, ll.b7 and b24 and MS Harley 4196, f.238^r, ll.b7 and b24.

ends with couplets' second lines, but two further Latin quotations lasting an odd number of lines restored order.¹¹²

Although this only happens in two copies of the poem, the fact that they probably inherited their lineation from an exemplar means that there must have at least been one more copy arranged similarly, and that there may have been several more. Furthermore, these two manuscripts are survivors from the possibly centralised and relatively early dissemination of the poem in the North and so they represent attitudes to rhyme which are perhaps close to the poem's composition.

The copy of the poem in BL, MS Add. 32578 also avoids bracing errors, again because every column ends with a completed couplet. However, rather than achieving this by manipulating the Latin quotations' lineation within a fixed number of ruled lines on the page, this scribe took the opposite approach by freely varying the number of lines on the page with no individual ruling, and finishing every column with a complete couplet. A similar determination to avoid splitting rhyme units is visible in one copy of the Middle English translation of Grosseteste's *Chateau d'amour*, in which the scribe varies the number of lines per column in the same manner, even though he was copying on parchment which already had individually ruled lines.¹¹³ Were this practice universal I would suggest that it might relate to copying and might have been convenient for some scribes as they divided their copy-text up into chunks suitable for self-dictation.

¹¹² MS Cotton Galba E.ix, ff.77^v–78^r and 111^{r-v}; and MS Harley 4196, ff.217^{r-v} and 256^r–257^r. The second disruption in MS Cotton Galba E.ix happened in the part of the manuscript which is now lost, but it can reasonably be assumed from the state of the lineation after the text resumes, on f.111^r.

¹¹³ BodL, MS Add. B. 107, ff.1^r–45^v—see for example ff.20^v and 34^r. This copy of the text, unlike the other two surviving (which are in Vernon and Simeon), contains an interpolated account of the fifteen signs of the end of the world (f.37^r), placing it even more firmly in the same world of thought as *The Prick of Conscience*. It also received red couplet bracing.

However, the number of examples is limited. I think that the consistent ending of columns with complete couplets together and the use of half-braces to mark split couplets are different manifestations of a shared understanding that lines in couplet verse should not be isolated from their companions: in the braced copies of the poem rhyme units are either copied together or split with clear visual indication that the companion-line is over the page. This effort spent highlighting and preserving the unity of couplets in the deployment of braces thus further strengthen the case for the importance of the rhyme unit as a key building-block in readers' perception of Middle English verse.

Marking rhyme accurately

However, given *The Prick of Conscience*'s length and its rhyme scheme's simplicity, bracers could have paid limited attention to the poem's actual rhyme words. The scale of the task could have encouraged mechanical, rather than methodical, bracing—bracing which was not reading at all. But examining the corrections to bracing in the poem reveals an impressive amount of attention to the rhymes. Bracers usually did read the rhyme scheme, although doing this meant they were reading the poem in an extremely unusual way. The simplicity of the poem's rhyme scheme strengthens the force of this evidence: because it would be easy to brace every two lines mechanically, bracers' attentiveness and their willingness to correct themselves are more impressive.

The commonest error in these bracing programmes occurred when a couplet was split by a page or column transition, necessitating the use of a half brace. Even in copies which consistently have an even number of lines on each page, the variable length of

The Prick of Conscience's Latin quotations, which were usually copied within the main column, made it more likely that some pages would begin with the second line of a couplet. The bracer could fail to notice that the first line of the page needed a half brace, brace the new page's first line to its second line and consequently fall out of step with the rhyme scheme.¹¹⁴ In copies in two columns, the same error could happen at column transitions. It would be quite easy for a bracer to continue bracing without noticing his error. This error's prevalence is one practical reason for the efforts of some scribes (discussed above) to avoid ever splitting couplets over column or page transitions.

However, although the Latin quotations' presence contributed to the commonest form of bracing error, by ensuring that some couplets would be split by page or column transitions, they sometimes also acted as checks on inaccurate bracing: as the quotations are always preceded by a complete couplet, any bracer who had fallen away from the rhyme scheme was left with a single unbraced line upon reaching more Latin and might notice his error.¹¹⁵ On reaching a quotation while bracing incorrectly, the bracer would normally correct himself, though that correction might be limited to an extra half brace joining the isolated last line to the inaccurate brace above it. The number of errors therefore probably did not dramatically exceed the number of corrections, and the balance between instances in which bracers noticed mistakes unprompted and those in which bracers were only prompted by the arrival of a quotation offers a rough indication of bracers' alertness in reading for their own mistakes. So, by measuring how attentive

¹¹⁴ Compare the accurate bracing of *Handlyng Synne* in BodL, MS Bodley 415, in which consistent ruling, the text's lack of Latin quotations and perhaps the choice of an elaborate and therefore slow style of brace militate against this problem.

¹¹⁵ For example, SJO, MS 138, f.19^r, on which the misbracing of ll.1–7 was brought to the bracer's attention by the Latin quotation which begins at l.8.

bracers were, we can measure how much effort they put into reading rhymes in order to highlight and decorate those rhymes for other readers.

As it turns out, the evidence suggests that bracers were usually attentive readers of rhyme: seventy-four times the bracers realised that corrections were necessary without prompting from a Latin interruption, while only seventeen corrections were prompted by the arrival of a Latin quotation or of a break between sections within the poem.¹¹⁶ In these copies, at least, bracers were therefore usually attentive enough to the rhymes to identify problems unprompted. The copy in BL, MS Lansdowne 348 stands out with eighteen corrections. This manuscript, which is already unusual because its bracing programme ceases as the poem's seventh part begins, has high numbers of both bracing errors caused by textual problems, such as lines missing or copied twice, and errors for which there is no obvious explanation. This proliferation of error might suggest inattention—a bracer who was not such a punctilious reader.¹¹⁷ That said, only five of the twenty corrections were prompted by page-ends or Latin quotations, so the bracer was at least attentive enough to catch himself most of the time.¹¹⁸

However, these numbers do not convey the variety of moments of reading which braces can reveal within a single copy. A closer look at examples from one manuscript, such as BodL, MS Douce 157, uncovers the variation in one bracer's reading of rhyme units which numbers cannot. On one page of this manuscript, in a typical error caused

¹¹⁶ For this number and the others in this paragraph, see Table 11.

¹¹⁷ Errors caused by textual disruptions: MS Lansdowne 348, ff.43^r, ll.9–13; 59^r, ll.7–18; 70^r, ll.31–32; 70^v, ll.8–9; 72^v, ll.11–12; and 76^r, ll.13–25. For the bracer's independent errors, see ff.46^v, ll.6–32; 52^r, ll.27–28; 58^r, ll.6–14; 69^r, ll.19–20 and 27–31; 71^r, ll.27–28; 75^v, ll.9–33; and 86^r, ll.11–19.

¹¹⁸ Corrections prompted by page-ends or quotations: MS Lansdowne 348, ff.13^r, ll.1–32; 46^v, ll.6–32; 59^r, ll.7–18; 75^v, ll.9–33; and 76^r, ll.13–25.

by a page transition, the bracer began by incorrectly bracing the page's first two lines as though they were a couplet.¹¹⁹ The bracer did not notice this mistake while bracing the page. But he did begin the following page by correctly giving its first line a half brace, and so he either noticed his error at that point or, perhaps more probably, accurately read the rhymes at the top of the new page, demonstrating renewed attentiveness in either case.¹²⁰ On three further pages beginning with the same kind of error the bracer did not discover his mistake until the arrival of a Latin quotation left an isolated, unbraceable line.¹²¹ On these three pages the bracer made cursory corrections to the bracing, only inserting an additional mark to connect the last line to its predecessor and not rebracing the whole page, perhaps due to time pressure or apathy. Nevertheless, the fact that the bracer spent any time correcting these errors, which impinge only briefly on readers' experience, evidences his desire at this point in his task that the braces should accurately reflect the rhyme scheme. His reading can be cautiously reconstructed.

The bracer did rather better on another page, on which, after bracing the first thirteen lines, he noticed without prompting that the braces had stopped matching the rhyme scheme, and better still on two more pages, catching bracing errors within the first three lines on both.¹²² The third of these errors is unusual in two ways.¹²³ First, the bracer spent time and effort erasing the incipient incorrect bracing of the second line to the third line. Second, here his bracing erred not because he misread the page's first line

¹¹⁹ BodL, MS Douce 157, f.72a^v, l.1 onwards.

¹²⁰ MS Douce 157, f.72a^v, l.1 to f.73^r, l.1. As this is technically not an active correction it is not included in the table.

¹²¹ MS Douce 157, f.68^r, ll.1–21; f.69^r, ll.1–35; and f.78^r, ll.1–21.

¹²² MS Douce 157, f.30^r, ll.1–13; f.47^r, ll.1–3; and f.56^v, ll.1–3.

¹²³ MS Douce 157, f.56^v.

as the first line of a couplet, but because he mistook it for the second line of a couplet split by a page division. The bracer erred because he was thinking about his other errors and anticipating a split couplet: a deliberate, albeit inaccurate, attempt to avoid mistakes. While the bracer might have failed here by trying too hard to be clever, there are many page transitions in this manuscript where the braces' accuracy might be the result of similar conscious thought and effort. Here, then, he was reading while thinking about the poem's rhymes.

Not all the errors corrected in this manuscript occurred because the bracer misread the rhyme scheme at the beginning of a new page, however. In one case the bracer probably mistook three lines for a couplet, bracing the first and third lines which are unusually long while ignoring the second, which is unusually short. But he also seems to have noticed his mistake while adding the vertical stroke, for he partially erased the bottom third of it and added correct horizontal strokes.¹²⁴ This error and its correction suggest that at this point the bracer's eyes were focused only on the ends of lines, perhaps reading the rhyme-words, rather than reading each line in full. Finally, a missing line on another page puts the bracing out of step with the rhyme scheme, with the result that the bracer incorrectly marked the first line of the following page with a half brace, wrongly treating it as the second line of a couplet.¹²⁵ But the bracer noticed his mistake by the time he had drawn the horizontal stroke next to the second line of the page, and quickly corrected himself. He was therefore reading the rhyme relatively closely when he began bracing the second of these pages, even if he did not alter the

¹²⁴ MS Douce 157, f.106^v, ll.23–5.

¹²⁵ MS Douce 157, f.95^v, ll.33–9 and f.96^r, ll.1–2. The missing line is the equivalent of l.8220 in *Morris*, and it is missing from between ll.33–34 on f.95^v.

bracing on the previous page.

Further evidence for bracers' attentive readings of rhyme can be found in tricky cases which they got right first time. Bracers demonstrated impressive reading of rhyme-words by correctly coping with textual disruptions. At page transitions in one copy, for instance, the braces usually identify and accurately mark lines which rhyme with nothing (as half a couplet has been lost), and lines which were copied twice.¹²⁶ This bracing programme is in red ink, and so was almost certainly not added as part of the copying of the text; instead, it represents careful later reading of the poem.

Accurate bracing in the copy of the poem in MS Rawl. C.319, which is also braced in red, offers more signs of close attention to at least the final words of each line. This copy's bracer was able, towards the end of the poem, to avoid bracing scribal corrections which had been added at the ends of lines. For example, when a missing 'schul' has been added to the end of a line using a pair of double-virgule *signes-de-renvoi*, so that the line reads 'For þei //wepe euere more //schul', the bracer squeezes in a brace correctly touching the rhyme-word, 'more'.¹²⁷ The bracer displayed the same care in the same situation four other times, once erasing and correcting his brace to do so.¹²⁸ These braces look rapid and rough, but it is unlikely that the bracer would have noticed all of these scribal corrections had he not been attending to the rhymes. This bracing programme thus demonstrates diligence belied by the braces' appearance.

¹²⁶ MS Cotton Appendix VII, f.32^r, l.1; f.55^v, l.1; f.80^r, l.1; f.86^r, l.1; f.110^r, l.30; f.113^v, l.30; and f.116^v, l.30.

¹²⁷ MS Rawl. C.319, f.99^v, ll.25–26. The additional words distort the braces enough to show that the bracer added the braces after the corrections were added.

¹²⁸ MS Rawl. C.319, f.104^r, ll.13–14; f.111^r, ll.15–16; and f.128^r, ll.25–26. The erased incorrect brace is on f.111^v, ll.17–18.

One copy, in MS Douce 126, contains interventions in the bracing by a later hand which suggest a concern for accuracy which continued after the addition of the original bracing programme. This copy contains a number of interlinear and marginal corrections in ink which is distinctively darker than the text's ink. The darker correcting hand is dressier than the original hand, with a similar range of anglicana graphs executed in a more angular way, with more broken strokes and calligraphic hairline adornments.¹²⁹ This might, then, be the hand of the original scribe working later and, with no time to build up speed, less currently, at some point between the original bracing and the manuscript's first binding.

Twice in MS Douce 126 the original scribe, probably detecting that a line was missing from his exemplar, left a line's space blank, adding a half brace next to the unrhymed line remaining in the text. In these cases the darker hand added new lines and then braced them to the half brace.¹³⁰ There are also two instances in this manuscript of substantial interventions in the bracing programme by the darker hand. The first occurs when a missing line put the bracing out of step with the rhyme scheme.¹³¹ The darker hand added an extra line at the bottom of the page, indicating its proper position with *signes-de-renvoi*, and then added correct braces to the rest of the column and to the first lines of the next column, on the following page, which were apparently left unbraced by the original bracer—there are no red braces and no signs of erasure.¹³² Second, the

¹²⁹ See for example MS Douce 126, f.14^v, l.b30; f.26^r, l.a11; f.61^r, ll.a30–b1; f.64^r, ll.a3–4; and f.67^v, ll.b5–6.

¹³⁰ MS Douce 126, f.64^r, ll.a3–4; and ff.67^v, ll.b5–6.

¹³¹ MS Douce 126, f.14^v, l.b15–16.

¹³² MS Douce 126, ff.14^v–15^r.

darker hand also conducted some large-scale surgery on a later page.¹³³ The transition between this page's first and second columns coincides with two difficult couplets. The rhyme-words of the first couplet have ceased to rhyme in this version of the text, and the rhyme-words of the second couplet eye-rhyme with the last word of the first couplet, as all three end in a letter **r** with a curl indicating an abbreviated 'e':

þer is ay blisseful certeyne
 [column transition]
 And certeyn duellynge ay fre
 þer is ay play *and* merþis sere
 þer is ioyze *and* merye chere.¹³⁴

The column division splits the first of these two couplets. The original bracer distinguished the first of these lines with a half brace indicating that its companion, the completion of the rhyme, would be at the top of the next column, but probably then braced the second of these lines to the third, putting the braces for the whole second column out of step with the rhyme scheme.¹³⁵ The darker hand added two lines reconciling the couplets:

þer is ay blisseful certeyne
And endeles lyf *with* oute peyne
 And certeyn duellyng ay fre
Euere more in þat cuntre
 þer is ay play *and* merþis sere
 þer is ioyze *and* merye chere¹³⁶

¹³³ MS Douce 126, f.61^r.

¹³⁴ MS Douce 126, ff.61^r, l.a29, ll.b1–3. Compare *Morris*, ll.7834–37, in which the 'fre' of l.7834 rhymes with the 'certaynte' of l.7835.

¹³⁵ The original bracer begins bracing correctly again at the top of f.61^v, but if he noticed his error when he reached the page division he did not correct it. See MS Douce 126, f.61^v.

¹³⁶ MS Douce 126, f.61^r, ll.a29–b3. I have inserted 'Euere more in þat cuntre' into the main text in the position indicated by the darker hand's *signes-de-renvoi*; the line actually sits in the margin. The additional lines are not in *Morris*. They may well have been invented for MS Douce 126, though they might come from another text of *The Prick of Conscience* not represented in *Morris*.

The darker hand erased all the bracing of the second column so that only faint stubs from the original braces remain, and braced the passage again. The original bracer was probably reading only the final letters of the rhyme-words here, with the result that he was caught out by their eye-rhyme. Perhaps he was rapidly reading the letter-forms in rhyme-words without really sub-vocalising them, not engaging with the text as it might sound read aloud or voiced within the mind in the manner that scribes are thought to have done, when they dictated memorised chunks of text to themselves while copying.¹³⁷ This scenario is consonant with some of the errors in MS Douce 157 (discussed above) which also suggest the reading of eye rhyme rather than aural rhyme.

The evidence in this manuscript thus reveals an original bracer who was concerned to reflect rhyme accurately but may have relied on reading eye-rhyme at points, and a later reader—not necessarily a different person—who not only noticed some of the original bracer's mistakes and corrected them, but also was willing to augment the text, amending and completing both the visual marking of rhyme units and the rhyme units themselves. Both of these readers, whether they were the same person or not, spent time and effort maintaining the integrity of the poem's couplets for future readers.

¹³⁷ Michael Benskin and Margaret Laing, 'Translations and *Mischsprachen* in Middle English Manuscripts', in *So Meny People, Longages and Tonges: Philological Essays in Scots and Mediaeval English Presented to Angus McIntosh*, ed. by Michael Benskin and M. L. Samuels (Edinburgh, 1981), 55–106 (90, 94); and Takako Kato, 'Corrected Mistakes in Cambridge University Library MS Gg.4.27', in *Design and Distribution of Late Medieval Manuscripts in England*, ed. by Margaret Connolly and Linne Mooney (York, 2008) 61–87 (72–83).

Aesthetics

Attention to eye-rhyme only in some cases should not be taken as evidence that these bracers were more interested in braces' visual properties. In fact the braces usually combine attention to rhyme with an apparent lack of care for appearance. The evidence of the thirty-one substantially braced copies I have consulted overwhelmingly suggests a lack of interest in neatness. The low rate of erasure in the corrections to bracing indicates little effort spent ensuring that readers had a neat and clean reading experience: if we reduce the sample to the thirteen corrected bracing programmes on parchment (as it was difficult to erase ink from paper by scraping) only eighteen of seventy-nine corrections involve any kind of erasure, and six of the manuscripts contain no erasures whatsoever.¹³⁸ This evidence may simply suggest that bracers were often unwilling to cross the threshold of effort which erasure required.

There is, however, one copy whose bracer was consistently willing to erase inaccurate braces: BodL, MS Junius 56. This is the only copy with bracing integrated into a thoroughly coherent—obsessive, even—aesthetic programme. The bracing alternates methodically between braces executed with zigzag lines and braces executed with straight lines. It was evidently difficult to get this alternation correct in a single pass through the poem, as there are frequent errors in it. The bracer put considerable effort into erasing and redrawing braces so that the correct sequence of straight and zigzag braces would be observed within the page unit, if not across page breaks.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Of the manuscripts in Table 11, BL, MS Arundel 140 is copied on paper and MS Harley 2394 is mostly copied on paper.

¹³⁹ For example, BodL, MS Junius 56, f.18^v, ll.27–28; f.31^r, l.7; f.58^v, l.5; f.67^v, ll.28–29; and f.101^v, l.16. As they are not corrections to the bracing's accuracy these erasures are not included in my survey.

Furthermore, the braces in MS Junius 56 are, so to speak, ‘right justified’: regardless of the length of the lines they brace, they always end at the right-hand edge of the ruled area, filling out a squared-off main column. MS Junius 56 also has line fillers after shorter lines of Latin, and it might be the case that the same aesthetic preference for a tidy, full ruled area lies behind both the justified braces and the line fillers. This possibility is strengthened by the bracer’s decision at one point to retain the zigzag first stroke of a brace which he had mistakenly added to a Latin line.¹⁴⁰ As the bracer usually erased braces which did not fit his aesthetic programme, this retention suggests that he treated the zigzag line as a line filler.¹⁴¹ There are additions of missing lines to the text in this manuscript, which are in the original scribe’s hand, have their own bracing, and displace the main text’s bracing in ways which prove they were added before the bracing programme. Their positioning indicates that they, too, were part of the same aesthetic scheme dedicated to filling but not exceeding the ruled area. The scribe uses *signes-de-renvoi* to insert extra text, which he copies in lines orientated ninety degrees clockwise to the main text, and placed to the main column’s right. In two instances he manages to fit the extra lines entirely within the ruled area’s edges.¹⁴² In three others the additional lines do not fit entirely (or at all) into the ruled area, but still hug its right-hand edge.¹⁴³ The insertion on folio 47^v is the only insertion on a verso page: the scribe decided to put this insertion on the main column’s right-hand edge, where, once the book was bound, it sat next to the gutter.

¹⁴⁰ MS Junius 56, f.111^r, l.13.

¹⁴¹ Compare the pages towards the end of Lichfield, MS 50 in which loose zigzag line fillers replace rhyme braces: ff.97^r–99^r and 105^r–107^r.

¹⁴² MS Junius 56, ff.28^r and 40^r.

¹⁴³ MS Junius 56, ff.35^r, 47^v and 116^r.

MS Junius 56 thus demonstrates that bracing could be executed in a regimented way, as part of a coherent aesthetic programme, or, in other words, that this was a thinkable use of braces for at least one person. Three other bracing programmes display similar impulses: the braces of *The Prick of Conscience* in BL, MS Egerton 657 fill out the ruled area in the same way, and the manuscript contains one similar additional line inserted to the main column's right; the alternating red and black braces in MS Add. 11304 are usually all 'justified' to an imaginary line somewhat to the right of the longest lines of verse, though they do not fill out the whole ruled area; and the bracer of Lichfield, MS 16 resembles the bracer of MS Junius 56 in his consistent willingness to erase mistakes.¹⁴⁴ However, none of these copies combines a comprehensive aesthetic programme with a willingness to erase errors consistently. Outside the detailed survey of braced copies, the only copy I have consulted which might be comparable is Magdalene College, MS F.4.18. Unusually in this sample, then, the bracer of MS Junius 56 consistently hid the signs of his struggle to achieve accuracy.

The bracing in the other copies seems much less concerned with neatness and much more haphazard, and in the light of the bracing in MS Junius 56, this looks less like disinterest or laziness, and more like policy. Take, for example, the copies of *The Prick of Conscience* in the three related and early manuscripts (discussed above) which are among the most impressive surveyed.¹⁴⁵ All are copied in set textura hands, and are carefully decorated. All three have impressive first-page borders, the copy in MS Rawl. poet. 175 has a cadel capital starting off every column, and gold leaf is used throughout

¹⁴⁴ For the addition in MS Egerton 657 see f.20^r, l.8.

¹⁴⁵ MSS Cotton Galba E.ix, Harley 4196 and Rawl. poet. 175.

the copy in MS Harley 4196 for decorated large initials and paraphs. However, in all three copies the braces are simple and frequently very faint. They are modelled on a simple 'v' shape, their exact form and size vary from page to page and they are the only decorative element in these books displaying such variation. Perhaps these braces' humble appearance strengthens the possibility that in these copies of the poem, at least, they were added in part as a rudimentary check for missing lines.

Although the contrast with other ornamentation is less striking, the execution of the other bracing programmes surveyed suggests a similar lack of interest in neatness. In SJO, MS 138, for example, the braces are modelled on a 'v' shape, but their two strokes often fail to intersect.¹⁴⁶ Yet a decorative impulse towards regulated zigzag lines is visible in the irregular squiggle of the braces' strokes, which does sometimes become a formed zigzag.¹⁴⁷ MS Ashmole 60, to take one final example, is reasonably large for a manuscript containing *The Prick of Conscience*, and offers a copy of the poem in a measured hand modelled on anglicana formata. However, although its braces are often executed with careful zigzag lines, especially in the first half of the book, it also contains simpler curved braces, and the bracer switches freely between the two styles, sometimes drawing the first half of a brace in one style and the second in the other.¹⁴⁸

So, judging from their distribution of effort, most bracers seem to have cared noticeably more about accurately reflecting the rhyme for readers than they did about making rhyme braces into neat decoration. The contrast between the filled ruled area in MS Junius 56 and the much more uneven bracing programmes in most other braced

¹⁴⁶ See, for example, SJO, MS 138, f.68^v, ll.12–21.

¹⁴⁷ For examples of more formed zigzag lines, see SJO, MS 138, f.96^r, ll.1–9.

¹⁴⁸ For example, MS Ashmole 60, f.58^r.

copies of the poem does bring to light another possible practical purpose for braces: the normal uneven programmes make it easier for the eye to track the variation in line lengths, and therefore easier for readers to be aware of their position on the page. Rhyme braces might have had some utility for reading even in long poems in unvarying couplets after all.

Indeed, it might be unwise to separate utility and pleasure too sharply in the operation of rhyme braces. Braces' ornamental functions and their usefulness were unlikely to be articulated separately or even at all in bracers' minds or in readers' experience. Due to the coordination of units of sense with rhyme units, the memorable and enjoyable experience of rhyme in these poems may have been closely tied to their pastoral attempts to educate and to stimulate. This phenomenon observed here at the coalface is consonant with medieval theorisations of pleasure as something that could be usefully integrated into learning.¹⁴⁹

Besides the possibility of pleasure commingling with a sense of utility in the reading of these poems, there could be pleasure derived from that very sense of utility. The voice heard at the end of *The Prick of Conscience* rather ostentatiously denies an interest in rhyme: 'I rek noght', it says, 'þogh þe ryme be rude, / If þe maters þarof be gude' (ll.9582–83). This is followed by a stock request for correction from 'ilka rightwyse lered man' that finds error in the poem (l.9592). Without necessarily doubting these lines' sincerity, we might find in this passage's opposition of good matter to rude rhyme an aesthetic appreciation of utility achieved at beauty's expense, or at least an

¹⁴⁹ Mary Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2013); Glending Olson, 'The Profits of Pleasure', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Volume II: The Middle Ages*, ed. by Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson (Cambridge, 2005) 275–87.

idea of utility as something achieved at beauty's expense. In the request for correction there might, too, be an aesthetic desire for 'correctedness' and completion. If rhyme braces functioned in part as a rudimentary check for missing lines, then some readers may have enjoyed bracing programmes which were rough and rapid, and corrected in obvious ways, or in other words bracing which looked authoritatively utilitarian. If this kind of reading pleasure in correction and completeness existed, it would have been a larger-scale echo of the emphasis in the poetic manuscripts of the period on the completion of the rhyme unit.

Conclusion

In the course of their habitual labour book producers in this period were attentive to rhyme, expecting and encouraging future reading which was similarly attentive. The process of bracing some copies of *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae* was a reading process, and a reading process which, particularly in the case of the former poem, oscillated between routine action and moments of conscious, worried examination. Few scribes altered the lineation of these texts, but those who did often knew what they were doing and retained or added indicators of verse form. No atypical copies survive which return to the unmarked copying of verse found in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts. Overall, codicological evidence pertaining to rhyme strongly suggests that book producers worked, usually unconsciously, within a set of habitual and assumed conventions which particularly emphasised rhyme and the role of the complete rhyme unit as the basic building-block of verse, and placed rhyme at the heart of the process of reading verse.

The recovery of this kind of reading offers fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscript evidence which can back up and refine twenty-first-century formalist observations. In particular, the evidence suggests that we should attend closely to the structure of rhyme units in rhyming Middle English verse. And, without necessarily making any radical adjustments to the modern canon of Middle English poets, the presence of some literary merit in *The Prick of Conscience*, *Speculum Vitae*, and other religious instructional poems such as *Cursor Mundi* and *Handlyng Synne* could be more widely acknowledged; apart from anything else, readers at the time seem to have found pleasures in these texts that we would consider to be literary pleasures.

This conclusion does not, though, necessarily mean that religious instructional poetry was read in precisely the same way as, say, Chaucer's work. Because, as I began by arguing, these poets carefully put rhyme units into the service of units of sense, there is no necessary conflict between, on the one hand, emphasising the presence of and potential pleasures of rhyme in these poems and, on the other hand, benefiting from their 'maters'. Aditi Nafde's recent investigation of the *mise-en-page* of manuscripts of works by three canonical Middle English poets, by contrast, concludes that book producers tended to emphasise form and especially rhyme in ways which cut across meaning and complicated the reading process.¹⁵⁰ That might be partly because these later poets might play form off against meaning more often: one thinks of the flexible fifth line of the rhyme royal stanza.¹⁵¹ Given Nafde's findings we might speculate that the scribes who transmitted her canonical primary texts worked in a tradition of copying

¹⁵⁰ Aditi Nafde, 'Deciphering the Manuscript Page: The *Mise-en-page* of Chaucer, Gower and Hoccleve Manuscripts' (unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2012), 245–47.

¹⁵¹ See the contrast sketched in Siegfried Wenzel, *Preachers*, 255.

and reading influenced by, or inherited from, the copying of slightly older religious instructional verse, a tradition which emphasised form in the expectation that sense would follow. In other words, the reading expectations surrounding, though certainly not originating with, *The Prick of Conscience*, *Speculum Vitae* and similar texts might be a factor in the manuscript treatment of later and more familiar, though often less well-witnessed, Middle English poems.

Finally, although I do not think that many of the book-production habits discussed here were directly useful for reading aloud, the concern for rhyme units might be connected to oral reading. Indeed, the interest in rhyme suggests that much of the reading of verse could have been either reading aloud or reading that was *like* reading aloud. There is almost never evidence that proves that a manuscript was read aloud, but the surviving evidence of the treatment of rhyme units on the page shows that a lot of reading could have been like reading aloud in its attention to sound. Perhaps seeking to distinguish reading aloud and silent reading too sharply is itself a problem when dealing with a period in which, for a substantial proportion of readers, reading aloud may have been the natural kind of reading.

5. Rewriting

In þir seven [parts] er sere materes drawen
Of sere bukes, of whilk som er unknowen,
Namly til lewed men of Ingland,
þarfor þis tretice drawe I wald
In Inglise tung þat may be cald
Prick of Conscience als men may fele (9542–46)

Bot yhe þat haf herde þis, I yhow pray
þat yhe pray for hym, bathe alde and yhung,
þat turned þis boke to Inglisshe tung (*Speculum Vitae*, 16078–80)

The Prick of Conscience and *Speculum Vitae* both announce their own rewritten status.

The composition of *The Prick of Conscience* is described using the verb ‘drawen’, perhaps a calque for the Latin ‘tracto’, and the poet writes that he took his materials from ‘sere’ sources.¹ The poet of the *Speculum Vitae*, meanwhile, describes his activity as translation, the ‘turning’ of one book (the *Somme le roi*) into English. Both texts were in turn rewritten themselves, in various ways, producing other English texts.

This chapter examines the details of various acts of rewriting which took either *Speculum Vitae* or *The Prick of Conscience* as their source text. It begins by examining several instances in which these poems were rewritten into prose texts; two of these examples have already been well studied by others. I then examine the motivations of the redactor who created the Southern Recension of *The Prick of Conscience* by discussing the changes he effected. This entails some new textual-critical work in order to get as close as possible to the redactor’s likely source and the text that he produced.

¹ ‘Tracto’ is the root for *forma tractatus* and *forma tractandi*. ‘Drawen’ was also used in mathematics for the act of adding different numbers together: *MED*, ‘drauen (v.)’, sense 6(a).

The redactor appears to have engaged in a programme of large-scale stylistic revision. The chapter's final section presents the first ever detailed investigation of a text rewritten from *Speculum Vitae* which survives in one manuscript in Lambeth Palace Library: this text, in an illuminating contrast to the Southern Recension of *The Prick of Conscience*, is conservative in its treatment of style but radically selective in its collection of material. Rewriting could be but did not have to be a bluntly utilitarian activity: rewriters read these texts in a variety of ways and encouraged a variety of different kinds of reading with their own texts.

The nature of rewriting

Rewritten texts offer two layers of evidence for the history of reading. The notion that 'in the Middle Ages the most vigorous form of literary criticism expresses itself through the re-writing of a received text' is not a new thought, but it is worth distinguishing the different directions in which that 'literary criticism' simultaneously looks.² Rewriting offers evidence about past reading, the reading which was necessary to produce the new text, but it also constitutes an anticipation of future reading. The rewriter's practice can offer hints about how he read the original text himself, and the rewriter's choices anticipate and encourage particular reading behaviours from future readers, offering evidence of how one reader at the time hoped or assumed others might read. That anticipation often involves judgements that some things are unnecessary for future reading and can be removed, or that some things which will be necessary are currently

² B. A. Windeatt, 'The Scribes as Chaucer's Early Critics', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 1 (1979), 119–41 (122).

lacking and must be added. In other words, these reworkings both create new readings and rule out others.

The reading practice used in the process of rewriting might be quite different from the reading that the rewriter expects from his audience. Indeed, since the act of rewriting implies that somebody decided that a different reading experience was necessary, perhaps all acts of rewriting aim to produce a text which encourages kinds of reading different from the rewriter's engagement with the original text. This division of tasks is analogous to the balance between interpretation and invention which Rita Copeland identifies as characteristic of what she calls 'secondary translation' into later medieval vernaculars, in which the translator's reading is hermeneutic but the translator's writing is a rhetorical act which seeks to supplant rather than complement the source text: like the 'secondary' translator, the rewriter interprets the source and then works rhetorically to render that source unnecessary.³ Like translation, rewriting did not have to be a descent, a process of 'dumbing-down': it could be a sophisticated activity in its own right, and it offers us multifaceted evidence of several kinds of reading.⁴

And yet rewriting was an everyday process in this period. Indeed, fourteenth- and fifteenth-century writers understood the process of composition itself as a form of

³ Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge, 1991), 187–220.

⁴ Gillespie, 'Religious Writing', 235–39.

rewriting.⁵ Authorship and *auctoritas* are displaced and deferred ‘upwards’ to previous authors and then drawn on in a delegated fashion. *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae* are perfectly conventional in this respect. This understanding manifested itself in—and perhaps also was conditioned by—later medieval book production: writing as the creation of a new text through the combination, rewriting and recontextualisation of past texts was intimately linked to *compilatio*. Just as the second chapter takes the broad concepts of discontinuous reading and the hierarchical organisation of the page and attempts to nuance them by seeing how they worked on the ground, this chapter takes the broad concepts of compilation and delegated authorship and investigates how they shaped reading as it happened.

One might expect, from the instructional nature of the material, that the rewritings of these poems would take the form of utilitarian extracts and shortenings: the products of pragmatic reading, which anticipate further pragmatic reading. However, the revisions discussed here offer a more complex picture. Some shorten their source texts dramatically, but others extend them or make formal alterations which cannot be explained by pure function: as with the punctuation of verse, these are formalist interventions, although the concern for form may ultimately derive from a concern for the text’s effectiveness. This chapter therefore corroborates the argument of

⁵ Parkes, ‘*Ordinatio and Compilatio*’; Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*. See also A. J. Minnis, ‘Late-Medieval Discussions of *Compilatio* and the Role of the *Compiler*’, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, 101 (1979), 385–421; ‘*Nolens auctor sed compiler reputari*: The Late-Medieval Discourse of Compilation’, in *La méthode critique au Moyen Âge*, ed. by Mirielle Chazan and Gilbert Dahan, Bibliothèque d’histoire culturelle du Moyen Âge, 6 (Turnhout, 2006), 47–63; Bernard Guenée, ‘L’Historien et la compilation au XIII^e siècle’, *Journal des savants* (1985), 119–35; and Neil Hathaway, ‘*Compilatio*: From Plagiarism to Compiling’, *Viator*, 20 (1989), 19–44.

the previous chapter, that formalist and practical concerns are sometimes tightly linked in the reading of these texts.

Indeed, these rewritings, regarded as evidence of reading—real examples in which ‘new readers make new texts’—can be placed on a continuum with smaller acts of rewriting.⁶ The interventions, conscious and unconscious, made by normal scribes have been the topic of sometimes heated debate. George Kane offered a foundational, and still very helpful, taxonomy of scribal variation although he, as an editor editing a particularly subtle poem, had a low opinion of scribes.⁷ To this school of thought alterations in the text, minor or extensive, deliberate or unconscious, are of little interest, or even painful to contemplate: in Kane’s account, early readers’ experiences of *Piers Plowman* are not only irrelevant but also something of a literary tragedy.⁸

However, others have asked whether scribal variation might have some value in itself either because, whether conscious or not, it reveals some early readers’ responses, or because it represents conscious and alert intervention. Variation, even when unconscious, has been persuasively mined for information about what readers found moving or difficult in Chaucer.⁹ More radically, variation has excited theorists. Paul Zumthor proposed that typical medieval works possess a mobility, *mouvance*, which is

⁶ D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, The Panizzi Lectures, 1985 (London, 1986), 20.

⁷ George Kane, ed., William Langland, *Piers Plowman: The A Version* (London, 1960), 115–46.

⁸ See the assessment of Kane’s practice in Ralph Hanna, ‘George Kane and the Invention of Textual Thought: Retrospect and Prospect’, *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 24 (2010), 1–20 (3–5). Kane’s aesthetic attitude to scribes and texts is perhaps well captured by his remark that the ‘height’ of scribes’ intellectual engagement with their material ‘is relative to the level of the base’ so that ‘[a] scribe copying Lydgate might well seem to soar by variation’: George Kane, *Chaucer and Langland: Historical and Textual Approaches* (London, 1989), 293, n.3.

⁹ Windeatt.

imposed by their authors' anonymity and their variation at the hands of scribes and in the mouths of performers, and which prevents them from inhering in any single textual 'performance'.¹⁰ Bernard Cerquiglini has presented scribal transmission as a process of joyful variation valuable in itself, indeed the 'main characteristic' of the period's non-Latin literature so that 'on pourrait dire que chaque manuscrit est un remaniement, une version' [one could say that every manuscript is a revision, a version].¹¹ Similar ideas have emerged in Anglophone scholarship. Tim Machan has argued that textual variation, and what he regards as later medieval work-centred (as opposed to author-centred or text-centred) reading habits render much traditional textual-critical effort on Middle English texts suspect.¹²

Turning to deliberate intervention, the alterations made by scribes copying historical texts have been ably investigated by Matthew Fisher, who argues that some scribes quietly took on a kind of authorship.¹³ Some, engaged in the enthusiasm for the so-called 'New Philology', proposed to elevate surviving manuscripts—texts which we know were read—above editorially reconstructed texts.¹⁴ It is indeed interesting to

¹⁰ Paul Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale* (Paris, 1972), 65–75.

¹¹ Bernard Cerquiglini, *Éloge de la variante: histoire critique de la philologie* (Paris, 1989), 62; translation taken from Bernard Cerquiglini, *In Praise of the Variant: A Critical History of Philology*, trans. Betsy Wing (Baltimore, 1999), 37–38.

¹² Tim William Machan, *Textual Criticism and Middle English Texts* (Charlottesville, 1994), the argument reviewed at 177–93.

¹³ Matthew Fisher, *Scribal Authorship and the Writing of History in Medieval England* (Columbus, 2012). See also Matthew Fisher, 'When Variants Aren't: Authors as Scribes in Some English Manuscripts', in *Probable Truth: Editing Medieval Texts from Britain in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Vincent Gillespie and Anne Hudson, *Texts and Transitions*, 5 (Turnhout, 2013), 207–22; and for a different perspective Susanna Fein, 'Literary Scribes: The Harley Scribe and Robert Thornton as Case Studies', in *Insular Books: Vernacular Manuscript Miscellanies in Late Medieval Britain*, ed. by Margaret Connolly and Raluca Radulescu, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 201 (Oxford, 2015), 61–79.

¹⁴ Stephen G. Nichols, 'Introduction: Philology in a Manuscript Culture', *Speculum*, 65 (1990), 1–10; and Sarah Kay, 'Analytical Survey: The New Philology' *New Medieval Literatures*, 3 (1999), 295–326.

wonder, for example, about the reading of the version of *Troilus and Criseyde* which promised to tell of Troilus's 'doleful sorow', the story of one who went 'Fro wo to wele and after *on to Ioie*'.¹⁵

But most unconscious scribal errors and most of the 'authorial' interventions discussed by Fisher are in fact relatively small changes.¹⁶ This does not necessarily make them insignificant, but in the history of reading it does distinguish them from more substantial rewritings. Consider, for example, the history of the Southern Recension copy of *The Prick of Conscience* in HEHL, MS HM 130. It seems likely that the scribe carried out normal processes of dialectal translation when producing this text: this is probable in any Middle English text if there is no contrary evidence, but in this case we also have another Southern Recension text with a very closely related dialect which he also copied from a different exemplar.¹⁷ A later hand corrected the text extensively, making dialectal alterations but also seemingly collating it against a Main Version copy—and choosing readings eclectically from both versions of the text.¹⁸ In this case, then, one reader seems to have engaged in minor but sustained rewriting, rewriting which was partly driven by an external conception of, in Machan's terms, a work rather than a text. This manuscript was itself used as printer's copy, twice, and the text was reproduced quite faithfully, if selectively, with the only consistent alterations

¹⁵ BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 163, f.1^r, ll.1 and 4, my emphases. This mischaracterisation of the poem's movement might well have inflected readers' interpretation of the ending.

¹⁶ Fisher, *Scribal Authorship*, 188: 'moments of unique local interest, revisions or emendations of facts, and substantive interpolations, additions, or expansions to make partisan political points'.

¹⁷ On dialectal translation the discussion in Simon Horobin, 'Mapping the Words', *PBE*, 59–78. BL, MS Harley 2281, ff.1^r–64^v. See *DG*, 139 and 148. These manuscripts have different exemplars and neither served as the exemplar for the other.

¹⁸ Wakelin, *Scribal Correction*, 151–56.

being dialectal.¹⁹ This single manuscript copy was therefore subjected to a variety of rereading activities.

Enthusiasm for variants can be taken too far. While the variations which MS HM 130 was subjected to were numerous, they were all extremely conservative in their treatment of the text both at the small-scale level of individual lines and also on a larger scale: there were no additions or omissions of even small passages. Wakelin has argued that the goal of the alteration to the text of the poem in MS HM 130 was not simply untethered and playful variance. Rather, the later correcting hand seems to have wanted a text closer to an idealised form which he understood to be imperfectly represented in both the copies available.²⁰ This corrector's activity was then not entirely unlike the approach taken by many modern editors, although he was constrained by the number of copies available to him. In fact, most scribes seemingly strove for accuracy, although what 'accuracy' meant to them might sometimes seem odd or limited to us.²¹ The decision to preserve a text without alteration should not be mistaken for a lack of a decision: the numerous surviving copies of religious instructional poems which are simply copies and not attempts at rewriting demonstrate that the majority of book producers who transmitted these texts judged, or were implicitly informed by their

¹⁹ Schulz, 'Manuscript Printer's Copy'; and 'A Middle English Manuscript'. P. B. Tracy, 'Robert Wyer: A Brief Analysis of His Types and a Suggested Chronology for the Output of His Press', *The Library*, 6th series, 2 (1980), 293–303. The printed books concerned are *A Little Book of Purgatory* ([London], [?1534]), STC 3360 (Part IV of *The Prick of Conscience*); and *A New Treatyse deuyded in thre parties* ([London], [?1542]), STC 24228 (Parts I–III). On the alteration of the text by Wyer's staff, see Preston, 'First Appearance in Print'.

²⁰ Wakelin, *Scribal Correction*, 151–56.

²¹ Wakelin, *Scribal Correction*; and Beadle, 'Some Measures of Scribal Accuracy in Late Medieval English Manuscripts', in *Probable Truth: Editing Medieval Texts from Britain in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Vincent Gillespie and Anne Hudson, *Texts and Transitions*, 5 (Turnhout, 2013), 223–39.

paymasters, that their readers' interests would be best served by the text as it stood.

Furthermore, *variance* and *mouvance* are more relevant to some texts than others. In Middle English we might compare *Ancrene Wisse*, a text with a long and varied history which, as Bella Millett argued, well models dynamism and change in its shaping for different audiences, to the Wycliffite Bible, which seems to have been subjected to redaction, but was never pragmatically altered in the same way.²²

For the study of reading, this kind of everyday variation and minor garnishing is less immediately useful than deliberate rewriting: these two phenomena may sit on the same spectrum, but they sit apart. Derek Pearsall argues that authorial revision and scribal variation 'must not be confused, or regarded as if they can be treated in the same way, though of course there may be disagreement about which is which'.²³ The subject of this chapter is neither authorial revision nor scribal variation, but rather *non-authorial revision*. It is not 'normal' scribal variation, nor is it muted additions or alterations—important and fascinating as all those changes are—but deliberate, interventionist creation. Every text discussed here is the result of a deliberate decision to alter the source substantially. This kind of rewriting has not been extensively considered before as evidence of both past reading and anticipated reading.

Rewriters primarily left textual evidence, so it is difficult to know exactly how, in the most practical, material terms, they carried out their work. We can, however, reasonably speculate about the mechanics of rewriting. As noted above, rewriting and

²² Bella Millett, 'Mouvance and the Medieval Author: Re-Editing *Ancrene Wisse*', in *Late-Medieval Religious Texts and Their Transmission: Essays in Honour of A. I. Doyle*, ed. by A. J. Minnis, York Manuscripts Conferences, 3 (Cambridge, 1994), 9–19; Bella Millett, ed., *Ancrene Wisse*, I, xlv–lxi.

²³ Pearsall, 'Variants vs Variance' in *Probable Truth: Editing Medieval Texts from Britain in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Vincent Gillespie and Anne Hudson, Texts and Transitions, 5 (Turnhout, 2013), 197–205 (202).

writing were very closely connected, and so it seems reasonable to imagine that rewriters used similar aids to writers. Many of the devices discussed in Chapter 2, the navigational apparatus supplied with texts or by readers, would have been useful for any discontinuous excerpting or compiling activity. It is hard to imagine pasted bookmarks or sewn bookmarks being used, but temporary, mobile bookmarks—fragments, straws or any flat objects—and cut-and-fold markers would be quick and easy. Readers were also conversant with *signes de renvoi* as tools for managing discontinuous reading. Rewriters could have copied their new text straight onto ruled writing supports, or they could have used wax tablets to compose a good draft, before copying the text into a fair copy or an exemplar for dissemination. Off-cuts and so-called ‘waste’ pieces of parchment or paper would have allowed the rewriter to rearrange larger chunks of text after copying them in a way that bound sets of wax tablets would not.²⁴

These discontinuous reading procedures might inform a number of questions about instances in which people rewrote *Speculum Vitae* or *The Prick of Conscience*. Was the rewriter’s own reading of the parent-text discontinuous or continuous, and if it was discontinuous, in what way was it discontinuous? If their conscious intentions and habitual assumptions can be recovered, how did they expect their re-written text to be read? The previous chapter argued that many readers read with considerable attention to one aspect of form, rhyme. This happened not despite these texts’ practical nature, but

²⁴ Richard Beadle notes the material and textual evidence for the use of small oddly shaped pieces in composition and note-making in ‘English Autograph Writings of the Later Middle Ages: Some Preliminaries’, in *Gli autografi medievali: problemi paleografici e filologici: atti del Convegno di studio della Fondazione Ezio Franceschini, Erice, 25 settembre–2 ottobre 1990*, ed. by Paolo Chiesa and Lucia Pinelli (Spoleto, 1994), 249–68 (260). Given this utility, ‘waste’ might not be the best term.

because form and practicality were inextricably integrated. This chapter is also therefore alert to further evidence of formalist interest from readers.

Could similar questions be investigated using the Latin, French and Anglo-Norman source texts for these two poems? Certainly in some cases. For instance, Ralph Hanna has described how the poet of the *Speculum Vitae* imposed an innovative reorganisation on material from *Somme le roi*.²⁵ However, in an investigation of the history of the reading of these Middle English poems such questions can only be noted in passing. Just considering all the subsequent rewritings of these texts themselves would exceed the available space and time. I have not discussed the rewriting processes that produced the *Speculum Huius Vite*, for example.²⁶ Nor have I examined the use of *The Prick of Conscience* in the seventh ‘tabula’ of *Speculum Christiani* or in the *Stimulus Consciencie Minor* (which is, despite its name, more a text mixing parts of *The Prick of Conscience* together with new material than a straight descendant such as the *Speculum Huius Vite*) or in various short derivative poems.²⁷ Nor have I examined the *Desert of Religion*, which draws on both *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae*.²⁸ The *Desert of Religion* occurs in, among other manuscripts, the noted ‘Carthusian miscellany’, BL, MS Add. 37049, which also contains other excerpts from both poems which might be considered the products of kinds of rewriting as well.²⁹

²⁵ *SVRE*, I, lxx–lxxiv. The poet also drew on an earlier, shorter, prose Latin condensation of the *Somme*: see *SVRE*, II, 631–38 for a copy and further references.

²⁶ The production of this text appears to have been a two-stage process. See *DG*, 11; and Guy Trudel, ‘An Edition with a Commentary of the *Speculum Huius Vite*, a Fifteenth-Century Pastoral Manual in English’, 2 vols (unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1999), I, 85–169.

²⁷ *IMEV* 1342; *Morris*, 382, n.17. *IMEV* 244. *IMEV* 230 and 1014.

²⁸ *IMEV* 672.

²⁹ BL, MS Add. 37049, ff.46^r–66^v; other excerpts detailed in *Morris*, 382, n.16; see also Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness*.

Prose redaction

The Prick of Conscience and *Speculum Vitae* were both at least partially rewritten into prose. The previous chapter argued that in these texts formal and practical concerns are closely connected, and probably commingled. Rewriting such text therefore has mixed formal and practical implications for reading: with no rhyme and less rhythm the text is less immediately engaging and harder to memorise. But the text might become more more clear. It is also worth remembering that these poems were originally written using primarily prose sources, and prosification need not be a radical change in other ways: in some ways the *Myrour to Lewde Men and Wymmen*, the prose redaction of *Speculum Vitae*, retains much more of its source text's diction than the verse Southern Recension of *The Prick of Conscience*.

By contrast, the redactor who produced the prose encapsulation of Part VI of *The Prick of Conscience* which survives in BodL, MS Laud Misc. 23 made many cuts to his material, crafting a reading experience which is quite unlike that offered by the poem he read.³⁰ Sarah Wood has convincingly demonstrated that this text is drawn from *The Prick of Conscience* rather than from the poem's own sources.³¹ This redaction borrows its structure from Part VI of the poem but is very short and consists essentially of brief accounts of each pain of hell followed by English translations of the poem's evidential Latin quotations. The translations are fresh: Wood remarks that the rewriter is

³⁰ This text is discussed and printed in Wood.

³¹ Wood, 1–5.

‘at pains to “correct” the original poem’s translations where the medium of prose allowed some of the metrical “padding” to be removed’.³²

The introductory part of the prose text is the least reliant on the poem’s structure and statements and can usefully be compared to the poem to examine the redactor’s practice.

Seint Paul, spekyng of þe ioyes þat God hath ordeynid to trewe keperis of his lawe, seiþ it is so gret þat no bodily ize may se it, ne ere here it, ne herte þenke it. Werby it is to suppose þat þe peynis of helle on þe same wyse ordeynid of God to þe brekeres of his lawe passyn in gretnesse al fleishly syzt, heryng and vnderstandyng. And alþouȝ þer be peynes in helle mo and more ydious þan mannis wit may ymagyne here, ȝit þat gracious men may be þe more war fro synne þat bryngiþ man to þese endeles peynes, we schal reherce here xiiij maneres of peynes of hellis bi record of holy writ and of holy doctours.³³

This bears little resemblance to the opening of Part VI of *The Prick of Conscience*. Is it possible that the rewriter could have produced this text by reading no more than poem’s the Latin quotations and a set of subtitles or marginal apparatus in a copy of *The Prick of Conscience*, such as the examples discussed in Chapter 2? The ideas communicated are consonant with those of the source, particularly the ideas that the pains of hell surpass human perception and are unimaginably numerous. But these ideas are hardly original to the poem and there are, as Wood notes, very few phrases borrowed directly from *The Prick of Conscience* in the whole new text.³⁴

The rewriter does, however, use the language of *The Prick of Conscience*. The vocabulary used to describe hell is fairly ubiquitous, and when dealing with a poem as

³² Wood, 7.

³³ Wood, 10, l.1 to 11, l.9. I have removed paraphs and the marking of abbreviation from Wood’s transcription.

³⁴ Wood, 3.

widespread as this one there must be some doubt about direct influence. But, for example, the redactor's use of 'ydious' repeats a word which appears throughout the poem and especially in Part VI.³⁵ Similarly, the statement that 'þe x peyne is bitter bityng of conscience withinne, withouten ende turmentyng', with an elegant in–out contrast which turns into another reminder of hell's eternity, borrows, shortens and intensifies the original text's more extensive balancing of within and without:

þe tend payne es þe gnawyng within
Of þair conscience þat never sall blyn.
For within þam sall þe worme of conscience frete
Als withouten sall do vermyn grete,
And swa sall þai evermare, withouten dout,
Be gnawen and byten within and without. (ll.7045–50)³⁶

The redactor's adoption of the balance between 'within' and 'without' might in fact improve on the original text, in which the original poet seemingly realised that he had hit on a satisfying piece of wordplay and then (as I read the text) elaborated on it excessively. These examples suggest that the redactor had read the full text of at least Part VI of the poem even though he borrowed its general organisation rather than specific lines or phrases.

By borrowing the structure and filling it with rapid, uniformly English prose, the rewriter created a text which is open to a single, continuous reading. It is short: the ninth pain, for example is reduced to a definition and just one quotation.³⁷ It also pulls readers onwards with considerable momentum. Each pain's description is a staccato series of

³⁵ In Part VI: *Morris*, ll.6453, 6514, 6545, 6817, 6823, 6844, 6896, 7505c and 7505h. *MED*, 'hidous (adj).', usually in senses 1(a) or 1(b), which are not easily distinguished. Sense 1 of Middle English 'hidous' is close to its modern descendant—'horrible', 'terrifying'—but often seems intimately connected to perception, so that things are hideous *to see* or hideous *to hear*.

³⁶ Wood, 12, 60.

³⁷ Wood, 12, 56–60.

linked statements. The text is more paratactic than hypotactic, but its parataxis is particularly, intensely additive, as in the description of the eighth pain (with each unit of sense here lineated separately by me):

þe viij peyne is bytyng and styngyng of venemous wormes, þe which as
dracounes with her teēþ schal bite dampned men.
Wherefore God seiþ bi Moyses, ‘þe teēþ of wicked bestis of nedderes Y schal
sende vpon hem al todrawyng hem in her wodnes’.
And þese wormes schal neuere deye, as Crist seiþ in the gospel.
And so seiþ seynȝt Austin, ‘hell wormes may not deye, but as fisshes in þe
water, so þei lyuen in þe fyr’.
Also þese wormes schul be to dampned men for þer bed and for here bed-hilyng,
as þe prophet seyde to Nabogodonoser, ‘Vnder þe schal be spred þe mothe, and
þi hilyng schal be wermes’.
And also in þe bok of Iudith is writen, ‘þe Lord schal ȝyue fir and wormes into
þer fleish, þat þei schal brenne and fele withouȝten ende’.³⁸

In this passage the redactor uses one straightforwardly hypotactic ‘Wherefore’ and one relative clause (‘þe which as dracounes’), but in the rest of this description he usually relies on ‘And’ or ‘Also’. And these words also appear together, or with a demonstrative ‘þese’, establishing a fiercer tone of accumulation than they would alone. This style might be simple but it is not rhetorically neutral and it effectively and quickly creates what the original text achieves by verbosity: a sense that the endless pains of hell could be accumulated and intensified endlessly.³⁹ This presentation is not as obvious a spin on the text as the addition of new material would be, but it is the redactor’s choice.

Some details of the rewriter’s own reading and the kind of reading he wished to cultivate can be guessed at from the text he produced. Since he retranslated the Latin

³⁸ Wood, 11, l.45 to 12, l.56.

³⁹ The original poem explicitly says that telling the suffering ordained in hell would take longer than the time available between Creation and Doomsday (ll.6460–76).

quotations his reading may have had a cross-referencing element, and it certainly had an element of translation. At the same time, however, by retranslating the quotations and then removing them he removed any opportunity for his future readers to check the quotations themselves: another case in which a facet of rewriting which engages some of the rewriter's attention renders itself absent from future readers' experience.

The available evidence suggests that this revision was read in a devotional and perhaps self-disciplinary manner. The other texts in the only presently known witness do seem designed to prompt thinking on the fate of the soul and contempt for the world.⁴⁰ The manuscript concerned retains a medieval binding and is of a small, manual, personal size.⁴¹ And the text explicitly announces that it exists so 'þat gracious men may be þe more war fro synne'. It might, however, be noted that the following words, 'we schal reherce here xiiij maneres of peynes of hellis', would also work well if the text were read in a small-scale oral setting, such as a household gathering or monastic refectory. The removal of the Latin text of the quotations might, then, be another change linked particularly to the anticipation of either or both of these kinds of reading and audience.

There is also a prose text derived from *Speculum Vitae: A Myrour to Lewde Men and Wymmen*.⁴² This is a much more comprehensive prosification than the pains-of-hell excerpt from *The Prick of Conscience*. Venetia Nelson, the text's editor, detects a strong

⁴⁰ Wood, 7–10. Wood, 14, n.32, notes the idea that producing this redaction might also have been regarded as a devotional act, one way in which the rewriter's reading and his readers' reading might be similar.

⁴¹ BodL, MS Laud Misc. 23 has a conventional binding of wooden boards covered with whitened leather, with a single English strap closing to the back board. The average page dimensions are 154 × 108 mm² and the average ruled area dimensions are 110 × 72 mm².

⁴² Nelson, ed.

concern for explication and clarity on the part of the redactor—so strong that she doubts the usefulness of *difficilior lectio* as an editorial principle at some cruces.⁴³ She also notes yet more clarification in one copy of this prosification, an example of the kind of activity which Fisher has called ‘scribal authorship’, with either the scribe or an earlier scribe leaving ‘many small additions and expansions seemingly made out of a desire for explicitness’, together with ‘a greater level of overt signalling of translations’.⁴⁴ Perhaps rendering the poem into prose made further expansion easier, since small interventions no longer needed to be fitted into a system of rhyme and metre.

Nelson has ably identified this redaction’s other major characteristics: it is less immediate, ‘more remote and learned’; it is more hypotactic; the redactor frequently smooths out moments of reversed syntax in the source text; and while some doublets were removed more than two times as many were added. Rhyme in general, meanwhile, is sometimes left in the prose.⁴⁵ Nelson proposes from this and other evidence that the redactor did not put much conscious artistic thought into his activity, but rather sought merely to make a more intelligible version of the text, one with gentler and more extensive flows of concepts unhindered by verse form. But the redactor did remove rhyming tags, so thoroughly that Nelson calls this aspect of his work ‘highly skilled’.⁴⁶ The redactor must therefore have read the text with careful attention in order to discern between ‘filler’ phrases and content. He may not have been an artist but his actions still reveal a kind of close reading of form.

⁴³ Nelson, ed., 58.

⁴⁴ BodL, MS Rawl. A 356, ff.1^r–83^r; Nelson, ed., 54.

⁴⁵ Nelson, ed., 20–22.

⁴⁶ Nelson, ed., 25–36.

A representative sample will better illustrate the redactor's acts of reading and rewriting. Here is the description of the first spiritual work of mercy in *Speculum Vitae*:

þe first Werk es counsaylle to bede
 To þam þat has of counsaylle nede,
 For Goddis luf when þai it craue
 And noght for werldely wynnyng to haue,
 Als pledours dose and auokettes
 þat þair hertes on wynnyng settes.
 Bot som of þam, als men vndirstandes,
 Wynnes and takes on bathe handes:
 þai gif na counsaylle bot for mede
 Or for fauoure or for drede.
 For Goddis luf wil þai nane gieue,
 For þat trauaylle wald þam greue.
 Bot þair counsaylle mast auaylles
 þat bisily and wele counsaylles
 Synfull men to leue þair synne
 And men of gode lyf to dwelle þarinne,
 Als dose prelates and confessours
 And othir gode counsayllours;
 þai wirk right þat werke gastly
 Þis is þe first braunche of Mercy. (ll.7563–82)

The redactor who produced the *Myroure* rewrote this passage as follows:

The firste is counsaile or rede þe redeles for þe loue of God and noght for worldliche wynnyng, as many pledours & aduocatis doþ þat settiþ alle her hertes on wynnyng, so ferforþ þat some of hem takeþ operwhile of boþe sides; but at þe leste wey fewe or none of hem counsaileþ for Goddes loue onliche, but oper for mede or for worldliche loue or drede. But her counsaile is best and most of pryse þat onliche for the loue of God and of her euencristen counsaileþ besiliche synful men to leue her synne, and good men to contynue & laste in her goodnes, as prelates, curates & prechoures of Holy Chirche, schrift fadres and opere good counsaillours lettred & lewed schulde doo.⁴⁷

Numerous additional doublets are responsible for much of the *Myroure* passage's sense of extra copiousness and of elaboration: the first work is to 'counsaile or rede', 'fewe or none' in the legal profession work for God's sake, while those who act 'for the loue of God and of her euencristen', both 'lettred & lewed', offer advice which 'is best and

⁴⁷ Nelson, ed., 145, ll.21–31.

most of pryse', and can be trusted to tell 'good men to contynue & laste' in goodness. The list of good councillors at the end of the passage has more than doubled in size, and there are smaller touches of emphasis, as when the *Myroure* text remarks that lawyers 'settiþ alle her hertes on wynnynge'. The redactor seems to have been determined to slow down, fill out and clarify his future readers' experience. Where the poet closes with a line recalling the beginning of the description, creating a circular and probably mnemonically convenient tying-up effect, the redactor simply ends when he runs out of material. And he adds the modal 'schulde' to the final verb, transforming the confidence of the poem that good councillors offer good advice into a more doubtful remark that they at least ought to.

The *Myroure* can be usefully contrasted with the prose redaction of Part VI of *The Prick of Conscience*. The *Myroure* is independent, rather than part of a loosely connected cluster of texts which seem to have been transmitted together. It is also long, and it is an attempt to preserve all the material in its source, not an excerpt or a simplification. Its existence illustrates how *Speculum Vitae*—and, indeed, the general *Somme* tradition—was valued for being comprehensive, so that in rewriting it one valuable contribution could be simply to preserve its material. Referential, discontinuous, hunting-and-gathering reading was enabled by the compendious nature of texts such as this. By contrast, the prose redaction of the pains of hell from *The Prick of Conscience* is a text produced by someone effectively doing their readers' discontinuous selection in advance, and excerpting only what someone wanting information on the pains of hell would seek out.

There is one other significant prose text derived from one of these poems, the Latin translation of *The Prick of Conscience*.⁴⁸ I have not studied this text in great detail, but it is quite a close rendering of each of the poem's general points, in the same order, which nevertheless removes much of the elaboration and the quotation of authorities found in its source text. The surviving copies appear conventionally academic, with the division into seven parts clearly articulated, and pages marked with paraphs, capitals and frequently running titles.⁴⁹ One of the surviving copies even has chapter divisions within parts, and a table of contents preceding each part, allowing for a very fine-grained consultation of the text.⁵⁰ These manuscripts therefore probably represent a re-absorption of the content into the academic world of late medieval Latinate reading, available to the 'lered' but not the 'lewed'.

Three copies of the Latin translation preserve a statement that the text is a translation: 'Iste tractatus vocatur stimulus consciencie qui ab Anglico in latinum a minus sciolo est translatus' [This treatise is called *The Prick of Conscience*, which is translated from English into Latin by a small beginner-student].⁵¹ The detail of the 'minus sciolo' is slightly unusual. It might be a routine modesty topos, but if it is simply a factual statement, it might explain why the translation is not very reflective.⁵² A

⁴⁸ On this under-studied phenomenon more generally, see Laura Saetveit Miles, 'Richard Methley and the Translation of Vernacular Religious Writing into Latin', in *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. by Kantik Ghosh and Vincent Gillespie, Medieval Church Studies, 21 (Turnhout, 2011), 449–66 (450–51).

⁴⁹ The manuscripts are described in *DG*, 163–68.

⁵⁰ MS Bodley 159, ff.161^r–179^r. These tables of contents do not correspond to the part-by-part tables of contents transmitted in some copies of the Southern Recension.

⁵¹ Cambridge, Pembroke College, MS 273, f.1^r; the same text is also used as a title in CUL, MS Dd.iv.50, f.57^r, and as a colophon in Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS F.4.14, f.31^v (where the phrase 'minus sciolo' is missing).

⁵² *DMLBS*, 'sciolus', sense 2: one of little learning, one who has schooling but not very much of it.

modicum of thought must have been required to read the poem and boil down each passage to its point, but it includes remarks such as ‘*Purgatorium non est aliud quam locus in quo anime purgantur que hic peccauerunt non hic plene purgate sunt*’ [Purgatory is nothing other than the place in which the souls are cleansed who have sinned here [and] are not here fully cleansed] translating ‘Purgatory es nathyng elles | Bot a clensyng-sted þar saules duelles | Þat [...] er noght parfytylly clensed here’.⁵³ This explanation was originally necessitated because the text is in a language in which the connection between ‘Purgatory’ and the meaning of the verb *purgare* is not self-evident, so translating it back into Latin is slightly odd; but perhaps this is an example of pleasure in simple etymology rather than a lack of conscious thought. Since five manuscript copies and one collection of extracts from the translation are known to survive, it must have been considered worth disseminating by a number of people.⁵⁴

These three prosifications are noticeably different: one is a short and selective excerpt which primarily uses its source’s local structure but retains little of its source’s phrasing, one is a long and expansive complete prosification, and one retains its source text’s organisation but reduces the content to brief Latin statements. Despite the differences, however, all three prosifications seem pragmatic in nature. And yet the reading involved in the production of the two English examples was acutely alert to aspects of form. This is also true of the Southern Recension of *The Prick of Conscience*.

The Southern Recension of *The Prick of Conscience*

⁵³ MS Bodley 159, f.167^r, ll.b11–14, translating *Morris*, ll.2710–13 and 2714.

⁵⁴ The manuscript containing the extracts is BL, MS Harley 106, ff.138^v and 344^v. This book is a collection of sayings and passages collected from various Latin sources.

The Southern Recension of *The Prick of Conscience* is the best-known and most successful rewritten text produced from either of these poems. Nineteen copies survive, enough that even if the Main Version of the poem disappeared entirely, the Southern Recension alone would have some importance—this number is, after all, more than the number of surviving copies of *Troilus and Criseyde*. Lewis and McIntosh offer a dialectal plot of these copies, with a concentration in the Monmouthshire-Herefordshire-Gloucestershire area, but also with copies appearing in, for example, Norfolk, Suffolk and Sussex dialects.⁵⁵ The numbers and dialectal locations together suggest reasonably wide dissemination. Therefore, to uncover the kind of reading which produced this recension, and the kinds of reading which it anticipated or encouraged, it is necessary to get as close as possible to the first act of rewriting which produced it.

This effort involves, first, a digression into the textual evidence for the Southern Recension, a body of material hitherto almost entirely unexamined. The following discussion of that textual tradition uses these sigla:

Surviving Manuscripts

C	SJC, MS B.7 (SR3)
B	BodL, MS Bodley 423 (SR12)
D	BodL, MS Douce 141 (MV67)
P	Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, MS Codex 196 (<i>olim</i> MS English 1; MV91)
H	HEHL, MS HM 125 (SR16)

Imagined Manuscripts

α	common ancestor of Group III copies of <i>The Prick of Conscience</i>
β	redactor's exemplar
σ	redactor's finished copy of the Southern Recension, common ancestor of Southern Recension manuscripts

⁵⁵ *DG*, 173. They suggest (9) that it may have originated somewhere in the Thames Valley.

The most recent investigation, by Stacy Waters, of the available texts of Part V in the Southern Recension proposed that there may have been multiple stages of revision, and concluded that two manuscripts with similar texts, C and B, probably represent the earliest surviving form.⁵⁶ Waters chose to edit the poem's fifth part in a further stage of rewriting represented by later manuscripts.⁵⁷ But here, in order to get as close as reasonably possible to the revision which initiated the Southern Recension tradition, I use the text offered by B, checking it against C.⁵⁸ Waters's evidence suggests that the form of the text attested in BC is not the ancestor of the other surviving forms of the Southern Recension. If this is correct then we can avoid considering changes that occurred in BC after it split from the rest of the surviving tradition by confirming that these changes are also present in H.⁵⁹ In a larger study, one would want to collate BC against H and certain other copies in an effort to reconstruct σ —indeed, in a larger study one would perhaps begin by interrogating the bifidity of Waters's stemma—but BC checked against H will do here in order to get some sense of the first redactor's reading of *The Prick of Conscience*.

Identifying the source for this revision requires a similar manoeuvre: Waters identified D and P as the surviving manuscripts of the Main Version which are probably closest, from the evidence he consulted, to the source manuscript of the initial revision. I will refer to P when it offers a surviving text, checking it against D and relying on D

⁵⁶ BodL, MS Douce 141 and SJC, MS B.7; Waters 53–54, and see the tentative stemma at 62.

⁵⁷ Waters, 61b–c. Chief among these later manuscripts is H. Jean E. Jost is currently preparing a single-manuscript edition of the whole Southern Recension using H.

⁵⁸ I found no clear trend in the evidence which would suggest that one of the two is markedly superior to the other, and B is easier to access.

⁵⁹ I have done this in particularly unusual and weighty cases, such as the addition of lines.

alone where P is deficient. Cases in which P and D disagree suggest that P might be closer to the exemplar used by the redactor of the Southern Recension than D.⁶⁰ The stemma in Figure 3 indicates my current impression of these particular manuscripts' historical relationships; it is certainly not meant to be definitive. Waters edited Part V of the Southern Recension, so I have read the other parts against PD.

It is highly likely that some of the differences between PD and BC are not the result of the redactor's work. Variations could be introduced in the line of transmission between σ and BC, or between α and β after the lines of transmission leading to P and D had left the line of transmission between α and β . Furthermore, due to the limited amount of surviving evidence, the textual history established by Waters and supplemented here is probably wrong at points, and possibly wrong on a large scale. There is, for example, some evidence that the redactor used an exemplar which, although it was closer to PD than to other Group III manuscripts, also sometimes agreed with other Group III manuscripts and disagreed with PD; or, alternatively, that he could

⁶⁰ A number of problems impede the investigation of the relative closeness of P and D to the exemplar used by the redactor. The Southern Recension is a rewritten text, so that sometimes when P and D disagree, the Southern Recension has been altered too much to indicate whether it is P or D which is closer to the redactor's source. Furthermore, P is dialectically closer than D to the dialects of BC and the likely dialect of the redactor, so some cases in which BC agree with P against D on points of diction may be the product of convergent dialectal translation by scribes. For example, consider the fate of *Morris*, l.7098:

Pat þai sall thole, þai sall ay grete

þat] *om.* P, The whiche BC thole] suffre P, suffir BC ay] euere P, eueremore D þai sall ay grete] and hem neuyr lete BC (P f.87^r, l.8; D f.95^v, l.28; B f.323^v, l.29; and C f.88^r, l.9)

Here the line's second half was probably actively altered by the redactor, while the transformation of 'thole' into forms of 'suffer' in all witnesses but D could easily be independent dialectal translation. The disappearance of 'Pat' in P but not D is suggestive, but this is the kind of omission which the redactor could easily have supplied himself. From a non-exhaustive investigation of variants which are unlikely to be dialectal, when BC have not been revised so much that they cease to be useful, it seems that when P and D disagree, and BC agree with one of PD against the other, then BC agree more often with P. This impression of the quantitative weight of variation would need to be extended and supplemented by thoughtful case-by-case examinations of variants to produce any probable conclusion.

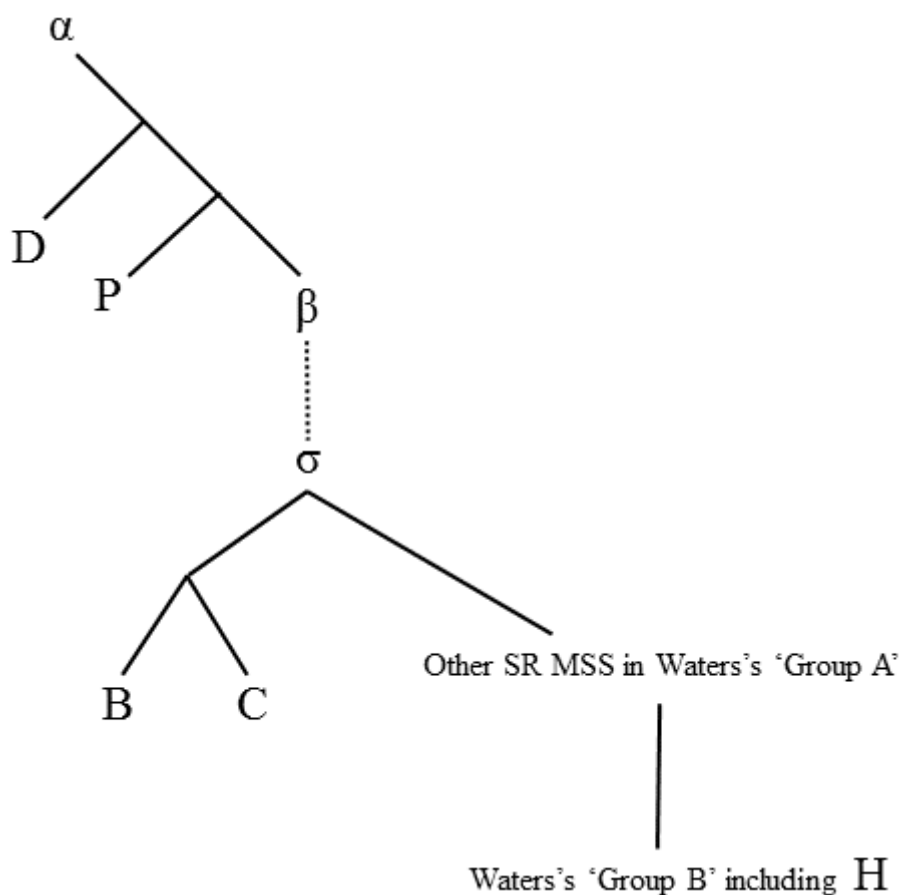


Figure 3

Preliminary stemma for the ancestry and early dissemination of the Southern Recension of 'The Prick of Conscience'

consult a Main Version text of the poem when his main exemplar was clearly in error, confounding any neat stemmatic diagram.⁶¹ The textual history of the Southern

⁶¹ For example, PD both contain a distinctive error in which *Morris* l.2844, a gloss on a quotation, was copied as a gloss on the previous quotation as well, replacing *Morris* l.2834: P, f.36^v, ll.2 and 11; D, f.38^v, ll.24 and 35. This error does not occur in B (f.272^v, l.38, and 273^r, l.9) or C (f.35^r, ll.18 and 27), which have the correct Main Version Group I reading. This error may be specific to PD rather than a Group III feature, as some other Group III manuscripts do not have it (for example, BodL, MS Rawl. A.366, f.83^r, ll.2 and 11). However, there are also errors in PD which probably existed in the redactor's exemplar but were corrected seemingly without reference to another Main Version text: P (f.43^r, ll.10–18) and D (f.46^r, l.35 to f.46^v, l.6) both announce ten remedies for venial sins but err and only list nine (compare *Morris*, ll.3401–09); BC supply a tenth ('kissynge of þe grounde': B f.280^v, ll.4–12; and C f.42^v, ll.17) which I have not found in Main Version texts.

Recension is a significant subject in its own right, and will require more research. However, as will be demonstrated below, there are distinct trends in the changes separating BC from PD which are very probably the result of the redactor's work. I will therefore speak of all instances in which BC agree against PD as though they are the redactor's work. I do not emend the texts. This exercise is not an attempt to reconstruct a text closer to the original text of the Southern Recension.⁶² It is, instead, an attempt to see what kinds of reading that act of revising entailed and anticipated.

Most of the types of changes which the redactor made for future readers can be grasped from any sample passage, such as the opening to Part VI. The source text of the poem in front of him probably read much like this:

Mony men here spekeþ of helle
 Bote of þo peynys here fewe can telle
 Bote who so myȝte here wyte
 And knowe wele þe soþ ȝyte
 What peynys þe synfulle schule þere fele
 He myȝte vnderestonde wele
 Þei schulde in grete drede be brouȝt
 Euere whenne þei on þei peynys þoȝt
 For þe mynde of hem myȝte hem fere
 So byttere and oryble þei beþ þere
 Bute for þi mony knoweþ noȝt a ryȝt
 What kynne peynys in helle beþ diȝt
With outyn ende for a synfulle man
 Þerfore y wole schewe ȝow as y can
 Aparty of heore peynys sere
 As ȝe may sone aftirward here
 Bote furst y wole schewe ȝow where ys helle
 As y haue herde grete clerkes telle
 And syþen wole y schewe ȝow more
 And speke of þe peynys þat ben þore. (D, f.86^v, l.25 to f.87^r, l.7)⁶³

⁶² A critical edition of the Southern Recension ('critical' in the sense that it sought to approach the text produced by the redactor) would be valuable. I hope that some of the observations offered here might be of use in any such effort, even though the process of editing the text might well correct or contradict some of them.

⁶³ Compare *Morris*, ll.6419–36. P has missing leaves here.

The equivalent lines in the Southern Recension read as follows:

Many a man spekith and tellith of helle
 Ande of þe peynes þereof fewe conneth telle
 But what man þat myght on erthe witte
 And knowe þo wele and þe sothe vnder zitte
 What peynes þe synnefulle schulle fele þere
 He myght hym wele vndirstond to haf grete fere
 But for þan þat men knoweth noght aryght
 What maner peynes beth in helle dyght
 With outen eny ende to asynfulle man
 Therefore I wille 3owe tellyn als I can
 And firste to 3owe schewe where is helle
 Als I haue hard thereof clerkys telle. (B, f.315^v, ll.21–32)⁶⁴

Despite many smaller interventions, the communicated meaning of the passage changes very little. The Southern Recension is a slightly shorter and substantially fatter version of the text. Whole couplets are removed so that, for example, the last two lines of the selection from the original text disappear, perhaps because readers are expected to infer that the details of the pains will follow. At the same time, however, words are added to many of the surviving lines to clarify and emphasise their meaning: men ‘spekith *and tellith*’ of hell, and the pains are arranged ‘With outen *eny* ende’ (my emphases). This aspect of the redactor’s interventions is perhaps comprehensible as a more extensive and programmatic application of the habit of alteration towards greater clarity and greater emphasis identified by Kane.⁶⁵ Some of these additions seem only to slow the lines down and alter the metre, as when ‘Mony men’ becomes ‘Many a man’.

What might each of these changes in turn reveal about reading? The redactor removed a number of lines so that his readers would not read them, implicitly judging that these lines were either unnecessary or directly unhelpful. The Main Version does

⁶⁴ Compare C, 79^v, ll.13–24.

⁶⁵ Kane, ed., *A Version*, 128. Windeatt, 132–33, also notes clarity as a conscious or unconscious goal in scribal variation.

tend to labour its points, but the lines removed in the Southern Recension are not in any simple way redundant. For example, the opening of Part VI collapses eight lines into the four lines reading:

But what man þat myght on erthe witte
And knowe þo wele and þe sothe vnder 3itte
What peynes þe synnefulle schulle fele þere
He myght hym wele vndirstond to haf grete fere.

The overarching point remains the same: knowledge of the pains of hell instils salutary fear. But the Southern Recension loses various smaller touches. The hint at affective reading practices in the DP texts' description of people afraid 'Euere whenne þei on þei peynys þo3t' is gone, for example. Indeed, the whole complex dance of grammatical subjects in DP which switches from the hypothetical 'who so' to the sinful, back to the hypothetical thinker, to a group, possibly the sinful again, and finally to the 'mynde' (probably here in the sense of 'thought' rather than modern English 'mind'), is gone.⁶⁶ In DP readers must pick with care through changing subjects, and also unmarked switches in the referents of pronouns: 'þe mynde of hem [the pains of hell] my3te hem [those who think on the pains] fere'. Similarly, the unglossed oscillation in DP between 'here' and 'þere', which requires the reader or listener to pay close attention, and might goad them into acting 'here' so as to avoid going 'þere', is regularised by this shortening to a series of references to 'þere' only in the Southern Recension. By collapsing these lines the redactor achieved an effect similar to the addition of more sophisticated navigational apparatus: the new text is more clearly organised and demands less from the reader. Increasing clarity and brevity allow for more passive

⁶⁶ *MED*, 'minde (n.(1))', sense 3c.

reading, in which the reader does not have to spend as much effort deciphering an unclear set of grammatical relationships.

It might be possible to guess at the ways in which the redactor's own reading was conditioned by his education. His work untangling grammar, and particularly clarifying pronouns' referents seems like a natural extension of the kind of linguistic training provided in grammar school. When learning Latin, students were trained to attend to grammatical agreement rather than looking for grammatically meaningful syntax.⁶⁷ The redactor's ability to supply synonyms and restatements which fill lines out, too, echoes the emphasis in grammar-school teaching on acquiring an extended vocabulary of nouns to use in translation. And the kinds of paraphrasing and parsing evinced by this redactor and other rewriters discussed in this chapter were stock school exercises. These observations might bolster Christopher Cannon's suggestion that late fourteenth-century verse production in English was at least conditioned, and perhaps produced, by the role of verse in the relatively new practice of Latin instruction in English.⁶⁸ These two activities did not play equal parts in the production of the Southern Recension. The redactor is an enthusiastic parser, intervening in the vast majority of lines and frequently tinkering with grammar, but at least in this piece of work he paraphrased much more rarely.

⁶⁷ For detailed examples of these kinds of training see Nicholas Orme, *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England* (London, 1989), 79, 92 and 94. For later medieval grammatical training see Orme, *Medieval Schools*, 105–18.

⁶⁸ 'The Middle English Writer's Schoolroom: Fourteenth-Century English Schoolbooks and their Contents', *New Medieval Literatures*, 11 (2009), 19–38. Cannon's conclusion perhaps needs to be tested against earlier Middle English verse production, but the exercises he uses to illustrate his argument are illuminating.

Cutting and paraphrasing are less common in the Southern Recension than small-scale alterations, and the removal of lines is not evenly spread through the poem. It is unlikely that the redactor began with the settled intention of shortening the text, and carried out a premeditated programme of shortening. Instead, the excisions—which are often precise enough to be clearly intentional rather than accidental—come thick and fast in some sections and barely occur in others. In Parts I–IV, for example, I have found seventy-six cuts. As in other facets of his rewriting activity, in his cutting the redactor tended to make only local interventions, leaving the general scheme unaltered. In the first four parts of the poem a majority of forty-seven cuts are only two lines long (or one couplet, if the poem is read as a series of rhyme units). A few cuts might well be errors, as in the disappearance of Latin quotations,⁶⁹ but many others leave the text as it stands making sense, and in some cases the cut material was amalgamated into surrounding lines, or single lines were cut from two adjacent couplets, with the two remaining lines being combined into one couplet—moments of deliberate surgery rather than a copyist's error.⁷⁰

The redactor's cuts are not spread evenly through the text, but rather concentrated in particular parts. We cannot have precise figures for the lengths of each part in the redactor's exemplar, but it is probable that like PD it was very complete, so we can use the line-number figures available in *Morris* for broad comparisons. The contrasts are dramatic enough that precision is unnecessary: for example, in the exemplar Part IV would probably have been around 1300 lines long, and the redactor

⁶⁹ For instance at the equivalents to *Morris*, l.1892–93, for example, or at ll.2514–15.

⁷⁰ For example, the equivalents to *Morris*, ll.1820–21 were amalgamated into ll.1822–23; the two couplets which were the equivalents of *Morris*, ll.2518–21 were folded into one couplet with neither original couplet particularly retaining its identity.

made sixteen cuts, while Part III was probably only around 1000 lines long but received fifty-five cuts—about one cut for every ten couplets. By contrast, I have found only five cuts in the poem's first 1800 lines. The redactor imposed larger individual cuts in Part III, including the only twenty-four-line cut and the only two ten-line cuts that I have found.⁷¹ He also cumulatively cut more from it, removing about a fifth of its length. Part III is the poem's discussion 'Of þe dede and whi it es to drede'. The poem speaks of death extensively elsewhere, so perhaps the redactor found more points in this part which seemed redundant. But any explanation must be speculative, and it might be possible that there is a basic cognitive explanation: perhaps the redactor was simply more engaged while reading that part, and therefore more often moved to remove text. Furthermore, the fact that the redactor seems to have started fairly conservatively and then to have begun cutting lines increasingly often as he entered the second and third parts might not reflect increasing disagreement with the poem but rather increasing confidence in his abilities. His reading practice certainly varied significantly as he worked.

In his small-scale rearrangements and amalgamations, which generally coincide with cuts, the redactor was able to read closely and manipulate his anticipated readers' experience precisely. For example, at one point the source text probably read something like this:

For certeyne he seyþ aman wote nouȝt
 Þauȝ he haue neuer so mucche gode wrouȝt
 Wheþere he were worþi aftur hys dede
 To haue loue of god or ellys haterede
 And y fynde aboke þat þus schewyþ vs

⁷¹ The equivalents to *Morris*, ll.2574–98, 2440–09 and 2458–67.

Acordeþ þerto þat seyþ þus. (D f.34^v, ll.11–16)⁷²

In the Southern Recension this becomes:

He sayes þat no man wote witterly
Whethir he be loue worthy
Or hatedde be proper skille
As Isodre accordethe þere ille. (B f.269^v, ll.19–22)⁷³

This is a set of amalgamations, not an eyeskip error: the redactor squashed the four lines equivalent to *Morris*, lines 2516–19 into three, rhyming the third line with a fourth created by combining *Morris*, lines 2520–21. Both of the rhymes are new. The result is inelegant, but the effort involved was precise and acute. Another good example of similar precision is the redactor's use of a combination of cuts, rearrangements and amalgamations a few hundred lines earlier. Here the source text probably said something like:

Bei schule dispute þen of al owre lyue
Wyþ grete discord and grete stryue
þe angelus schule reherse þe gode
And þe deuelys þe yuele *with* grete mode
Alle þe werkes þat we haue here wrouȝt
Bytweyx hem þen schal be owt souȝt
And eche a þouȝt and eche awylle
As wele þe gode as þe ylle
And eche aword þat spekyn haue we
Gode othur ylle wheþer so hyt be. (D f.32^v, l.37 to f.33^r, l.9)⁷⁴

In the Southern Recension, this became:

The aungels schalle reherce the goode
And þe fendes þe Ille with þe egir moode
Ilke a thoght and ilke a wille

⁷² The equivalents to *Morris*, ll.2516–21. P lacks leaves here. In D's text Isidore has been lost from the last line quoted.

⁷³ Compare C f.31^v, ll.31–34. Here Isidore is included. We cannot know whether this was simply an omission in D but not Pβ, or a case in which β was a better text than PD, or a case in which the redactor corrected β from another source, or a case in which the redactor corrected β from his own knowledge.

⁷⁴ Compare *Morris*, ll.2388–97. P lacks leaves here.

And ilke a worde bothe goode and ille
 Betwene þaim þare schall be oute soghte
 And all oure lyue þei schall leue noghte. (B f.268^v, ll.13–18)⁷⁵

Here the first two lines of the passage have been cut entirely, the fifth and sixth lines have been moved to the end of the passage and noticeably altered, and the final four lines have been amalgamated into a single couplet. The result still makes sense: it was created carefully. Such behaviour is very much the pattern for the revisions in the Southern Recension.

That the redactor could execute such complex small-scale rearrangements but did not attempt medium- or large-scale alterations suggests that in general he read the ordering of ideas in *The Prick of Conscience* with approval and simply wished to transmit it to his readers in a style that they would find more amenable. It is noteworthy that in the parts surveyed he never carries out larger-scale reorderings even though these would have been easier to coordinate using navigational aids than detailed surgery.⁷⁶ Paradoxically, subtle rearrangement might have been exactly what the redactor was saving later readers from having to do: if he created a cleaner, clearer reading experience, was he attempting to provide what he felt his exemplar lacked? His rewriting for readers is not characterised by concision above all else. It is a subtler engagement with form and style.

Indeed, the redactor was seemingly willing to increase the number of lines at points. In Part I the redactor added several lines:

Þis dale where wonyn in . þorwh clerkys clepid es

⁷⁵ Compare C f.30^v, ll.25–30.

⁷⁶ The fact that Morris felt able to borrow a detailed table of contents from a later Southern Recension copy in his Main Version edition attests to the lack of change in the large- and medium-scale organisation of the poem: Morris, ed., *Pricke of Conscience*, xxxiv–xli, taken from Princeton University Library, MS Garrett 138, ff.1^r–6^v.

þe more werd . and man is þe les
 Of þe lesse werd . wil I not speke 3it
 For aftirward . I shal speke of it. (P f.22^v, ll.18–21)⁷⁷

This dale for . sothe þere we wonnethe jnne
 That is full of wrechidnesse of sinne
 Of wise clerkis I clepyd is
 The more worlde as men may knowe be þis
 And of þe lesse world wil j noght 3it speke
 For afterward I wil into þat mattere breke. (B f.243^r, ll.25–30)⁷⁸

There is no immediately obvious reason for this reconfiguration, but there are indications elsewhere in the Southern Recension that the redactor disliked the poet's occasional use of the second half of a line for a separate or contrasting statement, as in the second of the lines from the DP text here. Soon afterwards, for example, he replaces a brief half-line tag in the source, 'as is oftin sene' with a phrase restating the line's first half.⁷⁹ It might be that he felt that substantial changes of topic or mode of address in the middle of lines were difficult for readers and decided to eliminate them. The complete removal of the identification of 'þe lesse world' as 'man' might be driven by a similar desire to avoid confusing readers by introducing ideas until they are discussed in full.

The redactor's changes also seem to be characterised by a concern to facilitate more affective, emotionally engaged reading. In Part II, when in PD the text offers a few comforting words reminding readers of grace, the Southern Recension includes an extra couplet connecting this to the crucifixion:

3it 3if þe soule . þorwh sinne be slayne
 It may þorwh grace quekyn a gayne. (P 30^v, ll.39–40)⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Compare *Morris*, ll.1046–49. In P or an ancestor the first of these lines has lost the word 'we'.

⁷⁸ Also C f.15^r, ll.33–38.

⁷⁹ P f.23^r, l.39; B f.254^r, l.12; *Morris*, l.1109.

⁸⁰ Compare *Morris*, ll.1722–23.

Nere þe les if þe soule *with* synne be slayne
 3it sche may begrace becom whik agayne
 For god here dere boght on þe roode tre
 In þe blisse of paradise euer *with* hym to be. (B 262^r, ll.9–12)⁸¹

This addition might suggest that the redactor here wanted to stimulate reading which was more affective: the Southern Recension introduces the images of the crucifixion and of paradise, and perhaps glancingly touches on the idea of Christ as the soul's lover. An emphatic if rather plodding additional couplet at the end of Part III suggests a desire to stimulate prayerful engagement from readers, and perhaps reveals some emotional engagement from the redactor himself:

And come to þe blisse . of heuene bryth
 Þer þat euere is day . and neuere nyth. (P f.34^v, ll.11–12)⁸²

In purgatorye schalle passe lyght
 And sone be broghte to blisse ful bright
 To whilke godde he brynge vs
 For þus sayes the wysemen þus. (B f.271^r, ll.5–8)⁸³

A similar sense of sincere enthusiasm is discernible in the six pious lines added in the Southern Recension to the very end of Part IV, supplementing the lines introducing Part V:

Nowe may I speke of þe day of dome
 And of tokens þat before schalle come
 Here vs to warnyn þat we be euer 3are
 Oure soules frome synne euyr to spare
 Who so ofte þis booke wille rede
 And þe more hym bysy to do goode dede
 It wille do hym fle synne *and* god to drede

⁸¹ Also C f.24^r, ll.13–16.

⁸² *Morris*, ll.2680–81.

⁸³ Also C f.33^r, ll.20–23. The additional lines in the Southern Recension here are not in P, D or *Morris*, though they are similar to the conventional beginning and ending prayers found in verse of this kind (for example, *Morris*, ll.8 and 9620).

And heuyn at þe ende get to mede. (B f.287^r, ll.31–38)⁸⁴

The new lines are conventional and very like the general advice on how to read found at the start and end of *The Prick of Conscience*.⁸⁵ But they are not thoughtless, and there is perhaps even an attempt at a bravura flourish linking rhyme and sense here in the double-couplet *rede-dede-drede-mede* sequence. Emotional engagement might also lie behind the redactor's probable addition of the two new lines following the original poem's invocation of martyrs: 'Of holy martires þat wel loued Cristes lay | For wose loue þei were broght in grete affray'.⁸⁶

So, then, despite the finicky nature of the redactor's task, it might be unfair to think of his reading as clinical and detached. These alterations might vary in their nature but, just like the limited size of the number of lines removed, they demonstrate that the original redactor of the Southern Recension was not committed simply to shortening the poem for his readers. They also hint at a certain enthusiasm in the redactor's reading of the poem, and a wish to stimulate similar enthusiasm in his anticipated readers. Perhaps these moments enhance the text's devotional possibilities: the redactor might have had in mind laypeople using the poem for personal or household devotion as a potential audience.

⁸⁴ Also C f.49^v, ll.19–26. The first two lines here are the equivalent of *Morris*, ll.3964–65, and the other six have been added. P does not contain this passage because of lost leaves, but D does not have the final six lines (which would appear at 54^r, 4–5).

⁸⁵ *Morris*, ll.336–45 and ll.9594–99. And indeed *SVRE*, ll.16063–68: this kind of self-reflexive recommendation is probably a standard feature of the tradition in which these texts were written.

⁸⁶ B f.285^v, ll.11–12 or C f.47^v, ll.34–35, following the equivalent of *Morris*, l.3825, but not attested in PD or *Morris*. Similarly, the redactor intensified and extended the original poem's description of God's plan to refill heaven with humanity after Lucifer's fall: B f.245^r, ll.1–8 and C f.6^v, l.33 to f.7^r, l.2 (*Morris*, 388–93).

A trend in the redactor's alteration of pronouns might also offer information about his reading of the original poem and the kinds of reading he wished to cultivate. The redactor repeatedly inserted additional moments of first-person speech. In this case the changes make the poem more personal. The redactor injects the first person into the text more often, and more forcefully.⁸⁷ Some individual instances of added first-person pronouns might be phatic filler phrases or rhyming tags, as when the Southern Recension promises that 'what it [death] is schortely to saye / 3e schulle witte or þan I wende a way' or that 'the sothe as I to 3owe tellyn can / There may befounde none so *perfit* man'.⁸⁸ But the intervention is persistent and widespread enough to suggest deliberate alteration, and the changes do not always make significant differences to lines' metre, rhyme or length. For example, in one short passage the following replacements occur:

To þis. þus answere men may
As men moun here grete clerkys say. (P f.38^v, ll.35–36)⁸⁹

To þis þus I wele answeryn may
Als I haue hard grete clerkys say. (B f.275^r, ll.25–26)⁹⁰

To þis . men moun answere þus shortly. (P f.39^r, l.13)⁹¹

⁸⁷ I avoid the word 'narrator', drawing on A. C. Spearing's persuasive argument that it is anachronistic to apply modern theories positing a unified narrator for every text to later medieval English literature: *Textual Subjectivity: The Encoding of Subjectivity in Medieval Narratives and Lyrics* (Oxford, 2005). *The Prick of Conscience* has moments of *narration* but they do not form a separately characterised persona, and indeed the most 'characterised' moments of first-person speech in the poem are direct appeals for prayer from the poet, who would presumably be distressed to find himself supplanted in readers' prayers by a narrator.

⁸⁸ B f.264^r, ll.7–8; C f.25^r, ll.12–13. Compare P f.31^v, ll.38–39, 'what deth is propirli to say / Ho so wil wete shortli he may'; and *Morris*, ll.1800–01. For other examples see B f.279^r, ll.35–36; C f.41^v, ll.7–8; (*Morris*, ll.3330–31; P f.42^v, ll.17–18; D f.45^v, ll.1–2). See also B f.279^v, l.35; C f.42^r, l.7 (P f.43^r, l.9; *Morris*, l.3362). The shortest and most phatic-seeming tag that the redactor adds is 'I wis' in, for example, B f.264^r, l.6 and C f.25^r, l.11.

⁸⁹ Compare *Morris*, ll.3026–27.

⁹⁰ Also C f.37^v, ll.7–8.

⁹¹ Compare *Morris*, ll.3044.

To þis þus I may answeyn schortely. (B f.275^v, l.3)⁹²

And þis may be prouyd . be þe gospelle
Porwh ensample . of a ryche man in helle. (P f.39^r, ll.25–26)⁹³

And þis preuyn right wele I can
Thurghe ensample of a riche man. (B f.275^v, l.15)⁹⁴

Sometimes first-person verbs appear in the Southern Recension when the Group III text never includes any kind of external comment, however impersonal:

But þei sweche vanites forsake
And here be times a mendis make. (P f.29^r, ll.23–24)⁹⁵

But I consayle iche man such vanitees forsake
And in þis werlde betymes amendes to make. (B f.259^v, ll.27–28)⁹⁶

Some of the redactor's changes place greater emphasis on the learning transmitted by the poem. PD introduce Part III with phrases such as 'Now wil I passe ferthere more | To þe thridde part . and se what is þore'.⁹⁷ The Southern Recension instead promises that 'Nowe will I in þis boke pas forthir more | To schewe 3owe in þe þird parte somewhat of my lore'.⁹⁸ Here the narration has changed from an observational stance, travelling through the text with the reader—or, if the poem is read aloud, the listener—to the controlling position of a figure who shows off their learning. The redactor's modification of 'As y schewede byfore opynly | Spekes innocent and austyn' to read 'I haue here myne auctours afor me Iset | As þerof spekith Innocent þe pope *and* Seynt Austyn' displays a similar concern to emphasise the delegated authority of the

⁹² Also C f.37^v, l.25.

⁹³ Compare *Morris*, ll.3056–57.

⁹⁴ Also C f.37^v, ll.37–38.

⁹⁵ Compare *Morris*, ll.1588–89.

⁹⁶ Also C f.22^r, ll.11–12.

⁹⁷ P f.30^r, ll.12–13. Compare *Morris*, ll.1658–59.

⁹⁸ B f.261^r, ll.21–22; C f.23^r, ll.25–26.

compilatorial narration.⁹⁹ Now the narration comes from the moment of *compilatio* itself, with the *auctores* given their titles and perhaps imagined as both quotations ‘set’ in the text and also as presences inhering in the material books ‘set’ before the writer. The redactor thus lent the poem a more personal tone.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps the emergence of more frequent eruptions of voice in the Southern Recension anticipates a higher likelihood of solitary reading in which the narration is more closely identified with the voice of the poet of *The Prick of Conscience* rather than being inhabited by a reader reading aloud to an audience.

The revision and extension of existing lines is a far more pervasive feature of the Southern Recension than either the removal or the addition of lines. Moreover, the redactor was also increasing the length of the individual lines. The text of the poem used by the redactor and represented here by PD almost certainly retained the poet’s essentially octosyllabic metre, albeit with occasional degeneration, as in the line quoted above, ‘Bot who so my3te here wyte’, which is substantially shorter than it should be and might trouble a reader expecting four stresses.¹⁰¹ By contrast, the Southern Recension’s lines usually last for ten syllables or longer. The redactor also made the Southern Recension more hypotactic. The general shift towards more frequent hypotaxis is primarily created by small line-lengthening additions of subordinating

⁹⁹ D f.53^v, ll.19–20; B f.287^r, ll.10–11; C f.49^r, ll.36–37. Compare *Morris*, ll.3943–44.

¹⁰⁰ Compare the addition of first-person pronouns in one poem in the Findern Manuscript (CUL, MS Ff.i.6) discussed in Seth Lerer, “‘The Tongue’: Chaucer, Lydgate, Charles d’Orléans, and the Making of a Late Medieval Lyric”, *Chaucer Review*, 49 (2015), 474–98 (482–86); here a text is given a more unified and forceful ‘voice’ not to claim authority but to increase its lyrical power.

¹⁰¹ Compare *Morris*, l.6421.

causal conjunctions such as ‘for’.¹⁰² Although hypotaxis involves more complex grammatical structures, it can, as it is here, be a clarifying force which renders the relationships between ideas more explicit. Furthermore, the diction of the poem becomes more Latinate and more elevated: there is nothing dialectically unpalatable about the Pope’s ‘large powere’, for example, but in the Southern Recension it becomes his ‘large Iurisdiccoun’.¹⁰³

The lines of the Southern Recension are, then, generally longer, slower, more repetitious, more hypotactic and more Latinate than those of their source. Taken together these changes create a reading experience which is noticeably higher in register. The redactor probably did not consciously decide on all of these changes, but this is a coherent set of alterations which are all consonant with each other and all work towards one result. The redactor’s changes, taken together, strongly suggest that he judged that the Main Version did not read impressively enough. Again, then, this evidence suggests a strong stylistic element in his rewriting activity.

The aspects of the original text which the rewriter left unchanged are also significant, because it is likely that he approved of these things and wished to pass them on to his anticipated audience. Despite the comprehensive spread of the redactor’s many changes, and the evidence of intention and thought behind his work, he left the poem’s overall structure and *sentence* unchanged. The large-scale structure of the poem is intact, and it makes the same general points in the same order. The redactor, then, spent a great deal of time carrying out a tremendous programme of small-scale revision to

¹⁰² As, in one example, in the change from something like ‘þe peyne of helle shal neuere sees’ to ‘For þe peynes of helle schulle neuyr cese’; P f.35^r, l.34 and B f.271^v, l.28. Compare C f.34^r, l.7; and *Morris*, l.2744.

¹⁰³ P f.49^r, l.24; B f.286^r, l.6; C f.48^r, l.28; *Morris*, l.3859.

offer the same *sentence* in a different style. Evidently the redactor read the PD text of *The Prick of Conscience* with a certain amount of local disagreement but firmly agreed with the poem's general structure and goals. Perhaps the redactor read the Main Version as something which was unclear and insufficiently fashionable, and therefore as something which had to be made more readable and palatable while retaining the same content.

In response, his rewriting activity offered other readers a text which conformed to a different set of formalist norms, involving longer lines and more Latinate diction, while also clarifying and explicating at every turn. Broadly speaking, the Southern Recension anticipates and encourages more passive reading than the Main Version of the poem: it signals its moves more clearly, avoids bringing multiple ideas up at the same time, and has slower lines with more internal redundancy. Perhaps the redactor trusted his readers less; he certainly produced a text which trusts readers less and allows them more limited responsibility. Without limiting the poem's potential audience, and with the qualification that this may be unfair to lay readers, it seems reasonable to speculate that the redactor may have had lay audiences, perhaps unsupervised lay audiences, more in mind than the original poet of *The Prick of Conscience* did.

We might also ask how the redactor of the Southern Recension compares to the other writers discussed in this chapter, and to medieval (re)writers in general. Other rewriters discussed here engaged with the form and style of their source texts for practical reasons, but usually in muted and quite possibly habitual, unconscious ways. Most of the other examples discussed here are short and relatively simple exercises in excerpting. The redactor of the Southern Recension, by contrast, seems to have had the

confidence, strong opinions and writerly self-possession required to carry out something subtler, though still something with a firm practical purpose.

Slices of *Speculum Vitae*

We have no surviving equivalent text created using *Speculum Vitae*, but we do have a text which is a methodological mirror image: a highly selective collection of excerpts, subject to drastic large-scale rearrangements, yet only conservatively edited on the small scale—just enough to demonstrate that it is not simply a collection of notes. This text can tell us about a different kind of reading. The text is only known to survive in one manuscript.¹⁰⁴ It offers an interesting contrast to the kind of rewriting witnessed by the Southern Recension of *The Prick of Conscience*: in the Southern Recension the small-scale reading experience is dramatically altered but the content and its structure remain stable, while in this text the structure is altered while the small-scale reading experience on the level of lines is only changed slightly, with no indication of stylistic divergence. Furthermore, in contrast to many of the other revisions (noted above), in this case the rewriter's own reading is relatively close to the kind of reading anticipated by the new text. The text appears to invite or cultivate much the same kind of reading as its source, simply in a smaller space. As in some of the other examples, the text is a kind of pre-reading, a pre-emptive exercise in discontinuous reading by the redactor, so that his readers in turn could concentrate on the passages selected and reordered.

¹⁰⁴ LPL, Sion College MS Arch. L.40.2/E.25, ff.1^r–12^v; known as *IMEV* 557.3, sometimes mis-identified as a variant of *IMEV* 694. First correctly, if obliquely, identified in Richard Morris, ed., *Dan Michel's Aynbite of Inwyte, or, Remorse of Conscience*, EETS, o.s., 23 (London, 1866), preface [2], n.1; Morris's note is itself noted by Hope Emily Allen, *Authorship*, 169, n.1. Most recently described in *Morris*, xxxii–iv. See also *DG*, 82–83. This text has never been discussed in any detail. It is transcribed in full with corresponding line numbers from *SVRE* in Appendix 2.

Middle English writings offer other examples which are comparable in some of their aspects. Similarly precise cuts were made during the transmission of the *Lyfe of Soul*.¹⁰⁵ However, while there are fascinating abridgements of text in two of the three surviving manuscripts of that text, it did not experience the kind of outright rearrangements which mark this redaction of *Speculum Vitae*.¹⁰⁶ A more impressive rearrangement and re-contextualisation is offered by some treatments of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, especially one collection of excerpts which display wide recall and precise control in their construction.¹⁰⁷

Some of the 'unnoticed fragments' of *The Prick of Conscience* studied by Derek Britton also offer an interesting, if small, analogue to this treatment of *Speculum Vitae*.¹⁰⁸ These three excerpts are discontinuous and similarly reordered: the first two, the poem's discussion of venial sins and the poem's discussion of ways to atone for venial sins, appear in the opposite order to their positions in the poem (only twenty lines apart), while the third, the poem's discussion of astronomy, has had the religious references removed from it.¹⁰⁹ The miscellany in which these excerpts are found is dominated by scientific texts, and so Britton argued quite plausibly that the scribe

¹⁰⁵ Helen M. Moon, ed., *Be Lyfe of Soule: An Edition with Commentary*, Salzburg Studies in English Literature, Elizabethan and Renaissance Studies, 75 (1978, Salzburg), xvi–xix.

¹⁰⁶ The fullest available version of the text survives in BodL, Laud Misc. 210, ff.114^r–132^v. The text is abridged in HEHL, MS HM 502 (ff.35^r–60^v) and abridged further in BL, MS Arundel 286 (ff.115^r–129^r).

¹⁰⁷ Nigel Mortimer, *John Lydgate's Fall of Princes: Narrative Tragedy in its Literary and Political Contexts* (Oxford, 2005), 234–38. See also A. S. G. Edwards (1972) 'John Lydgate, Medieval Antifeminism and Harley 2251', *Annuaire Mediaevale*, 13 (1972) 32–44. For another example involving the *Fall of Princes*, see Lerer.

¹⁰⁸ Britton, 'Unnoticed Fragments'; TCC, MS O.2.40, ff.104^r–105^r and 119^r–v.

¹⁰⁹ Britton, 'Unnoticed Fragments', 328. Britton also notes the removal of 'all statements which are repetitious, long winded, obvious, or simplistic'—perhaps the most catechetical aspects of the poem's content—in the third excerpt (328).

himself, Wymondham, was the redactor. Wymondham had a similarly selective and precise sense for what he wanted to read, and a similar ability to excerpt widely from a text, editing in detail as he did so. In some ways, then, his excerpting, rearranging treatment of short passages from *The Prick of Conscience* resembles the excerpting of *Speculum Vitae*.

However, while Wymondham had read *The Prick of Conscience* discontinuously to make his excerpts, no future reader of the results could flit around within them, since they are quite short. These excerpts are also different from the excerpting of *Speculum Vitae* because, as with the removal of the religious references in the astronomical passages, there is a larger gap between the reading experience offered by the source and that offered by the rewritten text even though the rewriter's anticipated audience was probably only the rewriter himself. By contrast (as we shall see) there is a closer likeness between the *Speculum Vitae* reviser's reading and any future readers' reading of the revision.

The text created by excerpting from *Speculum Vitae* survives in only one known witness. This book is also one of the four known manuscripts which contain parts of both *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae*.¹¹⁰ It contains work by three scribes, copying four different texts on four paper stocks. The activity of all three scribes is connected by their collaboration on *The Prick of Conscience*.¹¹¹ In fact, all the divisions

¹¹⁰ The other three are BL, MS Add. 22283 (Simeon) and MS Add. 33995; and MS Eng. poet. a.1 (Vernon).

¹¹¹ The surviving quires of the manuscript are organised as follows (see *SVRE*, I, xl–xlii; and *MMBL*, I, 289):

- Scribe 1, stock A, a collection of excerpts from *Speculum Vitae*
- Scribe 2, stock A, Verse gospel of Nicodemus (*IMEV* 512)
- Scribe 2, stock A, Verse gospel of Nicodemus
- Scribe 2, stock B, Dialogue of St Bernard and the Virgin (*IMEV* 771)
- Scribe 1, stock C, *The Prick of Conscience*

between texts in this manuscript match divisions between quires, and Hanna assigns each text a separate booklet in his description. In the more precise terms offered by Gumbert, this book is a homogenetic composite manuscript with four codicological units.¹¹²

While the manuscript's physical construction suggests that these texts were not necessarily copied with the settled intention of creating this manuscript as we have it, these quires are clearly productions from the same milieu. Hanna notes the collocation of some of these texts in other manuscripts.¹¹³ He has elsewhere connected these other manuscripts to the possibility of organised or semi-organised production based in a Yorkshire population centre such as Ripon and directed at the dissemination of a proto-canon of religious instructional texts in English.¹¹⁴ This manuscript is not necessarily the product of this proposed production centre, and in some respects it is unlike the manuscripts which probably are. But its production milieu may have had a relationship with this other, better-known production centre, if it existed. The possibility of such a relationship might itself suggest something about the history of the reading of these

Scribe 1, stock D, *The Prick of Conscience*
 Scribe 3, stock A, *The Prick of Conscience*
 Scribe 3, stock A, *The Prick of Conscience*
 Scribe 3, stock A, *The Prick of Conscience*
 Scribe 2, stock A, *The Prick of Conscience*
 Scribe 2, stock A, *The Prick of Conscience*
 Scribe 2, stock A, *The Prick of Conscience*.

¹¹² In the terms offered in J. P. Gumbert, 'Codicological Units', the first three units are unarticulated, and consist of the first quire, the second and third quires together, and the fourth quire. The fourth codicological unit is articulated, and can be divided into four blocks: the fifth quire; the sixth quire; the seventh, eighth and ninth quires; and the tenth, eleventh and twelfth quires.

¹¹³ *IMEV* 512 is also found in MSS Cotton Galba E.ix and Harley 4196, both of which contain copies of *The Prick of Conscience*, and in MS Cotton Tiberius E.vii, which contains a copy of *Speculum Vitae*. *IMEV* 771 is also found in MS Cotton Tiberius E.vii, and alongside *The Prick of Conscience* in MS Rawl. poet. 175; the related *IMEV* 1869 is found alongside *The Prick of Conscience* in MS Douce 126.

¹¹⁴ Hanna, 'North Yorkshire Scribes', 169.

poems. This book could be a rare surviving example of the kind of book which that possible programmatic dissemination led to, and was perhaps in part intended to create: the bottom layer of a ‘trickle-down’ process of reading and dissemination. In this model, relatively substantial manuscripts could have acted as exemplars, while books such as this were personal reference books for individual reading.¹¹⁵

The textual-critical status of the texts in this book might also reveal that these poems were in high demand, being frequently read and copied. Britton remarked, correctly from the evidence available to him, that the copy of *The Prick of Conscience* in this book is textually distant from the presumed original and would not be very useful for a critical edition.¹¹⁶ However, Lewis and McIntosh point out that the text changes from a Group I version to a Group IV version. While the second exemplar used for this book’s copy of *The Prick of Conscience* is less good, the first exemplar, used by Scribe 1 and for the first part of Scribe 3’s stint, is a good text of the poem, good enough to be of use to its editors.¹¹⁷ Hanna and Wood offer a scenario of collaborative production in which the three scribes used two exemplars.¹¹⁸ And, from my observations, the new text formed from excerpts from *Speculum Vitae* is also quite a good witness to the text of that poem—except where the rewriter deliberately altered it. In other words, as far as *Speculum Vitae* and *The Prick of Conscience* are concerned, this manuscript contains copies from two textually good exemplars and one textually poor one, all available to

¹¹⁵ Example relatively substantial manuscripts are MS Rawl. poet. 175, MS Cotton Galba E.ix and MS Harley 4196.

¹¹⁶ Britton, ‘Unnoticed Fragments’, 329.

¹¹⁷ *Morris*, lxxv.

¹¹⁸ The shift occurs at the equivalent of *Morris*, l.2850, during Scribe 3’s stint, on MS Arch. L.40.2/E.25, f.83r. *Morris*, xxxiii.

the scribes and considered ‘current’ at the time of the copying of the various quires which now form this book. Taken together, this evidence suggests a context in which both poems were being read frequently, and a context in which there was both demand and the supply of exemplars necessary to allow scribes to collaborate to meet that demand more rapidly. In other words, this book constitutes further evidence for the ‘exemplar wealth’ I proposed above.¹¹⁹

The redaction of *Speculum Vitae* begins and ends imperfectly, part way through a unit of sense in both cases, confirming that there was more to this reconfigured collection of parts of *Speculum Vitae* than survives today.¹²⁰ How much more? To frame the question more precisely: Gumbert distinguishes between defective codicological units which are ‘torsos’, which have suffered only limited loss, and ‘fragments’, which are only a small proportion of the original unit—is this booklet a torso or merely a fragment?¹²¹ Only twelve leaves survive in the first quire. Both Hanna and Ker suggest that it was once a quire of fourteen and that it lost its first two leaves.¹²² To my eyes, however, the signatures visible on the bottom right-hand corners of the rectos of the first five leaves begin with ‘ij’ and run to ‘vj’, while string is visible between the fifth and sixth leaves, and between the eleventh and twelfth.¹²³ Furthermore, there is a textual disjunction between the end of the verso of the tenth leaf

¹¹⁹ See above, 39–40.

¹²⁰ MS Arch. L.40.2/E.25, f.1^r, ll.1–2 are *SVRE*, ll.7799–7800; and f.12^v, ll.33–34 are *SVRE*, ll.15041–42.

¹²¹ Gumbert, ‘Stratigraphy’, 30.

¹²² Or in notation, 1¹⁴ (-1, -2). MS Arch. L.40.2/E.25, ff.1–12. *MMBL*, 289; and *SVRE*, xli.

¹²³ MS Arch. L.40.2/E.25, ff.1–5. The manuscript was rebound in 1994, recently enough that the binders are likely to have preserved the previous collation.

and the beginning of the recto of the eleventh.¹²⁴ It therefore seems likely to me that this booklet is the remains of two quires.¹²⁵ The opening excerpt is the end of a numbered list which retains its numbering, and therefore may have had at least ninety additional lines. This additional material could not fit onto a single leaf without omissions which, at this point in his practice, the rewriter was not making. As I discuss below, the reviser usually stripped the numbering out of numbered lists which were not included in full. There might well, therefore, have been at least one quire preceding this one, which would mean that this redaction could have been substantially longer—if it was not preceded by other texts.

If the scenario Ker and Hanna offer for the quire's construction is correct, we are driven to the same conclusion by different calculations.¹²⁶ Furthermore, if they are right about this quire then another quire, or at minimum another structure of at least one more leaf, probably followed this quire to finish the text.¹²⁷ The likely existence of a second quire of some kind would further strengthen the possibility of the past independent existence of this copy of the text as a booklet. Whatever the physical structure of the first quire, the fact that this is the only part of the manuscript in which Scribe 1 works on paper stock A also hints that this might not have been part of the same production

¹²⁴ From *SVRE*, l.11390 and an unidentified subtitle to *SVRE*, l.10125

¹²⁵ Perhaps 1¹² (-1, -12), 2¹² (-1–4, -7–12).

¹²⁶ The surviving text begins halfway through a numbered list, at *SVRE*, l.7709; this list is not long enough that it would have filled the quire if the quire began with two additional leaves, and from his behaviour in the surviving text the rewriter is unlikely to have made substantial additions to *Speculum Vitae* which would have bulked the excerpt out. In the Ker-Hanna scenario the earliest that the quire could have begun is around l.7663, which is not close to a convenient large-scale division within *Speculum Vitae*.

¹²⁷ If the quire is 1¹⁴ (-1, -2) then f.12, on which the text ends imperfectly, is its original last leaf. There is no catchword, but there are only three catchwords in the manuscript as a whole, none of them in quires executed by this scribe (MS Arch. L.40.2/E.25, ff.82^v, 113^v and 123^v).

campaign as the rest of the manuscript, with its copy of *The Prick of Conscience*. So: we can be certain that the text was longer than it is now, and it is possible that what survives is a fragment, not a torso, which means that we may have lost substantial portions of this rearrangement of *Speculum Vitae*.

What, then, can the text itself tell us? What kind of reading was it designed for, and what kind of reading of the original poem was necessary to produce it? This text is not a personal collection of notes copied without intervention, because it contains clear evidence of deliberate surgery. There is no possibility that it is accidental, the result of, for example, a scribe copying out what could be salvaged from a severely damaged book. Perhaps the most conclusive signs are the alterations to the lines introducing items which are, in the *Speculum Vitae*, parts of long, numbered lists, thus:

þe thridde thinge es Mynde certayne
Of Crystes Passyoun and his payne. (*SVRE*, ll.9571–72)

It es gude to haue mynde certayne
Of cristes passioun and hys payne. (f.10^r, ll.15–16)

þe thridde thinge es, als methinke,
To vse ay strayte mete and drynke. (*SVRE*, ll.11385–86)

þar for it es god als me thynk
To vse ay strait met and drynk. (f.10^v, ll.26–27)

þe fift leef es Sharpnes of Lyf
þat with þe Flesshe byhoues stryf. (*SVRE*, ll.11849–50)

It kepes chastite charpnes of lyfe
þat with þe flesshe byhoues stryfe. (f.11^r, ll.16–17)

There are other examples.¹²⁸ Deliberate excerpting is also visible in the dovetailing of the beginnings and ends of passages excerpted or omitted with points of transition in the text of the original poem. For example, *Speculum Vitae* lists the desirable conditions for

¹²⁸ *SVRE*, ll.5847–48 and f.6^v, ll.29–30; *SVRE*, ll.5927–28 and f.7^v, ll.27–28; and *SVRE*, ll.11777–78 and f.11^v, ll.11–12.

confession, and the rewriter excerpts the fifth and seventh conditions while very precisely omitting the sixth.¹²⁹ Within the same passage the rewriter deliberately and neatly excised one of the poem's cross-references to material not excerpted, matters which 'er declared in þis boke | A lytell bifore, þar men may loke'.¹³⁰

The rewriter also thoughtfully re-contextualised some lines. He retained a quotation from the Pater Noster but replaced the gloss provided for it in *Speculum Vitae* with an alternative translation which appears about twenty lines later in the original text.¹³¹ By doing so he avoided the original's introduction of the Gift of Knowing, not discussed in the new text (ll.3055–72). The second translation in the original text is also more Latinate, rendering 'debita' as 'dettes' rather than 'folys', which might be another possible reason for this choice.¹³² These pieces of evidence for deliberate, controlled excerpting might strengthen the case for conscious choice in some other, individually more debatable instances too. So, for example, the omission of one couplet from the poem's explanation of temptation's value could be an intentional shortening of the passage rather than a copying error—for the passage still makes sense, albeit slightly differently, without it.¹³³ This rewriter's smoothing over of disjunctions and inconsistencies created by his excerpting was, however, not comprehensive. One passage is repeated, for example.¹³⁴ Is this perhaps a remnant of the drafting process?

¹²⁹ *SVRE*, ll.5835–46, omitted between f.6v, ll.28 and 29.

¹³⁰ *SVRE*, ll.5769–70, omitted between f.5v, ll.24 and 25. The reference is to the original poem's detailed taxonomy of the information that qualifies as the circumstances of sin, and to its discussion of that information's relevance (ll.5537–64).

¹³¹ *SVRE*, ll.3050–51, 3073–78 and f.9r, ll.6–12.

¹³² 'Folys' is not an inaccurate translation (*MED*, 'folie (n.)', sense 2(a)).

¹³³ *SVRE*, ll.3205–22, with 3219–20 omitted, and f.9v, ll.3–18.

¹³⁴ *SVRE*, ll.7867–76, on both f.2r, ll.7–16 and f.7r, ll.23–32.

The persistence of idiosyncrasies such as these is perhaps a testament to the difficulty of reading in this selective, excerpting way, even in a highly organised text such as *Speculum Vitae*. Nevertheless, there is clear evidence that this excerpting was the deliberate creation of a coherent new text.

So how did the rewriter read *Speculum Vitae*? His rewriting proceeded almost entirely by careful direct quotation, excerpting and re-contextualisation. There are only small changes to the words quoted themselves, and these changes often seem simply to smooth over the fact that the material has been wrenched away from a larger context.

The sheer range between the most distant lines excerpted—from line 389 to line 15042—suggests that the rewriter had a complete or near-complete copy of the poem which he knew well and read extensively. The reading process involved in the excerpting itself was clearly discontinuous, both on a large scale and on a small scale. The surviving lines can be roughly divided into five tranches taken from within different parts of the poem.¹³⁵ These tranches are both discontinuous and non-contiguous. At the smaller scale the rewriter was clearly willing and able to move around within the poem while quoting from it.¹³⁶ Evidence of the rewriter's knowledge of and movement within the poem can be gleaned from the precision of one transition between two relatively distant points within one tranche of lines. Here the new text reads:

Castitas perit in deliciis
 For bernard says in a tretice
 þat chastite *perishes* in delice
 þar for it es god als me thynk
 To vse ay strait met and drynk
 For whaso will hald þam chast

¹³⁵ In order of appearance, *SVRE*, ll.7799–7904, 5569–5872, 387–3142, 9567–11804 and 13279–15042. Due to the incomplete nature of the booklet's physical boundaries we can assume that the first surviving tranche did not begin at l.7799, and that the last surviving tranche did not end at l.15042.

¹³⁶ For example, *SVRE*, ll.3205–18 and 3221–22 followed by ll.3131–42, f.9^v, ll.3–30.

Byhoues vse greete metes mast
 And noght delicious dayntese
 Pat makes many chastite to lese. (f.10^v, ll.23–31)

This passage is in fact composed from the topical note from the *Speculum Vitae*'s marginal navigational apparatus at line 11395 used (either by the rewriter or in his exemplar) as an in-column subtitle with set graphs and a larger module, followed by lines 9725–26, followed in turn by lines 11385–90 (with the first line altered to remove a reference to the numbering of a list). The rewriter has deliberately conflated the two points in *Speculum Vitae* where the poem reports Bernard's statement 'Pat Chastyte perisshes in delyces', adopting the marginal note or subtitle of the second instance and placing it before the quotation from the first instance.¹³⁷ He therefore had and used the ability, either through memory or through navigational aids, to cross-reference one of these passages to the other. We cannot know precisely how he achieved this moment of discontinuity, but we know he did it.¹³⁸

It may also be possible to see changes in the rewriter's practice even in the relatively short surviving text. Towards the end of what survives the excerpts become shorter, and small-scale movements backwards through the poem rather than forwards become more common: for example, in the final lines on the last surviving page he moved a subclause from the end of a unit of speech to its beginning.¹³⁹ The beginning of the surviving text, by contrast, consists of more extensive excerpts, often running continuously over several pages so that, for instance, the first twelve pages effectively

¹³⁷ *SVRE*, ll.9726 and 11396. Hanna notes (596) that this sounds proverbial.

¹³⁸ He might have used the marginal navigational apparatus provided in many copies of the poem.

¹³⁹ MS Arch. L.40.2/E.25, f.12^v, ll.25–34; *SVRE*, ll.15039–40, 15033–38, 15041–42.

contain only two very long excerpts.¹⁴⁰ I think, tentatively, that this change might show us the redactor becoming increasingly confident in his handling of the *Speculum Vitae*, and increasingly creative and interventionist in his reading and excerpting activity. Alternatively, perhaps his reading and excerpting practice changed when he shifted from general overviews such as the taxonomy of sins for confession to specific topics such as resisting lechery. But this more intimate, small-scale excerpting would have required closer reading than excerpting great chunks of the poem earlier in the quire, whatever the cause of the change. And this change is another example of verse reading in late medieval England which needs to be described in more precise terms than ‘discontinuous’ or ‘referential’. The redactor is a reader whose extremely active reading became more discriminating in its slicing-up and rearranging of the text over time within the execution of one task.

But what were the uses to which he put this reading? What kind or kinds of future reading does his new text anticipate or encourage? The new text that the rewriter produced abandons the original poem’s structure of intricately nested lists keyed to a series of easily-remembered sequences—the words of the Pater Noster, the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, the seven deadly sins and the seven virtues. It is also much shorter. Even if it is only a fragment of a more substantial text, the whole text would never have rivalled the length of *Speculum Vitae*. Length is in itself a formal feature which affects reading.¹⁴¹ In this case specifically, by abandoning the grand structure of *Speculum Vitae* and most of the poem’s content, the rewriter was able to make the material which

¹⁴⁰ MS Arch. L.40.2/E.25, ff.1^r–6^v.

¹⁴¹ See above, 142.

he *did* want significantly more portable. He also made it easier to navigate: the new text retains, at least in this copy, much of the original poem's navigational apparatus, and even a few navigational subtitles which may be the work of the rewriter himself. For example, the subtitle 'Nihil deest timentibus deum' [Nothing is lacking for those fearing God] is absent from Hanna's edition at this point and, since the redactor's exemplar seems to have been good, it is reasonably likely that this was added by the rewriter.¹⁴² (For a sufficiently knowing audience this quotation might also have been a gentle defence of the exercise of compiling the new text from chosen excerpts itself.) The new text thus abandons the comprehensiveness of the original poem in order to enable an even more referential reading of the selected parts which remain. So in this case the redactor's reading is more akin to the reading he offers to those who use his revision. At the small-scale this rearrangement offered a very similar reading experience in a smaller space, with some decisions about large-scale discontinuity already made.

The content of the new text can be roughly divided up along the lines of the five broad tranches taken from the original poem. The new text begins with an acephalous discussion of good things to think on during suffering and then proceeds through: a discussion of good confession and penance, including the *Speculum Vitae*'s traditional taxonomy of sins by heart, mouth, work and omission; a collection of general and proverbial-sounding comments on obedience and the value of temptation; a discussion of ways to resist lechery; and a discussion of gluttony and asceticism. This sequence moves from the general to the particular, from advice on suffering, confession and the value of temptation to advice on specific kinds of sin, and this progression might be

¹⁴² MS Arch. L.40.2/E.25, f.10^v, l.32. The subtitle itself is a liturgical quotation and was probably proverbial.

deliberate. There are a few hints that the expected audience might have been the learned rather than the ‘lewed’. First, the rewriter included the original poem’s lines warning that ‘þe spotte of Litchery es mare laythe | And mare perillous [...] / In clerkes’ (ll.12257–64).¹⁴³ This evidence’s force is increased by the selective nature of the rewriter’s activity: these lines were deliberately chosen. Second, the rewriter appears to assume a basic working knowledge of Latin in moments such as his expansion of a marginal source note from the original poem into a subtitle which is macaronically embedded at the beginning of a unit of speech: ‘Dicit Bernardus de confessione | Luf chrift he says þat may ye saue’.¹⁴⁴ Third and finally, although it is by no means clear that this text was originally planned by its scribe to be part of the same manuscript as its co-texts, the other texts are connected to it by the shared scribe, and so they probably moved in the same ambit, and they are also texts of interest for the learned, perhaps particularly for those among the learned who had to teach the unlearned.

If the new text perhaps anticipates the same kind of reader as *Speculum Vitae* and certainly contains no substantial new material, why does it exist? Reconstructing the exact reason might be impossible but asking this question itself usefully makes the history of reading more complex: the fact that at some point at least one reader thought that a useful and different new text could be provided simply by rearranging quotations from *Speculum Vitae* demonstrates that the business of size and organisation (discussed in my previous chapters) could be tremendously important to the way a text was read.

¹⁴³ MS Arch. L.40.2/E.25, f.11^v, ll.1–8.

¹⁴⁴ MS Arch. L.40.2/E.25 f.10^r, ll.9–10. The Latin line performs the same role as *SVRE*, ll.9565–66. *Speculum Vitae* itself does not require readers to understand macaronic text, since it usually translates its Latin quotations immediately and always avoids embedding them within the larger structures of English sentences.

This question also helpfully reminds us that, although it is often difficult to go further than these relatively simple categorisations, different people in the same walks of life could have different reading needs for the same material, and the same person might read the same material very differently at different times. Perhaps the new text in this manuscript is designed to make what the rewriter regarded as the most essential parts of the poem more immediately available in a quick summary. If this is the case then it is designed for reading which is still discontinuous and potentially referential, but much less extensive than the reading anticipated by the original poem. Indeed, although the content is mostly unchanged and revolves around taxonomies and practical advice about sin, the system of organisation has changed to something closer to that of *The Prick of Conscience*: a relatively shallow system without deep nested lists, addressing each topic in turn and equally, without regard to their place in hierarchical schemes of intellectual organisation.

The fact that this text only survives in one incomplete copy suggests that it was not successful. Even taken with caution about treating manuscript survival as a proxy for dissemination, the numerical difference between the eighteen surviving copies of the Southern Recension of *The Prick of Conscience* and the only surviving copy of this text might well be significant. But it might not simply mean that this text was a ‘failure’ in an anachronistic view of a ‘market’. Perhaps it was always a text with a small anticipated set of readers, perhaps clerkly ones, or even only one or two readers, perhaps the original rewriter or one of his acquaintances. The selection of material is precise and targeted—the opposite of the all-encompassing ambition of the source text. It may have been produced for a small, coterie audience with a strong set of shared reading practices—this possibility is consonant with the narrower gap between the

reading which the rewriter displayed when creating the text and the reading which the text itself seems to invite.

This text is, therefore, very unlike the Southern Recension of *The Prick of Conscience*. The latter text retains its source's large- and medium-scale structure and content, while making pervasive changes at the level of lines and couplets. The text created from *Speculum Vitae*, meanwhile, makes dramatic interventions in the source text's structure and removes much of its content, but makes only conservative small-scale alterations. The rewriter significantly reduced the navigational challenge facing readers simply by reducing the size of the text, but offered readers an almost identical moment-by-moment experience of form.

Conclusion

Rewriting reveals a range of different reading practices and expectations. Notably, the gap between the rewriter's reading experience and the reading experience which the rewriter sought to offer to future readers varies considerably. Some rewritings are conservative and practical, but even these enable particular kinds of reading. The evidence presented here also reveals that some rewriting had more complicated objectives. For example, the more hypotactic text offered by the Southern Recension of *The Prick of Conscience* offers less room for reader responsibility than the Main Version at the level of the couplet and the unit of sense, but by retaining essentially the same content in the same overall organisational scheme the redactor offered his readers the same opportunity to read discontinuously. Meanwhile the redactor who excerpted *Speculum Vitae* produced a text which is almost unchanged at the small-scale but which

has a dramatically reduced scope for readers' movement on the large-scale. There is therefore a related contrast in the kind of responsibility allowed to readers. The provision of additional guidance to readers allows for more sophisticated reading, but also takes some responsibilities away, and so the more sophisticated reading which is enabled is also in important ways more passive reading. Moreover, there is a concern for aesthetics, which is particularly marked in the creation of the Southern Recension. Intense work on the detail of the poem's text raises its register and makes emotionally engaged reading easier. Such stylistic interventions may still have practical motivations, but they are impressively formalist. As in the previous chapter's exploration of rhyme, there is evidence here of medieval reading for form.

Conclusion

How, then, was English verse in manuscript read in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England? The surviving copies of *Speculum Vitae*, *The Prick of Conscience* and related texts contain a great deal of information for the history of reading. Because these texts spread so widely and so successfully and, particularly in the case of *The Prick of Conscience*, continued to be read for so long, they can reveal what was normal in the reading of verse in the period. By looking beyond the few unhelpful marginalia in these books, and instead developing new ways to interpret codicological evidence, I have been able to build a picture of these normal reading practices. This picture is valuable in itself. It contributes to our understanding of a period in the history of reading which has been neglected in favour of the dramatic changes of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This picture can also be used as a background image or a baseline for comparison against which we can place the reading of poets central to our modern Middle English canon such as Chaucer, Langland and the *Pearl*-poet. These writers' works did not necessarily offer normal reading experiences, and treating them as though they were typical, studying the readings they received in isolation, is unjust both to them and to the poetry which outperformed them.

The reading practices expected and encouraged in copies of *The Prick of Conscience*, *Speculum Vitae* and related texts are varied, and that variety is important in itself: the reading of these texts should not be imagined as a single, simple and unchanging experience. But some common threads emerge. Readers approached these texts with close attention to and real appreciation for poetic form, and especially rhyme. The primary texts used here are poems and were read as poems, and the aesthetic

pleasure they offered went hand-in-hand with their salvific purpose. Another recurring feature of the reading evidenced in these manuscripts is readers' agency: readers of religious instructional verse could and sometimes did act to alter the texts they had before them. Navigational aids and particularly physical navigational markers suggest that readers who wished to could read in very mobile ways, within and between texts—an observation which could unsettle the interpretative approaches usually applied to medieval miscellanies. Besides controlling where books were kept and how they were handled, reading might have quite literally shaped manuscripts during their production. And while previous scholarship has rightly emphasised that many Middle English poems were rarities, transmitted in a situation of exemplar poverty, this study substantially strengthens the case for at least some readers of the most successful Middle English verse experiencing 'exemplar wealth'. I discuss these common threads in more detail below.

The reading of *The Prick of Conscience* and of *Speculum Vitae* was often discontinuous, and sometimes guided by sophisticated navigational aids. These poems were composed in a compiling fashion and sometimes read in profoundly 'compiled' volumes. Our macroscopic history of reading predicts this conclusion. However, while Peter Stallybrass has emphasised the dominance of discontinuous reading in the later medieval period, I have demonstrated with reference to religious instructional verse that the period also saw continuous reading.¹ Furthermore, discontinuous reading could be discontinuous in a variety of identifiably different ways. *Speculum Vitae* invites discontinuous reading much more thoroughly than *The Prick of Conscience* does, and

¹ Stallybrass, 'Books and Scrolls'.

The Prick of Conscience in fact also welcomes continuous reading. The marginal navigational apparatus provided for *The Prick of Conscience* was never terribly sophisticated, and the surviving manuscripts indicate that it was often reduced or abandoned in transmission. It is true that later readers added more sophisticated navigational aids to some copies of the poem, but many readers judged that more extensive navigational aids were unnecessary, and some chose to abandon the existing aids available in exemplars. The history of reading Middle English verse in this period was not, then, an uncomplicated triumph of increasing organisation.

Navigational aids of a physical kind, such as cut-and-fold tabs, reveal something about the choices of individual readers, and allow us to distinguish different kinds of discontinuity within the broad category of ‘discontinuous reading’. Histories of reading often struggle to advance from a general models of idealised reader behaviour to provable instances of specific readers displaying that behaviour.² But tabs and pieces of string let us track real readers in their individual practice of prevailing models for reading. Some readers chose to enable more rapid access to the pre-existing seven different parts of *The Prick of Conscience*, while others picked out individual passages of interest, imposing new and very personal organisational schemes on the poem. There is some correlation between the material complexity and the labour requirements of physical navigational aids and their use, with the more demanding kind being added in planned, programmatic ways while simpler cut-and-fold aids were more often the products of moment-by-moment improvisation. This correlation demonstrates the

² Robert Hume, *Reconstructing Contexts: The Aims and Principles of Archaeo-Historicism* (Oxford, 1999), 137–41; and Harold Love, ‘Early Modern Print Culture: Assessing the Models’, *Parergon*, 20 (2003), 45–64 (53).

importance of non-arbitrary, materially determined factors in the interpretation of manuscript evidence. Physical markers do reveal things about the history of reading, and they do so not by signifying arbitrarily assigned meanings, but by evidencing the greater or lesser amounts of labour and material investment required in their construction, in materially determined ways.

Evidence for selective and discontinuous reading might suggest that we should exercise greater caution about miscellanies. These books and their possible historical reading remain a major concern of Middle English manuscript studies.³ But I would suggest that we can infer less than is sometimes supposed from the co-location and ordering of texts in miscellanies: our ‘miscellany epistemology’ should be more pessimistic. Other scholars have emphasised the role of the chance availability or unavailability of texts in determining these books’ contents.⁴ I would add that physical navigational markers might have rendered moot any intentional scribal or compilatorial ordering of the actual practice of reading, by unifying miscellanies’ varied contents, making it easier to flit between different parts: paradoxically, a physical feature which unites the contents of a book, making texts speak to each other more easily for the reader, also sidesteps any considered ordering within that book.

Furthermore, the evidence surveyed in the first chapter reveals that individual books are not especially reliable guides to readers’ general reading habits: those who owned copies of religious instructional poems also owned a wide variety of other texts.

³ See the influential essay Julia Boffey and John J. Thompson, ‘Anthologies and Miscellanies: Production and Choice of Texts’, in *BPP*, 279–315; and the scholarship since surveyed in Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards, ‘Towards a Taxonomy of Middle English Manuscript Assemblages’, in *Insular Books: Vernacular Manuscript Miscellanies in Late Medieval Britain*, ed. by Margaret Connolly and Raluca Radulescu, Proceedings of the British Academy, 201 (Oxford, 2015), 263–79.

⁴ Pearsall, ‘The Whole Book’, 18–19; and Hanna, ‘Miscellaneity and Vernacularity’, 47–51.

When wills and inventories identify books alongside the primary texts, they frequently describe heterogeneous collections. Some owners of these texts are also themselves surprising figures. For example, no surviving manuscript suggests a reader such as John Bateman, the scribe who had worked, in Italy, on Italian humanist texts, yet also seems to have owned a copy of *The Prick of Conscience*. Bateman's reading life is inadequately represented by any single one of the books that he owned or copied. It is dangerous to take a single surviving book as any kind of guide to an individual's reading. Miscellany theory correctly highlights the loose homogeneity of topic found within some compiled books, but the evidence we have about individuals' book collections suggests that reading was more varied between books than within them. A rough homogeneity in any single surviving miscellany might, therefore, make it probable that the other books read by an owner of that miscellany were *unlike* the surviving book in their content.

The reading history of *The Prick of Conscience* must also be complicated by the possibility of what I have called 'exemplar wealth', as opposed to exemplar poverty, in at least some places and times. Michael Sargent proposed this scenario for some texts.⁵ The idea receives support from the presence of multiple copies of texts in single wills, and from the repeated hints throughout this study that the scribes transmitting these texts for reading sometimes had more than one copy to hand: in the rapid and collaborative copying of *The Prick of Conscience* from multiple exemplars in Yorkshire and Lichfield; in the collation of a Southern Recension copy against a Main Version copy; in the apparent transmission of the table of contents cutting across textual

⁵ Sargent, 216.

affiliations in the Southern Recension corpus; and possibly in the work of the redactor who produced the Southern Recension himself. Not all readings of Middle English verse were conditioned by a sense of the contingency and uniqueness of the experience.

Agency and responsibility are two aspects of reading particularly highlighted in my introduction. Readers emerge from this study as participants who sometimes exercised considerable agency in reading. Malcolm Parkes noted this tendency in later medieval readers, and here their interventions can be tracked in the reading of manuscripts which are a long way from the Ellesmere Chaucer.⁶ Readers of most English verse might not have left many marginalia in this period, but some were capable of reconfiguring the navigational schemes attached to the poems they read, while others engaged in simple or sophisticated acts of rewriting. These interventions may be harder to track than marginalia, but they are more substantial.

Readers can, then, be witnessed exercising their agency. At the same time, however, the increased sophistication of books after the twelfth and thirteenth centuries had diminished readers' responsibility for their own reading: the proliferation of techniques for access to large, well-organised masses of texts reduced the work that readers themselves had to do when reading any individual text. This kind of shift is revealed by the supplementary aids that readers added to these texts themselves: for example, the verse summary of *The Prick of Conscience* at the beginning of MS Laud Misc. 486 was written by a reader who could regurgitate parts of the poem from memory, but anticipates readers who do not know the poem and wish to discover which part of it they should turn to. Similar changes are observable today, in cohorts of

⁶ HEHL, MS EL 26 C 9; Parkes, 'Ordinatio and Compilatio', 65.

undergraduates who can search and navigate across vast masses of information but are not always comfortable meditating on the meaning and mechanism of individual phrases or passages.⁷ It is noteworthy, therefore, that there are many copies of both poems in which readers did not intervene to add additional navigational aids, including copies of *The Prick of Conscience* in which the poem's original marginal apparatus has largely disappeared. Reading and navigating in these copies would potentially have been more active. These books remind us, again, that developments in reading do not simply travel teleologically in the direction of increasing sophistication in all books.

Indeed, in the braced copies of these and other poems, scribes offered readers marking of one feature, rhyme, which was more explicit than we use today: traditions in the preparation of verse for reading have since stepped back from this obsessive clarification and decoration. Braces are a complex interface between manuscript form and textual form. Except for a few isolated points, investigations of form in this study have not sought the direct connection of material manuscript form to textual verse form which is envisaged by some recent studies of manuscripts from a formalist perspective.⁸ Rather, this study takes manuscript form as useful evidence for the reading of verse form. Although their occasional connections can be exciting, manuscript form and textual form are two quite different things, which coexist uncomfortably.⁹ In my

⁷ See for example the discussions in Baron; and Richard E. Miller, 'On Digital Reading', *Pedagogy*, 16 (2016), 153–64.

⁸ For example—though here the connection is rightly envisaged with some caution—in Bahr and Gillespie, 'Form, Aesthetics, and the Literary Text', 354, 357–58.

⁹ D. Vance Smith has noted ways in which material and textual form can be—perhaps always are—at odds in 'Inhumane Wonder'; and 'The Shadow of the Book: *Piers Plowman*, The Ilchester Prologue, and Inhumane Revision', in *Yee? Baw for Bokes: Essays on Manuscripts and Poetics in Honor of Hoyt N. Duggan*, ed. by Michael Calabrese and Stephen H. A. Shepherd (Los Angeles, 2013), 203–18. See also Nafde, 'Deciphering the Manuscript Page'.

investigation of the punctuation of units of verse, it is the cases in which the lineation is unsuited to verse, cases in which material form and textual form are at loggerheads, which reveal the most about how verse was probably read. When rhyming poems were copied in unusual lineation which elicited structural punctuation from scribes, rhyme was treated as the basic building-block of verse. In conventionally lineated copies, rhyme was sometimes braced with considerable, sometimes heroic effort from book producers even in a long poem of indifferent quality. It has always been obvious that rhyme is important to rhyming verse, but what is newly demonstrated here is that readers at the time knew this very well themselves, and that they were interested in rhyme when reading religious instructional poems. The evidence also suggests that an emphasis on balanced rhyming structures was a prominent, though not necessarily dominant, strain in the reading of rhyming verse. These arguments offer historicist licence to modern literary-critical uses of rhyme in the close reading of Middle English verse. As such close readings are relatively rare at present, it should perhaps also encourage more of them.

Some exercises in rewriting religious instructional verse were engaged with form and style. The Southern Recension of *The Prick of Conscience*, in particular, is a very large-scale programme of stylistic revision, and may have been prompted by a desire to present the same content in a different style. In its dialect, metre and diction the Southern Recension is, in some ways, a more Chaucerian version of the poem. How might religious instructional verse have related to now-canonical Middle English poetry? Langland alluded to *Speculum Vitae* and Chaucer probably alluded to *The Prick*

of *Conscience*.¹⁰ I have suggested that in extended religious instructional poems the form and the sense were coordinated so that pleasure in the form and edification from the sense could work together to inform and reform readers and listeners. So perhaps English verse of this kind played a role as part of the context for the reading of later poetry in English which was more stylistically adventurous and in which the sense was allowed to cut more dramatically across the structures formed by rhyme and rhythm. Perhaps, too, the ways in which book producers copied canonical, ‘literary’ verse for reading, emphasising form with some expectation that the sense would follow, were influenced by instructional texts such as *The Prick of Conscience* which played a significant part, for a time, in determining what many readers expected sustained verse in Middle English to be and to do.

The normal experience of reading verse in English in this period, as described here, contributes to our understanding of the context and early reception of the major Ricardian and Lancastrian poets, balancing our sense of their continental inheritances. There have been valuable explorations of the French and Italian contexts for the development of the poetry of Chaucer.¹¹ Moreover, almost all literary activity in England in this period was in some sense Latinate, since learning to read and write at all—learning to grasp and use *litterae*—was a process which usually revolved around Latin. There is no doubting the Latinity of a normal manuscript page of *Piers Plowman*, with its Latin typically highlighted, as in copies of *The Prick of Conscience*, but also, unlike the Latin of *The Prick of Conscience*, embedded directly into the grammar of

¹⁰ Hanna, ‘Form of *Piers Plowman*’, 122–25; and Wakelin, *Scribal Correction*, 33–34.

¹¹ For example, with reference to manuscripts, Ardis Butterfield, ‘“Mise-en-page” in the “Troilus” Manuscripts: Chaucer and French Manuscript Culture’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 58 (1995), 49–80; and Kenneth Clarke, *Chaucer and Italian Textuality* (Oxford, 2011).

English statements. Nevertheless, and without offering a narrative of the triumph of English, we should also remember the English literary context for the flourishing of the Middle English poetry which we now regard as canonical. Ralph Hanna's hunt for regional literatures has outlined a mid-fourteenth-century proto-canon of Middle English religious writing emanating from Yorkshire.¹² Studying the history of the reading of verse using copies of *Speculum Vitae* and *The Prick of Conscience* as central rather than peripheral evidence offers glimpses of the ways in which parts of this proto-canon spread into the rest of England and became standard long Middle English verse texts. The reading of religious instructional verse is a pervasive background element for the reading of our modern canon, perhaps akin to the role of verse form in elementary literacy in the period.¹³ This type of history of reading might be conceived as the history of a contextual layer below and prior to the layer interrogated by intellectual history.

Although *The Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum Vitae* have primarily served this study as sources of evidence rather than as objects of enquiry, new conclusions about their reception are also possible. As I demonstrated above, *Speculum Vitae* was still apparently current for some readers at the end of the fifteenth century, and the number of surviving manuscripts hardly suggests a failure, though it does not rival the number of surviving copies of *The Prick of Conscience*. One factor in the greater success of *The Prick of Conscience* may be simply that it was written earlier, and had more time to spread. But this study suggests that another factor: the all-encompassing subject of *Speculum Vitae*, its sheer length and its logical, carefully worked-out nested

¹² Hanna, 'Yorkshire Writers'.

¹³ Cannon, 'From Literacy to Literature'; and Cannon, 'The Middle English Writer's Schoolroom'.

structure may all have hindered its adaptation. For although *Speculum Vitae* is impressively comprehensive, its comprehensiveness may have limited the number of new ways in which readers could read it as tastes changed. Across the chapters above, readers consistently appear to have found *The Prick of Conscience* more malleable. Copies vary more in physical size, and parts are more commonly excerpted and rewritten. The redactor who produced the Southern Recension may have baulked at the style of the Main Version of the poem but clearly thought that the content and its arrangement justified the work of rewriting the entire thing. *The Prick of Conscience* might also have been more welcoming to a wider variety of kinds of reading: its baggy inclusion of digressions allows it to educate readers on a variety of topics and its vividness and immediacy probably opened it up to more directly affective reading. Its lack of a methodical, taxonomising *summa* structure of the kind found in *Speculum Vitae* allows it to include a wider variety of potentially interesting material. In its adaptability and its openness to re-readings and re-purposings *The Prick of Conscience* was more emphatically ‘news that stays news’ than its later cousin.¹⁴ The poet of *The Prick of Conscience* seems to have hit upon a collection of topics and an approach which, for a long time, suited the practical needs and the aesthetic tastes of English readers in all their variety.

In All Saints Church, North Street, York, there is an early fifteenth-century window of three vertical lights, with five panels in each, depicting the fifteen signs of

¹⁴ Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (London, 1951), 29.

the world's end, captioned with text taken from *The Prick of Conscience*.¹⁵ The window neatly captures many of the issues discussed here. It is the largest and most definitively stationary witness to the text. It is a 'version' of the text with a truly dramatic gap between the rewriter's reading and future readers' reading. Although this is known as the '*Prick of Conscience* Window' it is probably rather a 'Fifteen Signs Window' borrowing captions from a convenient and perhaps local source. The text is not taken exclusively from *The Prick of Conscience*, and the lines which are taken from the poem are modified.¹⁶ Furthermore, although the window is not a codex, it has its own navigational quirks. The signs are ordered left-to-right, but also bottom-to-top, so that the events which are chronologically furthest away are also furthest away physically. If the reader reads the signs in order, text and images become harder to see, with increasing strain on the neck and eyes: experiencing the Last Days becomes more stressful as they continue.¹⁷ The images and the church setting make it likely that the paraliterate, who could not read but could have texts read to them, were a significant part of the window's audience. The Fifteen Signs Window seems an appropriate image with which to end this study. It invites some reading practices similar to those applied to

¹⁵ The best available study is Powell. See also Gee. Images of the window are available online: *Vidimus*, 45, <<http://vidimus.org/issues/issue-45/feature>> [accessed 26 June 2015]. On the pastoral life of this church see P. S. Barnwell, "'Four hundred masses on the four Fridays next after my decease": The Care of Souls in Fifteenth-Century All Saints', North Street, York", in *Mass and Parish in Late Medieval England: The Use of York*, ed. by P. S. Barnwell, Claire Cross and Ann Rycraft (Reading, 2005), 57–87.

¹⁶ The window only has one couplet per sign and transmits Peter Comestor's ordering of the twelfth and thirteenth signs rather than the Pseudo-Bedan order found in the poem. On these orderings see William Watts Heist, *The Fifteen Signs before Doomsday* ([East Lansing], 1952), 25–26, 131–33, 197. Moreover, Powell demonstrates that the window's likely original text had noticeably different wording at points, including some text borrowed from the Chester Play of the Prophets (301).

¹⁷ It must have been understood that the bottom of the window was the most easily-read part, for this is where donors usually appear in stained-glass, as they do here.

manuscript copies, but also some which are very alien to manuscripts. Nevertheless, it still attests to the poem's success and shows how readers could pragmatically and aesthetically manipulate the text for new readings.

Appendix 1: Tables

Table 1: Copies of *The Prick of Conscience* with physical navigational markers which primarily mark individual passages

Shelfmark	Marker locations	Construction type(s)	Passages or parts marked
SJC, MS E.34	ff.16, 35, 45, 47, 54, 68, 82, 84	Cut-and-fold (1), slit with external parchment (7)	1182–1345, 2802–2972, 3804–3967, Part V, 4710–4867, 5830–5983, 6955–7106, 7107–7262
BodL, MS Ashmole 52	ff.27, 33	Slit with external parchment	Part V, 4684–4988
BodL, MS Douce 156	pp.41–42, 45–46, 59–60, 93–94, 107–108, 141–42, 151–52,	Cut-and-fold (3), slit with external parchment (4)	1448–1595, Part III, 2134–2287, 3479–3640, 4031–4257, 5407–5547, 5785–5943
BodL, MS e Musaeo 76	ff.42, 76, 87	Cut-and-fold	3301–3462, 6187–6408, interpolation ¹
BodL, MS Rawl. A.366	pp.27–28, 35–36, 45–46, 49–50, 53–54, 65–66, 69–70, 77–78, 101–102, 131–32, 137–38, 163–64, 181–82, 183–84, 193–94, 205–206, 207–208, 209–210, 219–220	Cut-and-fold (14), thread sewn into page (4)	Part II, 1145–1279, 1486–1628, Part III, 1761–1889, 2175–2309, 2310–2444, Part V, 3481–3612, 4613–4751, 4818–4951, 5719–5847, Part VI (twice), 6722–6860, 7140–7275, Part VII (twice), 7834–7958
SJO, MS 138	ff.4, 7, 11, 31, 39, 43, 50	Slit with external parchment	Part II, 1207–1327, 1476–1623, 2760–2885, 3277–3396, 3519–3640, Part V

¹ This is one of a group of copies which share significant interpolations without equivalents in *Morris*; see *DG*, 6–7.

Table 2: Copies of *The Prick of Conscience* with physical navigational markers which primarily mark the beginnings of parts

Shelfmark	Marker locations	Construction type(s)	Passages/parts marked
Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS McClean 131	ff.5, 12, 22, 35, 48, 80, 94	Cut-and-fold (1), thread sewn into page (6)	Parts I–VII
SJC, MS B.7	ff.5, 13, 23, 33, 49	Cut-and-fold	Parts I–V
BL, MS Add. 33995	(in <i>Prick of Conscience</i>) ff.107, 111, 117, 123, 144	Thread sewn into page	Parts II–V, VII
BL, MS Harley 2377	ff.2, 16, 34, 36, 42, 99	Thread sewn into page (5), pasted parchment strip (1)	Parts III–VII
BL, MS Lansdowne 348	ff.4, 21, 29, 43, 78, 94	Thread sewn into page	Parts I–IV, VI, VII
BodL, MS Bodley 99	ff.23, 24, 38, 55, 88	Pasted parchment strip	Parts III (twice?), IV–VI
Princeton University Library, MS Garrett 138	ff.7, 13, 21, 44, 64, 73, 95, 99, 110	Cut-and-fold	Prologue, Parts I–V, 6057–6135, ² Parts VI, VII

² MS Garrett 138 is a Southern Recension copy of the poem and so the equivalent line ranges in *Morris* resemble its text much less closely.

Table 3: Size and shape in copies of *The Prick of Conscience*

Shelfmark	Ruled area <i>taille</i>	Ruled area proportion	Page <i>taille</i>	Page proportion	Inter- proportion	Ruled area (%)	Margins (%)	Medieval binding?
Main Version								
Arundel Castle manuscript	286	0.60	384	0.68	0.87	54	46	
Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS McClean 131	260	0.49	355	0.61	0.80	50	50	
Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS F.4.18	273	0.50	399	0.65	0.77	44	56	
SJC, D.5	316	0.50	432	0.61	0.82	51	49	
SJC, E.34	277	0.67	355	0.67	0.99	61	39	
CUL, MS Dd.xi.89	235	0.64	312	0.66	0.98	56	44	
CUL, MS Dd.xii.69	232	0.59	302	0.64	0.92	58	42	
CUL, MS Ll.ii.17	345	0.60	509	0.69	0.86	45	55	
CUL, MS Add. 6693	227	0.57	286	0.65	0.87	61	39	
Cambridge, MA, Houghton Library, MS English 515	210	0.58	299	0.62	0.94	49	51	
Canterbury Cathedral Library, MS Lit. D.13	277	0.56	362	0.63	0.90	57	43	
Chicago, Newberry Library, MS 32.9	227	0.66	330	0.68	0.97	47	53	
Chicago, Newberry Library, MS 33	265	0.43	320	0.52	0.83	64	36	
Douai Abbey, MS 7	208	0.64	289	0.65	0.98	52	48	Y
TCD, MS 156	277	0.51	364	0.67	0.77	54	46	

Shelfmark	Ruled area <i>taille</i>	Ruled area proportion	Page <i>taille</i>	Page proportion	Inter- proportion	Ruled area (%)	Margins (%)	Medieval binding?
TCD, MS 157	274	0.50	346	0.63	0.79	59	41	
TCD, MS 158	249	0.64	331	0.66	0.96	56	44	
Leeds University Library, MS Brotherton 500	276	0.51	330	0.62	0.82	66	34	
Leeds University Library, MS Brotherton 501	331	0.72	427	0.91	0.79	59	41	
BL, MS Arundel 140	362	0.55	505	0.74	0.75	48	52	
BL, MS Cotton Galba E.ix	440	0.63	555	0.66	0.96	62	38	
BL, MS Egerton 657	301	0.52	367	0.56	0.93	66	34	
BL, MS Egerton 3245	255	0.59	355	0.65	0.91	50	50	
BL, MS Harley 1205	202	0.43	305	0.61	0.71	39	61	
BL, MS Harley 2377	276	0.51	364	0.64	0.79	54	46	
BL, MS Harley 2394 (A & B)	272	0.64	353	0.67	0.96	59	41	
BL, MS Harley 2394 (C)	284	0.59	353	0.67	0.88	63	37	
BL, MS Harley 4196	440	0.67	657	0.73	0.91	44	56	
BL, MS Lansdowne 348	197	0.61	287	0.65	0.95	47	53	
BL, MS Sloane 2275	333	0.74	421	0.70	1.06	63	37	
BL, MS Add. 11304 (A)	300	0.58	375	0.67	0.86	62	38	
BL, MS Add. 11304 (B)	300	0.60	375	0.67	0.90	62	38	
BL, MS Add. 11304 (C)	295	0.59	375	0.67	0.88	60	40	
BL, MS Add. 24203	212	0.54	299	0.63	0.86	48	52	
BL, MS Add. 25013	253	0.50	361	0.69	0.72	45	55	
BL, MS Add. 32578	280	0.49	352	0.68	0.72	58	42	

Shelfmark	Ruled area <i>taille</i>	Ruled area proportion	Page <i>taille</i>	Page proportion	Inter- proportion	Ruled area (%)	Margins (%)	Medieval binding?
BL, MS Add. 33995	395	0.60	507	0.66	0.91	59	41	
LPL, MS 260	355	0.61	475	0.73	0.84	54	46	
LPL, MS 491	253	0.59	366	0.66	0.89	47	53	
LPL, MS 492	279	0.45	382	0.54	0.84	50	50	
LPL, Sion College MS Arch. L. 40. 2/E. 25	294	0.60	365	0.67	0.90	63	37	
JRL, MS English 90	495	0.71	588	0.71	1.00	71	29	
New Haven, Beinecke Library, MS Osborn a.13	255	0.54	397	0.65	0.82	39	61	
New York, Pierpoint Morgan Library, MS Bühler 13	265	0.51	378	0.67	0.76	46	54	
BodL, MS Ashmole 41	280	0.52	440	0.66	0.79	38	62	
BodL, MS Ashmole 52	238	0.75	288	0.66	1.13	70	30	
BodL, MS Ashmole 60	332	0.56	480	0.66	0.85	46	54	
BodL, MS Bodley 99	238	0.53	338	0.69	0.76	46	54	Y
BodL, MS Digby 14	207	0.60	276	0.71	0.85	54	46	
BodL, MS Digby 87	255	0.61	358	0.70	0.87	49	51	
BodL, MS Digby 99	291	0.65	368	0.66	0.99	62	38	
BodL, MS Douce 126	305	0.70	397	0.73	0.97	59	41	
BodL, MS Douce 141	274	0.44	406	0.65	0.68	41	59	
BodL, MS Douce 156	278	0.47	402	0.60	0.79	45	56	
BodL, MS Douce 157	316	0.60	432	0.71	0.85	52	48	
BodL, MS Junius 56	227	0.58	340	0.65	0.89	43	57	

Shelfmark	Ruled area <i>taille</i>	Ruled area proportion	Page <i>taille</i>	Page proportion	Inter- proportion	Ruled area (%)	Margins (%)	Medieval binding?
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 486	250	0.52	344	0.66	0.78	49	51	Y
BodL, MS e Musaeo 76	331	0.60	473	0.67	0.89	48	52	
BodL, MS e Musaeo 88	337	0.53	460	0.70	0.76	50	50	
BodL, MS Rawl. A.366	294	0.61	415	0.69	0.87	49	51	
BodL, MS Rawl. C.35	268	0.56	356	0.68	0.82	54	46	
BodL, MS Rawl. C.891 (A)	303	0.55	442	0.64	0.87	45	55	
BodL, MS Rawl. C.891 (B)	310	0.56	442	0.64	0.88	48	52	
BodL, MS Rawl. C.891 (C)	283	0.52	442	0.64	0.82	39	61	
BodL, MS Rawl. C.891 (D)	289	0.55	442	0.64	0.86	41	59	
BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 138	274	0.59	370	0.67	0.89	53	47	Y
BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 139	310	0.42	398	0.53	0.80	56	44	
BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 175	354	0.71	458	0.71	1.00	60	40	
SJO, MS 57	345	0.60	519	0.71	0.85	43	57	
SJO, MS 138	298	0.63	370	0.64	0.98	65	35	
TCO, MS 15	241	0.64	337	0.71	0.90	50	50	
TCO, MS 16A	235	0.47	372	0.66	0.71	36	64	
TCO, MS 16B	279	0.49	400	0.65	0.75	45	55	
Oxford, University College, MS 142	291	0.48	442	0.66	0.73	40	60	
Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Library, MS Codex 196	278	0.51	409	0.68	0.76	43	57	
Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Library, MS Codex 218	460	0.63	635	0.65	0.97	52	48	Y

Shelfmark	Ruled area <i>taille</i>	Ruled area proportion	Page <i>taille</i>	Page proportion	Inter- proportion	Ruled area (%)	Margins (%)	Medieval binding?
Princeton University Library, MS Taylor Medieval 13	235	0.57	303	0.64	0.89	58	42	
HEHL, MS HM 139 (A)	426	0.72	495	0.72	1.00	74	26	
HEHL, MS HM 139 (B)	448	0.70	495	0.72	0.97	81	19	
HEHL, MS HM 139 (C)	411	0.71	495	0.72	0.98	69	31	
Wellesley College, MS 8	252	0.61	356	0.68	0.89	49	51	
Southern Recension								
Cambridge, Pembroke College, MS 272	200	0.63	326	0.68	0.92	37	63	
SJC, MS B.7	296	0.55	504	0.73	0.75	32	68	
CUL, MS Ee.iv.35	337	0.59	447	0.66	0.90	55	45	
TCD, MS 69	376	0.72	444	0.75	0.95	71	29	
Lichfield Cathedral Library, MS 16	287	0.69	443	0.72	0.96	42	58	
Lichfield Cathedral Library, MS 50	238	0.69	310	0.72	0.95	58	42	
BL, MS Harley 1731	254	0.57	359	0.66	0.86	48	52	
BL, MS Harley 2281	273	0.54	379	0.68	0.80	49	51	
BL, MS Royal 18 A.v	279	0.65	386	0.66	0.99	52	48	
BL, MS Add. 11305	299	0.53	452	0.66	0.81	42	58	
BodL, MS Bodley 423	302	0.50	467	0.72	0.70	38	62	
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 601	350	0.63	525	0.67	0.94	44	56	Y
BodL, MS Lyell empt. 6	271	0.51	376	0.65	0.79	49	51	
Princeton University Library,	309	0.59	466	0.67	0.88	43	57	

Shelfmark	Ruled area <i>taille</i>	Ruled area proportion	Page <i>taille</i>	Page proportion	Inter- proportion	Ruled area (%)	Margins (%)	Medieval binding?
MS Garrett 138								
HEHL, MS HM 125	293	0.66	410	0.72	0.91	50	50	
HEHL, MS HM 128	331	0.63	411	0.68	0.93	64	36	
HEHL, MS HM 130	277	0.54	403	0.69	0.79	45	55	Y

Table 4: Size and shape in copies of *Speculum Vitae*

Shelfmark	Ruled area <i>taille</i>	Ruled area proportion	Page <i>taille</i>	Page proportion	Inter- proportion	Ruled area (%)	Margins (%)	Medieval binding?
Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Peniarth 395	315	0.43	405	0.53	0.82	56	44	
CUL, MS Ff.iv.9, pt 1	407	0.72	505	0.74	0.97	65	35	
CUL, MS Gg.i.7	260	0.53	350	0.67	0.79	52	48	
CUL, MS Gg.i.14	265	0.56	385	0.67	0.83	45	55	
CUL, MS Ii.i.36	262	0.46	388	0.69	0.66	41	59	
CUL, MS Ll.i.8	280	0.51	390	0.59	0.87	49	51	
CUL, MS Add. 2823	227	0.51	355	0.73	0.70	38	62	
Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS McClean 130	230	0.44	330	0.53	0.82	45	55	
GCC, MS 160/81	267	0.51	380	0.62	0.82	47	53	Y
TCC, MS R.3.13 (second copy)	395	0.61	510	0.76	0.81	58	42	
TCC, MS R.3.23	305	0.49	460	0.64	0.76	41	59	
TCD, MS 76	285	0.50	390	0.66	0.76	50	50	
TCD, MS 423	393	0.75	480	0.81	0.92	66	34	
Edinburgh University Library, MS Laing II.318	283	0.45	470	0.68	0.67	32	68	
Glasgow University Library, MS Hunter 89	342	0.46	445	0.59	0.77	54	46	
Liverpool University Library, MS F.4.9	253	0.51	340	0.67	0.75	51	49	
BL, MS Add. 8151	270	0.59	385	0.64	0.92	48	52	
BL, MS Add. 22558	227	0.51	390	0.66	0.78	32	68	

Shelfmark	Ruled area <i>taille</i>	Ruled area proportion	Page <i>taille</i>	Page proportion	Inter- proportion	Ruled area (%)	Margins (%)	Medieval binding?
BL, MS Add. 33995	385	0.64	510	0.67	0.95	56	44	
BL, MS Harley 435	365	0.70	475	0.73	0.96	59	41	
BL, MS Harley 2260	300	0.50	430	0.65	0.76	45	55	
BL, MS Harley 6718	450	0.64	510	0.70	0.91	76	24	
BL, MS Royal 17 C.viii	245	0.58	358	0.68	0.85	45	55	
BL, MS Sloane 1785	331	0.70	395	0.72	0.97	70	30	
BL, MS Stowe 951	255	0.59	355	0.69	0.86	50	50	Y
LPL, Sion College MS Arch. L.40.2/E.25	285	0.58	370	0.68	0.86	57	43	
Nottingham University Library, MS Middleton LM 9	255	0.50	385	0.57	0.88	42	58	Y
BodL, MS Bodley 48	235	0.62	310	0.72	0.86	56	44	
BodL, MS Bodley 446	325	0.44	435	0.71	0.63	49	51	Y
BodL, MS Eng. poet. d.5	317	0.59	430	0.69	0.85	52	48	Y
BodL, MS Greaves 43	300	0.46	370	0.54	0.86	62	38	
BodL, MS Hatton 18	360	0.53	518	0.71	0.75	45	55	
BodL, MS Hatton 19	395	0.76	531	0.72	1.04	56	44	Y
BodL, MS Lyell 28	428	0.59	580	0.71	0.83	52	48	
BodL, MS Rawl. C.884	255	0.50	375	0.67	0.75	43	57	
BodL, MS Rawl. C.890	310	0.51	400	0.60	0.85	57	43	
BodL, MS Rawl. Q.b.4	283	0.47	390	0.77	0.60	46	54	
Princeton University Library, MS Taylor Medieval 11	470	0.68	620	0.77	0.88	56	44	
Tokyo, Toshiyuki Takamiya, MS 15	390	0.65	483	0.68	0.96	65	35	Y

Table 5: Size and shape in copies of the Middle English *Brut*

Shelfmark	Ruled area <i>taille</i>	Ruled area proportion	Page taille	Page proportion	Inter- proportion	Ruled area (%)	Margins (%)	Medieval binding?
BodL, MS Ashmole 791	313	0.64	477	0.71	0.90	42	58	
BodL, MS Ashmole 793	289	0.68	471	0.73	0.94	37	63	
BodL, MS Bodley 231	297	0.62	436	0.70	0.89	45	55	
BodL, MS Bodley 840	299	0.66	408	0.70	0.94	53	47	
BodL, MS Digby 185	343	0.65	477	0.67	0.97	51	49	
BodL, MS Douce 290	259	0.63	331	0.72	0.87	60	40	
BodL, MS Douce 323	325	0.68	495	0.76	0.90	42	58	
BodL, MS e Musaeo 39	362	0.64	501	0.68	0.94	52	48	
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 550	271	0.64	431	0.73	0.88	39	61	
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 571	381	0.77	477	0.71	1.09	65	35	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 733	337	0.66	512	0.69	0.96	43	57	
BodL, MS Lyell 34	299	0.68	485	0.73	0.94	38	62	Y
BodL, MS Rawl. B. 166	266	0.64	342	0.68	0.95	60	40	
BodL, MS Rawl. B. 171, SCR A	254	0.67	379	0.75	0.89	44	56	
BodL, MS Rawl. B. 171, SCR B	305	0.64	381	0.76	0.85	62	38	
BodL, MS Rawl. B. 173	302	0.60	412	0.64	0.93	53	47	
BodL, MS Rawl. B. 196	335	0.63	482	0.70	0.90	47	53	
BodL, MS Rawl. B. 205	475	0.71	682	0.73	0.97	48	52	
BodL, MS Rawl. B. 216 SCR A	428	0.75	586	0.66	1.15	55	45	

Shelfmark	Ruled area <i>taille</i>	Ruled area proportion	Page taille	Page proportion	Inter- proportion	Ruled area (%)	Margins (%)	Medieval binding?
BodL, MS Rawl. B. 216 SCR B	442	0.76	588	0.66	1.16	58	42	
BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 32 SCR A	345	0.65	490	0.71	0.92	49	51	
BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 32 SCR B	377	0.65	492	0.71	0.92	58	42	
BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 32 SCR C	365	0.67	494	0.71	0.95	54	46	
BodL, MS Tanner 188	287	0.59	382	0.61	0.98	56	44	
TCC, MS MS 5	316	0.67	370	0.70	0.96	72	28	
HEHL, MS HM 113	339	0.66	422	0.67	0.99	64	36	
HEHL, MS HM 131	229	0.83	362	0.83	1.00	40	60	
HEHL, MS HM 133	345	0.68	469	0.69	0.99	54	46	
HEHL, MS HM 136	325	0.63	477	0.68	0.93	46	54	

Table 6: Size and shape in copies of *Piers Plowman*

Shelfmark	Ruled area <i>taille</i>	Ruled area proportion	Page <i>taille</i>	Page proportion	Inter- proportion	Ruled area (%)	Margins (%)	Medieval binding?
Cambridge, Newnham College, MS 4	350	0.59	475	0.61	0.97	54	46	
TCC, MS B.15.17	375	0.60	480	0.66	0.91	60	40	
CUL, MS Dd.i.17 vol. 3	556	0.71	740	0.68	1.04	57	43	
CUL, MS Ll.iv.14	330	0.57	495	0.74	0.78	42	58	
'R': BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 38; BL, MS Lansdowne 398	325	0.63	495	0.71	0.88	42	58	
BL, MS Cotton Caligula A.xi, pt 2	265	0.83	375	0.70	1.17	51	49	
BL, MS Add. 10574	320	0.68	420	0.68	1.01	58	42	
BL, MS Add. 35287	390	0.56	500	0.64	0.88	59	41	
BL, MS Harley 3954	302	0.44	435	0.50	0.88	46	54	
BL, MS Harley 6041	288	0.61	379	0.66	0.92	57	43	
BL, MS Harley 875	327	0.55	433	0.64	0.86	55	45	
BodL, MS Bodley 814	309	0.70	430	0.70	1.00	52	48	
BodL, MS Douce 323	315	0.68	495	0.76	0.89	40	60	
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 581	350	0.56	460	0.70	0.79	55	45	
Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 201	355	0.45	476	0.61	0.74	51	49	
Oxford, Oriel College, MS 79, pt 1	270	0.69	285	0.78	0.88	88	12	
HEHL, MS HM 114	265	0.61	355	0.65	0.93	55	45	
HEHL, MS HM 128	345	0.68	408	0.70	0.98	71	29	
HEHL, MS HM 137	341	0.63	476	0.65	0.97	51	49	
HEHL, MS HM 143	329	0.68	441	0.74	0.91	55	45	

Table 7: Size and shape in a heterogeneous collection of manuscripts each dominated by prose

Shelfmark	Ruled area <i>taille</i>	Ruled area proportion	Page <i>taille</i>	Page proportion	Inter- proportion	Ruled area (%)	Margins (%)	Medieval binding?
CUL, MS Dd.v.55	232	0.62	357	0.69	0.90	41	59	
CUL, MS Ff.v.40	266	0.63	375	0.67	0.94	50	50	
Leeds University Library, MS Brotherton 15	271	0.64	456	0.70	0.92	35	65	
Leeds University Library, MS Brotherton 20	245	0.67	370	0.75	0.89	43	57	
Leeds University Library, MS Brotherton 3	85	0.60	158	0.68	0.89	28	72	
Leeds University Library, MS Brotherton 502	255	0.68	350	0.65	1.04	54	46	
BL, MS Harley 7401	229	0.76	340	0.77	0.99	45	55	
BL, MS Royal 12 E.xvi	179	0.72	288	0.75	0.97	38	62	
New Haven, Beinecke Library, MS Osborn a.29	176	0.59	253	0.68	0.87	47	53	
BodL, MS Auct. D. 3. 6	289	0.65	479	0.68	0.96	36	64	
BodL, MS Barlow 1	444	0.68	685	0.69	0.99	42	58	
BodL, MS Barlow 5	435	0.61	625	0.67	0.92	48	52	
BodL, MS Bodley 283	403	0.40	679	0.68	0.59	30	70	Y
BodL, MS Bodley 608	175	0.70	246	0.67	1.04	51	49	Y
BodL, MS Bodley 619	153	0.61	236	0.64	0.96	42	58	
BodL, MS Bodley 623	168	0.68	218	0.60	1.13	61	39	
BodL, MS Bodley 626	159	0.62	225	0.68	0.92	49	51	
BodL, MS Bodley 630	241	0.59	366	0.64	0.91	42	58	Y

Shelfmark	Ruled area <i>taille</i>	Ruled area proportion	Page <i>taille</i>	Page proportion	Inter- proportion	Ruled area (%)	Margins (%)	Medieval binding?
BodL, MS Bodley 850	242	0.72	358	0.74	0.97	45	55	Partially
BodL, MS Don. d.5	479	0.64	695	0.67	0.95	47	53	
BodL, MS Don. d.6	535	0.67	750	0.69	0.97	51	49	
BodL, MS e Musaeo 108	271	0.70	433	0.70	1.01	39	61	
BodL, MS e Musaeo 126	259	0.57	372	0.66	0.86	47	53	Y
BodL, MS e Musaeo 29	319	0.57	540	0.73	0.79	33	67	Y
BodL, MS Gough Eccl. Top.4	262	0.65	365	0.71	0.92	51	49	
BodL, MS Jones 47	177	0.69	285	0.73	0.94	38	62	
BodL, MS Kennicott 16	166	0.63	235	0.73	0.86	48	52	
BodL, MS Laud Lat. 10	158	0.68	215	0.64	1.06	55	45	
BodL, MS Laud Lat. 13	278	0.64	381	0.69	0.92	52	48	
BodL, MS Laud Lat. 75	231	0.59	370	0.66	0.90	38	62	Y
BodL, MS Laud Lat. 83	144	0.66	228	0.70	0.93	39	61	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 267	330	0.59	520	0.64	0.92	40	60	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 169	222	0.73	283	0.75	0.98	61	39	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 174	191	0.66	282	0.69	0.96	46	54	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 178	200	0.69	280	0.68	1.03	51	49	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 23	182	0.65	262	0.70	0.93	48	52	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 24	159	0.66	263	0.69	0.96	36	64	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 30	174	0.71	253	0.61	1.15	49	51	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 302	414	0.63	647	0.66	0.95	40	60	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 314	189	0.62	314	0.67	0.92	36	64	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 33	190	0.67	279	0.69	0.96	46	54	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 372	242	0.62	386	0.72	0.86	38	62	Y

Shelfmark	Ruled area <i>taille</i>	Ruled area proportion	Page <i>taille</i>	Page proportion	Inter- proportion	Ruled area (%)	Margins (%)	Medieval binding?
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 374	285	0.70	407	0.70	1.00	49	51	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 414	295	0.66	413	0.68	0.97	51	49	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 447	385	0.60	548	0.64	0.93	49	51	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 451	412	0.70	557	0.69	1.00	55	45	Y
BoDL, MS Laud Misc. 501	223	0.69	337	0.64	1.08	45	55	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 511	286	0.62	380	0.70	0.88	55	45	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 513	272	0.65	368	0.70	0.92	54	46	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 529	337	0.64	432	0.70	0.91	60	40	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 572	340	0.55	458	0.69	0.79	52	48	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 579	314	0.64	504	0.70	0.92	38	62	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 602	366	0.66	503	0.69	0.95	52	48	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 641	365	0.64	536	0.67	0.95	46	54	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 645	399	0.64	620	0.73	0.88	40	60	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 652	419	0.62	590	0.67	0.93	50	50	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 659	211	0.57	316	0.66	0.87	43	57	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 674	154	0.64	225	0.65	0.98	47	53	Y
BodL, MS Liturg. 130	126	0.64	188	0.62	1.03	45	55	
BodL, MS Liturg. 6	156	0.66	247	0.73	0.91	39	61	
BodL, MS Liturg. 98	196	0.66	337	0.70	0.94	33	67	
BodL, MS Lyell 47	293	0.66	458	0.70	0.95	41	59	
BodL, MS Lyell 7	310	0.54	541	0.62	0.87	32	68	
BodL, MS Rawl. C.285	300	0.66	372	0.71	0.93	64	36	
BodL, MS Rawl. C.448	501	0.68	709	0.72	0.94	49	51	
BodL, MS Rawl. C.72	226	0.61	326	0.67	0.91	47	53	Y

Shelfmark	Ruled area <i>taille</i>	Ruled area proportion	Page <i>taille</i>	Page proportion	Inter- proportion	Ruled area (%)	Margins (%)	Medieval binding?
BodL, MS Rawl. G.170	336	0.62	485	0.66	0.93	47	53	Y
BodL, MS Rawl. G.23	202	0.59	318	0.68	0.87	39	61	Y
BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 141	290	0.58	436	0.73	0.80	42	58	
BodL, MS Wood empt. 19	183	0.56	248	0.65	0.86	53	47	
BodL, MS Wood empt. 20	190	0.73	266	0.71	1.03	51	49	
Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Library, MS Codex 197	112	0.58	194	0.64	0.90	32	68	
Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Library, MS Codex 198	275	0.54	448	0.71	0.76	35	65	
Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Library, MS Codex 201	236	0.57	297	0.61	0.93	62	38	
Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Library, MS Codex 680	257	0.64	387	0.68	0.93	43	57	
Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Library, LMS Codex 721	395	0.59	517	0.66	0.90	57	43	
Ripon Cathedral Library, MS 6	192	0.67	263	0.71	0.95	53	47	
Ripon Cathedral Library, MS 9	225	0.65	352	0.69	0.95	40	60	
HEHL, MS HM 1067	278	0.63	443	0.66	0.95	39	61	
HEHL, MS HM 112 (A)	217	0.61	314	0.68	0.89	47	53	
HEHL, MS HM 127	288	0.65	461	0.73	0.89	38	62	
HEHL, MS HM 128	339	0.66	411	0.68	0.98	68	32	
HEHL, MS HM 1339	333	0.67	477	0.68	0.98	49	51	
HEHL, MS HM 147	323	0.61	463	0.69	0.88	47	53	
HEHL, MS HM 148 (A)	369	0.66	468	0.71	0.94	61	39	
HEHL, MS HM 148 (B)	379	0.68	488	0.74	0.93	60	40	

Shelfmark	Ruled area <i>taille</i>	Ruled area proportion	Page <i>taille</i>	Page proportion	Inter- proportion	Ruled area (%)	Margins (%)	Medieval binding?
HEHL, MS HM 149	336	0.55	426	0.66	0.83	59	41	
HEHL, MS HM 19913	100	0.61	191	0.71	0.87	27	73	
HEHL, MS HM 19918 part 1	358	0.61	512	0.68	0.88	48	52	Y
HEHL, MS HM 19918 part 2	352	0.64	487	0.67	0.95	52	48	Y
HEHL, MS HM 19918 part 3	352	0.53	484	0.63	0.84	51	49	Y
HEHL, MS HM 19918 part 4	359	0.61	495	0.66	0.92	52	48	Y
HEHL, MS HM 266	247	0.67	360	0.64	1.04	47	53	
HEHL, MS HM 502	182	0.67	249	0.72	0.93	53	47	

Table 8: Size and shape in a heterogeneous collection of manuscripts each dominated by verse

Shelfmark	Ruled area <i>taille</i>	Ruled area proportion	Page <i>taille</i>	Page proportion	Inter- proportion	Ruled area (%)	Margins (%)	Binding
CUL, MS Add. 4122	119	0.59	208	0.69	0.85	32	68	Y
CUL, MS Dd.i.17, vols 1-2	531	0.61	757	0.69	0.90	48	52	
Leeds University Library, MS 1	317	0.70	445	0.63	1.12	52	48	
BL, MS Cotton Vespasian A.iii	327	0.71	385	0.70	1.02	72	28	
LPL, MS 853	190	0.64	280	0.72	0.89	45	55	Y
New Haven, Beinecke Library, MS Osborn a.2	257	0.57	358	0.67	0.85	50	50	Y
BodL, MS Add. B.107	175	0.58	277	0.78	0.74	38	62	Y
BodL, MS Ashmole 42	274	0.47	352	0.59	0.80	57	43	
BodL, MS Bodley 415	368	0.66	479	0.70	0.94	58	42	
BodL, MS Bodley 686	353	0.45	640	0.67	0.68	27	73	
BodL, MS Digby 232	495	0.67	749	0.70	0.96	43	57	
BodL, MS Douce 236	198	0.68	284	0.72	0.94	48	52	
BodL, MS Douce 60	299	0.98	342	0.76	1.28	78	22	
BodL, MS Greaves 57	239	0.60	372	0.62	0.97	41	59	
BodL, MS Hatton donat. 1	295	0.58	450	0.72	0.80	41	59	
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 416	351	0.45	566	0.62	0.73	35	65	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 463	462	0.65	574	0.68	0.95	64	36	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 595	319	0.49	509	0.65	0.75	36	64	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 656	282	0.66	354	0.69	0.95	63	37	Y
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 673	180	0.71	251	0.76	0.95	51	49	Y

Shelfmark	Ruled area <i>taille</i>	Ruled area proportion	Page <i>taille</i>	Page proportion	Inter- proportion	Ruled area (%)	Margins (%)	Binding
Princeton University Library, MS Taylor Medieval 2	505	0.64	759	0.71	0.90	43	57	Y
HEHL, MS HM 115	232	0.63	368	0.68	0.93	39	61	
HEHL, MS HM 124	184	0.69	289	0.69	1.00	41	59	Y
HEHL, MS HM 129	257	0.44	358	0.65	0.67	46	54	
HEHL, MS HM 135	291	0.56	467	0.74	0.77	37	63	
HEHL, MS HM 142	271	0.59	432	0.63	0.94	39	61	
HEHL, MS HM 144 (booklets 3-5)	295	0.59	492	0.67	0.89	35	65	
HEHL, MS HM 55	256	0.61	422	0.67	0.91	36	64	Y
HEHL, MS HM 744	253	0.71	395	0.69	1.03	41	59	
HEHL, MS HM 903	321	0.74	407	0.67	1.09	63	37	

Table 9: The dimensions, volume, weight and density of some Bodleian manuscripts retaining late medieval bindings

Shelfmark	Contents	Dating	H/W/D (mm)	Vol. (mm ³)	Weight (g)	Density (g/mm ³)
MS Laud Misc. 486	<i>The Prick of Conscience; Cura Pastoralis</i>	s. xv in	203 × 137 × 55	1529605	950	0.000621
MS Bodley 159 ¹	<i>Stimulus Conscientiae</i> , et al.	s. xv in	312 × 222 × 96	6649344	4000	0.000602
Univ. Coll, MS 142	<i>The Prick of Conscience</i>	s. xv in	273 × 166 × 48	2175264	1300	0.000598
MS e Musaeo 23 ²	<i>Aventure and Grace</i>	s. xv ²	341 × 230 × 41	3215630	1850	0.000575
MS Bodley 446	<i>Speculum Vitae</i>	s. xv in	255 × 174 × 82	3638340	2050	0.000563
MS Eng. poet. d.5	<i>Speculum Vitae</i>	s. xiv/xv	254 × 184 × 75	3505200	1950	0.000556
MS Rawl. C.319	<i>The Prick of Conscience</i>	s. xv ¹	250 × 133 × 55	1828750	950	0.000519
MS Hatton 19	<i>Speculum Vitae</i>	s. xv ¹	310 × 225 × 48	3348000	1700	0.000508
MS Laud Misc. 601	<i>The Prick of Conscience</i>	s. xiv ex	318 × 216 × 53	3640464	1750	0.000481
MS Bodley 99	<i>The Prick of Conscience</i>	s. xv ¹	207 × 154 × 33	1051974	450	0.000428

1. BodL, MS Bodley 159 is four manuscripts bound together, but bound together in the fifteenth century; ff.169^r–179^r contain a copy of the Latin translation of *The Prick of Conscience*.

2. BodL, MS e Musaeo 23 is the only one of these manuscripts with a late fifteenth-century binding in which the wooden boards are covered with blind-stamped leather. *Aventure and Grace* is a prose translation of the *Somme le roi* by the diplomat and knight Robert Shottesbrook; it survives uniquely in this manuscript. Hanna says that MS e Mus. 23 has a Winchester binding: ‘Sir Thomas Berkeley and His Patronage’, *Speculum*, 64 (1989), 878–916 (905–906).

Table 10: Copies of *The Prick of Conscience* with substantial bracing programmes

Shelfmark	Date	Brace colour
Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS McClean 131	s. xiv ex	Initially red, black after f.1 ^r
GCC, MS 386	s. xv ¹	Text ink
Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS F.4.18	s. xiv ex	Red and blue with yellow wash
Chicago, Newberry Library, MS 32.9	s. xiv ²	Red
Chicago, Newberry Library, MS 33	s. xiv ²	Red and blue alternating
Lichfield Cathedral Library, MS 16	s. xv in	Red
Lichfield Cathedral Library, MS 50	s. xiv ²	Red
BL, MS Arundel 140	s. xv ¹	Black
BL, MS Cotton Galba E.ix	s. xiv ex	Black
BL, MS Cotton Appendix VII	s. xv in	Red
BL, MS Egerton 657	s. xiv ²	Predominantly black, intermittently red
BL, MS Harley 4196	s. xiv ex	Black
BL, Additional 11304	s. xiv ²	Red and black alternating
BL, Additional 32578	1405	Red
London , Society of Antiquaries, MS 687	s. xv ¹	Initially red, black after p.19
JRL, MS English 51	s. xv in	Black
JRL, MS English 90	s. xiv/xv	Red
Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 60	s. xiv ex	Red
BodL, MS Bodley 99	s. xiv ex	Red
BodL, MS Digby 14	s. xiv ¹	Black
BodL, MS Digby 87	s. xiv ex	Black
BodL, MS Douce 126	s. xv ¹	Black
BodL, MS Douce 157	s. xiv ex	Red
BodL, MS Junius 56	s. xv ¹	Red
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 468	s. xv in	Black

Shelfmark	Date	Brace colour
BodL, MS Rawlinson C.319	s. xv ¹	Red
BodL, MS Rawlinson poetry 175	s. xiv ²	Black
SJO, MS 138	s. xv med	Red
Princeton University Library, MS Taylor Medieval 13	s. xiv ²	Red
Wellesley College, MS 8	s. xv in	Red
Woolhampton, Douai Abbey, MS 7	s. xiv/xv	Red

Table 11: Corrections to rhyme braces in some copies of *The Prick of Conscience*

Manuscript	Number of corrections	Source of error			Detection		Corrections	
		Page/column division	Textual disruption	Bracer/unknown	Independent	Prompted	Add. bracing	Erasure and add. bracing
Chicago, Newberry Library, MS 32.9	7	5	0	2	6	1	7	0
BL, MS Arundel 140	2	1	1	0	2	0	2	0
BL, MS Cotton Appendix VII	5	5	0	0	3	2	4	1
BL, MS Egerton 657	2	2	0	0	2	0	2	0
BL, MS Harley 2394	10	5	5	0	9	1	10	0
BL, MS Lansdowne 348	18	3	7	8	16	2	14	4
BL, MS Add. 11304	2	0	1	1	2	0	1	1
BodL, MS Ashmole 60	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
BodL, MS Bodley 99	13	8	0	5	11	2	13	0
BodL, MS Douce 126	8	8	0	0	6	2	8	0
BodL, MS Douce 157	8	6	1	1	4	4	5	3
BodL, MS Junius 56	6	4	0	2	5	1	0	6
BodL, MS Laud Misc. 486	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
BodL, MS Rawl. C.319	3	1	1	1	3	0	1	2
SJO, MS 138	5	4	0	1	3	2	4	1
Totals	91	54	16	21	74	17	73	18

Appendix 2: Transcription

The following transcription from LPL, Sion MS Arch. L.40.2/E.25, ff. 1^r–12^v is provided to contextualise the discussion in Chapter 5, since this text is known to survive only in this manuscript and has never been published. Equivalent line numbers from *SVRE* are listed to the right for reference. For convenience the marginal apparatus has been transcribed to the right regardless of which margin it originally appears in.

- | | | |
|-------------------|---|----------------------------|
| (1 ^r) | Bot yherne of þam oft with þam to mete | <i>SVRE</i> , ll.7799–7904 |
| | For all seme þai bittir þai ar swete | 7800 |
| | For thyng þat byttir to þe body es | |
| | To þe saule es grete swettnes | |
| 5 | þar for he suld nan angre drede | |
| | þat wald þarfor haf blyse to mede | |
| | For angre suld litel dere hym þan | 7805 |
| | Als saynt gregor says þe halyman | <i>Gregorius</i> |
| | Trast of mede þat may noght faile | |
| 10 | Alleges mykel a mans trauayle | |
| | þe thride thyng es in tribulacioun | |
| | To thynk ay on cristes passioun | 7810 |
| | þat he tholed for mannes trespas | <i>De passio</i> |
| | Who so thynkes how hard it was | <i>ne christi</i> |
| 15 | First how ^{^he^} had many sare buffe[d]^tte^ | |
| | And sithen naked with scourges bete | |
| | þat hys body ran [dou] all of blode | 7815 |
| | And sithen nayled was on þe rode | |
| | And þare on he degged and yhelde þe gast | |
| 20 | And all tholed he for oure luf mast | |
| | Swa hard payne had neuer nane | |
| | Als [Alf] crist for vs suffred þane | 7820 |
| | No harder payne myght neuer be | |
| | For he spak þis worde of gret pite | |
| 25 | Thurgh Ieremye þe prophete | <i>Ieremias</i> |
| | Yhe men he sayde þat passes by þe strete | |
| | Habyde whyle or yhe ga | 7825 |
| | And byhald my payne and my wa | |
| | If euer was any sorow or pyne | |
| 30 | So herd and bitter als es myne | |
| | Mynd of þis [d] suld do vs grette | |
| | And mak ovr angres to vs swette | 7830 |
| (1 ^v) | Nathyng may be here to vs better | |
| | Ne man mak oure angres swetter | |
| | Als I fynde wryten in haly write | |
| | Ensaumpel þar men may red it | |
| 5 | How þe childer of Irael | 7835 |
| | þat moyses led goddis prophet leel | |

	Come to awater þat þai soght		
	Bot drynk þar of myght þainoght		
	For þe water was bitter to fele		
10	Bot afterward god pay ^e ^e de þam wele	7840	
	He had moyses lay þar in a tre		
	And all þe water suld swte be		
	Moyses did als god hym sayde		
	And it was swete þare þe tre was layde		
15	þe bitter water alls I hald	7845	
	þe anger of þis werld es cald		
	þe tre þat mad it swet sone		
	Es þe croycy on whylk god was done		
20	Whar for wha so in hert has mynde		
	What payne þat crist had for man kynde	7850	
	Onþe croice als was his wille		
	Hym suld thynk here nan angre ille		
	For it nees payn ne aduersite		
25	Ne angre þat in þis werld may be		
	þat ne þemynd of goddis passioun	7855	
	Suld mak it swet thurgh deuocioun		
	þe ferth thyng to thynk in thoght		De Vtilitate
	When we ar in angre broght		tribulacionum
30	What godes þat anger wynne may		
	Tille hym þat mekely suffres þam a<y>	7860	
(2 ^r)	First angre proues goddys knyght		
	To luk how hardy he es and wyght		
	A knyght may noght hys strength fele		
	Til he in stoure be proued wele		
5	For saynt paul says as I fynd can	7865	Paulus
	þat paciens mast proues a man		
	And als þe aungel spak þer by		
	And sayd þis word vn to toby		
	For þou payed god it byhoued		
10	þat þi fondyng had þe proued	7870	
	Angre þoghe it be gret to syght		
	It clenses þe saule and mas it bright		
	Right als fire mas golde fyne		
	And als þe fyle dus þe iren to schine		
15	And als þe flayle þe corn dynges	7875	
	Out of þe caf þat on it hynges		
	Als saynt gregor telles and says		Gregorius
	In a buk þat es mekel to prays		
	þat angres bene medicyns lele		
20	þe gret sekenes of synnes to hele	7880	

- For als þe buke openly shewes vs
 þar we may fynd wretyn þus
 þat sekenes þe saule sobre mas
 þat syn oft sithe couerd has
- 25 þarfor says þus saynt gregor 7885
 þou suld noght thynk hard þarfor
 þat þou fyndys here malady
 With outen þe of þi body
 If þou be heled clene with yn
- 30 Of alkyn sekenes of syn 7890
 (2^v) Also thurgh tribulacioun
 Men wennys of blys þe coroun
 For saynt Iame says þat blissed es he
 þat tholes fandyng ad uersitie
- 5 As þe gud knyght þat in stoure takes 7895
 And endures many sare strakes
 For þi þe hegh coroun of blys
 When he es proued sal be his
 Þise foure thynges þat I haf tald
- 10 We suld in hertes falde 7900
 And thynk on þam bath nyght and day
 In alle angres þat greue vs may
 For nathyng vs may comfort mare
 þan mynd of þam when we arein care
- 15 Bot wha so wele wele schryuen be *SVRE*, ll.5569–5758
 Hym byhoues part hym self in thre 5570
 First at þe hart he sall begyn
 And sythen at mouthe and tung with in
 And afterward at all þe body
- 20 Tille he haue ransaked ylk aparty
 For ilkan mas hys cours euen 5575
 Thurgh all þe dedly synnes seuen
 First he suld tell his thoughtes ouer twert
 And þe wekyd yhernynges of hys hart
- 25 And þar efter his worde^s^ ilkane
 þat out of hys mouthe wrang has gane 5580
 And efter ward he suld tell sone
 All þe ille workes þat he has done
- (3^r) And so may he if he be wyse
 Put out in shrift all hys folyse
 For all þe synnys þat on conscience hynges 5585
 Comes specialy of þis thre thynges
- 5 Of hert of mouthe and of werk
 By þise thre may we tak oure mark

	To schew in shrift what we haf wrought	
	What we haue sayde and we haf thought	5590
	And ouer þat may we know sone	
10	þe synnes of leuyng of god vndone	
	Bot first I wille telle yow some	
	Of þe synnes þat of þe hert may come	
	Hec sunt peccata cordis	
	þe synnes of þe hert er þis by skylle	5595
15	Thought delite consentyng and wille	
	Yhernyng and vnfathfulnes	
	Slewth dulhede and vndeutines	
	Wranghope ouer hope and wrang wenyng	
	Wanhope þat wers es and vntrastyng	5600
20	Fole luf þat es elle brynnande	
	Drede þat es ay ille lawande	
	Assocyng and foule affeccioun	
	Vayne gessyng and suspeccioun	
	Wreth hatred and litherhed	5605
25	Rancure envye and carles drede	
	Ioy of othermens angres and care	
	Sorow of other mens welefayre	
	Dedeyen muyng þat þe hert shendis	
	And fleshly affeccioun of frendys	5610
30	Trechery and vn conabel gladnes	
	Vn sufferaunce and wordly drerynes	
(3 ^v)	Vayne dole perplexite and pryde	
	Irkyng of gode and accide	
	Couatyse and auaryse	5615
	Herdnes of hert and malyse	
5	Vnstedfastnes and for getyng	
	Forthyngkyng of penance doying	
	Studyng of ille begynnyng	
	Ioy þat aman has of hys syn	5620
	And sorow þat he na mare ille dide	
10	Ypocrycy þare þe synes hydde	
	Luf to plese aman a gayn skylle	
	Drede to displese hym þat dus ille	
	Shame to do any godedede	5625
	In syght o men when it war nede	
15	Hardines and baldnes in synne	
	Arghnes of gode dede to bygynne	
	Syngulere witte and ille luf priue	
	Yhernyng of state or of dignite	5630
	Vayne glory and vayne likyng	

(4 ^v)	Excusyn and defendyng of syn	5675
	Skrykyn crying and vayn dyn	
	Grechyn a gayn god and man	
	Blawyng of bost þat som men can	
5	To snybe and sette men to reson	
	A gayn skylly with outhen cheson	5680
	To mote in causis vnrightwis	
	To lere man to gre his enmys	
	Fals demyng of other men dedis	
10	Fals endityng þat men dredys	
	Laghing grynnyng and vayn lykenyng	
	Dispytus [bre] bleryng and maws makyng	5685
	To syng sangys of iolyte	
	To red of bukes of vanyte	
15	To schewe wordes af harlotry	
	To spek fole wordes of vilany	5690
	To stody mare in voice brekyng	
	In kyrk þan in deuoute syngyn	
	To dispute and ergu in vayne	
20	To schew fallaces vn certayne	
	To ask on hethyng or wrang to answar	5695
	To þam þat men suld for bere	
	To spire how athyng may be	
	þat es godes awn priuite	
25	þis er þe synnes of þe mowthe	
	Yhit er þar ma wha sou þam couthe	5700
	Hec sunt peccataoperis	
	þe synnes þat comes of werk and dede	
	Of þe body er þes to rede	
30	Drunkenes and glotony	
	And man slaughter and lechery	5705
	Sacrelege theft and rauyn	
	And symony þat I hald gret syn	
(5 ^r)	Ocur þat grettely god mispayes	
	Brekyn of dere halydays	
	Brekyn of vowes þat men mas	5710
	Forsakyn of ordyr þat men tas	
5	Takyn of howsyl vnworthyly	
	Vnreuerence vnto goddis body	
	Besyne abowt vayne reuereys	
	Fayllyng thurgh fayntys in goddys seruys	5715
	Ille ensample in dede to gyf	
10	To other men þat suld wele lyf	
	Or any werk to haunt or wyrk	

- Pat may be slawnder to haly kyrk
 To hurt a man in hys *persoun* 5720
 In hys godes or in hys renoun
 15 Treson [fa^l^sed] falshed and gylry
 And wechecraft and tregetry
 Exstorsious þat is laghles
 Sellyng of [sawl] lawe and of reghtwysnes 5725
 Fals marchandys and fole sleghles
 20 Hauntyng of fals mesures and wegthes
 Plays iapes als men oft sese
 Pat ar noght but vanytese
 Hauntyng of carols and of daunce 5730
 Feynnyng of fole countenans
 25 To gyf iugolors and menstrayles
 Gyftes for iapes and vayne [ta^y^les] tayles
 To with draw fra amans awn body
 Hys nedeful fode þat he suld leue by 5735
 Or ouer mekyl to tak and vse
 30 In outrayge als som men duse
 To vnder take with a gret wille
 To do mare þan aman may fulfyllen
 (5v) Office to hald and to haunt 5740
 To whylk a man es noght suffi^ci^aunt
 Or office or craft to begynne
 Pat may noght be with owten [wynne] synne
 5 Agayne to t^u^rne and to haunt eft
 Be syn þat aman has left 5745
 Custom to syn þat es herd to breke
 Batayle to mayntyne or conteke
 To smyte and to assaile on somwise
 10 To fynd and to vse neuelryse
 Sturdines of men þat I hate
 Agayne other of mare state 5750
 Hardnes þat some dus þat may
 To men þat er meyner þan þay
 15 To trespas in vndirstandyng
 In syght in heryng or in felyng
 In smellyng in tasyng with mowthe 5755
 In kyssyng þat es atakyn cowthe
 In halsyng or in vnder takyng
 20 In bekenyng or in syngnes makyn
 Be circumstaunce of syn to take 5760
 Pat be synful greue may make
 Als tyme stede maner and tale

	Persoun dwellyng elde and witte hale	
25	And when aman hym puttes syn	
	Byfor or fondyng begyn	<i>SVRE</i> , ll. 5771–5834
	Or paynes hym to syn mare	
	With hys body þan myster ware	
	Þis er þe synnes to tell shortly	
30	Þat comes of werk and dede of body	5775
	Hec sunt peccata omissionis boni	
(6 ^r)	Þe syns of leuyng of gode v ⁿ ^wroght	
	Es to haue noght gode in thoght	
	To luf hym noght ne to drede	
	To thank hym noght of all gode dede	5780
5	To hald noght done thurgh goddys myght	
	Þe dede þat aman dus ryght	
	For syns here na sorow to make	
	Als aman suld do for goddys sake	
	To make hym noght redy and able	5785
10	Grace to resceuey þat es profitable	
	To vse noght grace ne [no] to kepe wele	
	Þat men has getyn and may fele	
	To turn hym noght ne hym hast	
	To enspyryng of þe halygast	5790
15	To conferm noght hys wille haly	
	Vn to þe wille of god all myghty	
	To ga noght to þe kyrk ne to pray	
	Ne þe houres of þe day to say	
	To leve thyng vndon thurgh neclygens	5795
20	To welk he [h] es halden thurgh obedyence	
	To do noght hys office ne to hald vowe	
	To fader ne [ne] moder noght to bowe	
	To receyve noght anes in þ yhere	
	Housel and scheref with conscience clere	5800
25	To know noght hym self in hys state	
	To reproue noght hys syn ne hate	
	Hys consciens noght ryght to lede	
	Nawther in worde ^ne^ in dede	
	To say and to do noght sone	5805
30	Thyng þat fel tite to be done	
(6 ^v)	To haue na ioye ne solace	
	Of othermens wele fare and grace	
	Or to haue na sorowe ne care	
	Of othermens angres and ille fare	5810
5	To relese noght ne to for gyf	
	Wranges all if þai might grettely gref	

- To kepe noght trewth and leawte
 To other men als falles to be
 To answer noght at þe god dede 5815
 10 þat other men has done in nede
 Als to do noght blethely
 Als falles to þe werkes of mercy
 To chasty þam noght þat mysdose
 To snyb þam noght þat syn will vse 5820
 15 To mak noght pees als falles by skylle
 þare þare stryfes and ille wille
 To teche noght vnconand men
 þe whylk men er halden to ken
 To comforth þam [s] noght sadly 5825
 20 þat has angre and are sary
 To noght after gode mens rede
 To be noght deuoute in haly bede
 Here may men se and knawe
 Many syns wryten on rawe 5830
 25 He þat lokes þam ouere grathely
 May witte of [syn] what syn he es gylty
 Swa may he ransake all hys lufe
 And knaw of what he sall hym shryf
 Another condicioun es to se *SVRE*, 1.5847–72
 30 þat a man suld oft shryfyn be
 Of wyked dedys and thoghtes and wittes
 And es nedefull for sex skylles 5850
 (7^r) Ane es for mare grace to wynne
 And to be made mare clene with me
 Another es for syns veniele
 þat men may ilk day fele
 For þat þai oft fyled es sene 5855
 5 Oft byhoue[d]^s^ be wasshed clene
 And thynk þat comes þat dere may
 Men byhoues ^oft^ do tite a way
 Als dus þe shypman þat þe ship kepes *exemplum*
 Ay when þe water with in crepes 5860
 10 Als oft als it comes in fast
 Als oft byhoues hym out it kast
 And bot he do so þe schip will synk
 Thurgh weght of þe water also me thynk
 So fares aman sawle with in 5865
 15 In wham comes ilk day new syn
 þat hym byhoues in shrift rounne
 And elles it will hys sawle wegh doune

- For yhe se þat many smale cornes may make
 A gret charge til an hors bake 5870
 20 Ryght so may many syns smale
 Make agret dedyly syn hale
 And als þe aungel spake þarby *SVRE*, ll.7867–76
 And sayd þis word vnto toby
 For þou payed god it byoued
 25 þat yn fondyng had þe proued 7870
 Angre þoghe it be gref to syght
 It clenses þe sawl and mas it bryght
 Ryght als fyre mas gold fyne
 And als þe fyle dus þe iren to shyne
 30 And als þe flayl þe corn dynges 7875
 Out of þe caffē þat on it hynges
 (7^v) Bot fyfe thynges schrift mast lettes *SVRE*, ll.5883–99
 þat þe fend in mans hert settes
 Ane es shame in hert ful euen 5885
 þat aman has hys synnes to neuē
 5 A nother es wykked drede þar to
 þat aman has penaunce to do
 þe threde es wikked luf to telle
 þat aman has in syn to dwelle 5890
 þe ferth es wanhope of hert
 10 þat a man ha^s of lang lyf in quert
 þe fift es wanhope werst of [a] all
 In whylk þe fend mas a man to fall
 þe secund batayle es of penaunce *SVRE*, ll.5903–04
 þat puttes aman fra sufferauce *Bellum penitencie*
 15 For som bygynnes penaunce to haunt *SVRE*, ll.5915–74
 þat in þat ba[yt]^{ta}yll er recriaunte
 Bot after þe wedercok lyue þay
 þat with all wyndys turnes ay
 So lyghtly chaunges amans thoght
 20 þat now he will and now he will noght 5920
 Bot when a man þat ^{god} will pay
 Settes hys hert in swilk away
 To do penaunce and it ful fill
 So þat nathyng chaunge hys will
 25 Ne in hys penaunce will noght fayll 5925
 þan ouercomes he þat batayll
 Ecce bellum carnis
 A nother batayl es ay fresshe
 þat es þe batayl of þe flesshe
 30 And langest with aman will dwell 5930

- For when þe flessch penaunce beres
 Or any hardnes þat it deres
 (8^r) It groches þar with and plenes it oft
 For it loues wele all theng[es] þat es soft
 And all eses and delyces 5935
 þat ledes aman to many vices
 And if þe felssh haue all þe will
 5 It ouercomes aman thurgh skyl
 Bot I will lyken efter I kan
 þe flessch vntill an ill woman 5940
 Of whame þe maners er noght to prays
 Als salamon þe wys man says *Salomon*
 10 For euer þe mare men folowes hire will
 þe mare fraward sche es and ill
 And þe mare fell and þe mare kene 5945
 Als was in sampson þe fortesene
 þat of a woman ouercomen was
 15 For hyre wyles hyr streⁿ^{gh} gunpas
 For in hys hare was all hys strength
 þat semely was of bred and lengh 5950
 All þat was haly fra hym rest
 So þat na strength was with hym left
 20 þan fell he in þe handes of hys enmys
 And all was thurgh a woman quayntys
 For soth rygth so oft it fares 5955
 Of amans flessch wha so it spares
 If he lat it hym ouercome
 25 It castes hym in tyl a thraldome
 For it mas hym to syn ful boune
 When it bycomes wild and wanton 5960
 Bot it war god for þe saule bote
 To hald þe flesshe ay vnderfote
 30 And lat it haf na delice
 þan may he it lyghtly scomfete
 For wha so euer ouer comes þat batayle 5965
 God hym hetes with owten fayle
 (8^v) þe whitte robe of hys lyueree
 þat es þe robe of chastite
 Bellum mundi
 þe ferth batayl þan
 5 þe werld bygynnes to assayl aman 5970
 And dame fortune with hyr whele
 þat turnes a bout als men may fele
 þe werld aman here assayles

- On ayther syde with twa batayles
 10 þe ta batayl es as I gesce *SVRE*, ll.5977–92
 Of honours delices and rychesce
 þe whylk þe werld *profers* in syght
 þat assales aman on þe syde ryght 5980
 þe tother batayle es ful smert
 15 þat es angre yuel and pouert
 þat god sendes for þe saule byhoue
 Som to chasty and some to prufe
 þat assayles fast on þe left syde 5985
 þat batayle suld a man abyde
 20 And stand stalworthly in þat stoure
 For god will help and socoure
 Bot who so [feles] fles wordes lykyng
 And abydes angres with owten grochyn 5990
 He ouercomes þe batayls bathe
 25 And passes o way with owten scatthe
 We suld tytter thole if we war wyse *SVRE*, ll.387–89
 Oure lyf be parted fra oure bodyse
 þan fra god departed be
 þat vs dere boght opon þe rod tre
 30 Dred mas aman syn for sake one unidentified line
 And luf mas aman gud vertus take *SVRE*, ll.423–24
 And ilk a hert þat god may halde *SVRE*, ll.1491–92
 By skylle may be a heuen calde *SVRE*, ll.1627–28
 And luf and dred in all thyng
 35 May sonest a man to mekenes bryng
 We suld lof god for hym self anely *SVRE*, ll.1847–48
 And oure oeuen cristyn for god almyghty
 (9^r) Aduenat regnum tuum
 þat may be schortly sayd þus *SVRE*, ll.2601–04
 Lord thurgh grace here regne invs
 þat we thurgh blys may regne inþe
 5 In þe tother werld þat ay sal be
 Et dimitte nobis
 Lord forgyf me ^{^here^} my dettys *SVRE*, ll.3073–78
 þat are my syns þat my mede lettys
 For I am als þou may se 3075
 10 Grettely endettyd onnence þe
 Thurgh my wyckednes þat I haue wroght
 In word in werk in will in thoght
 Et ne nos et cetera
 þat es to say þus stretly *SVRE*, ll.3113–20
 15 Swette fader god almyghty

- Lede vs noght with in temptacion 3115
 þat we namare to syn be boun
 þat es to say ^thurgh^ vndyrstandyng
 Lat vs noght be felled in fandying
 20 Nauther of þe werld ne of þe fend
 Ne of our flesshe þat þe saule wald schend 3120
 Bot we pray noght on þis manere
 þat we be noght tempted here
 For þis ware afoly to pray
 25 And a schame ful thyng to vs to say
 Ryght als aman son of grette myght 3185
 þat ware made a new knyght
 Prayde hys fader on þis wyse
 Thurgh faynt hert and cowardyse
 30 Gode fader he says I pray þe
 Kepe me wele and for [gyf]^bere^ me 3190
 þat I neuer to turnament ga
 Ne to batayl bot kep me þar fra
 Swylk a [ky] knyght es noght worthy
 To haf los als he þat es doghty
 (9^v) We suld ay yherne fandyns to fele 3195
 So þat we agayne stand þam wele
 For als salamon says þar by
 þat was a wysse man and a witty
 5 He þat neuer was fonded yhyte
 He may noght ryghtly a thyng wyt
 Bot als men vndyrstandyng
 Of þe batayle of troy thurgh sayng 3210
 For why hene may [kna] knaw ne gesce
 10 Hys awen strenghe ne hys feblesce
 Ne þe strenghe of hys enemyse
 Ne þe suttelnes þat in þam lyse
 Ne how leel god es to help in nede 3215
 Hys awen frend þat es in drede
 15 Ne fra how many shenchippes
 And syns and peryls he hym kepes
 Ne thank hym of hys godenes here
 Wharne he ware founded on some manere
 And if foundyng ware noght profitable
 20 To god men [hyre] here of hard [stabylle] stable
 God þat all thyng duse wele
 Suld noght thole men sa mykel it fele
 Bot when he þat temptys says saynt bernard 3135
 on Oure bakkes strikes harde

- 25 He forges vs corounes of blys
 þat god graunttes to þam þat er hys
 For he þat strykes fast thurgh myght
 On þe bak of anoble knyght 3140
 He forgesce hym loos and wurschippe
- 30 All if he þat strykes þar of tak na kepe
 Si vis placere deo habeas pietatem
 de tua anima
- (10^r) Þarfor þus says haly wrytte says ryght 8140
 If þou will paye god mast of myght
 Haf fyrst pyte and mercy
 Of þine awen saule pryncipaly
- 5 For he þat to hym self dos ille
 To wham suld he be gude thurgh skyll
 He may noght lele to other be
 þat to hym selfe ans na lewte
 Dicit Bernardus de confessione
- 10 Luf chrift he says þat may þe saue 8150
 If þou will fayrhed in þe haue
 For varray chryft may noght be
 With outen clennes and bewte 9570
 Memoria passionis *christi*
- 15 It es gude to haue mynde certayne
 Of crystes passioune and hys payne
 þat es þe wepen als clerkys redys
 þat þe fend of hell mast dredys
 Thurgh whilk he was ouer comen sone 9575
- 20 And hys mast power here for done 8160
 And of þat haue we in haly wrytte
 Ens^aumple wha so will here itte
 Of þe nedder of bras wroght
 þat moyses on a rode broght 9580
- 25 Agayne qwilk neddres þa^t þan ware
 þat venymd þe folk and stynged sare
 He held vp hegh þe nedder of bras
 Als oure lord comaundment was
 þat all þe cuntre myght it se 9585
- 30 þe venemous nedders þan gun fle
 And all was warest þat it hy helde
 þat styngyng of þe neddres felde
 þe nedder þat was mad of bras
 þat on þe rode hynged was 9590
- 35 By takenes þe blissed body
 Of Iesu crist god all myghty

exemplum
 de
 ser
 pente

- (10^v) Pat was hynged on þe croyce heghe
 And for vs vouched sauf to dyghe
 He was þenedder with outhen wenyng 9595
 All treacle of hele come of hym
- 5 Þarfor wha so feles hym byten
 Or venymd or with tange smyten
 Of þe nedders of hell þat sare stynges
 Als fendes þat smytes men with fondyngs 9600
 Byhald yhe þan þenedder[s] of bras
- 10 With verray trouth how he hynged was
 Þat es þat yhe of þe payn haue mynd
 Þat cryst tholed for man kynd
 And als tite þe fendes sal fle 9605
 And þan sall he delyuerd be
- 15 Of all fondyngs þat he feles byte
 So may he best þe fend scomfite
 Þe wittes of aman þat es idel *SVRE*, ll.9705–10 de ocio
 Fars als a hors with outhen brydel
 Þat rennes ay on hede fast
- 20 And castes hys mayster at þe last
 Bot þe chest hert of gode will
 Restregnes þe wittes with þe brydell of skylle 9710
 Castitas perit in delicijs
 For bernard says in a tretice *SVRE*, ll.9725–26
- 25 Þat chastite *perishes* in delice
 Þar for it es god als me thyngk *SVRE*, ll.11385–90
 To vse ay strait met and drynk
 For whaso will hald þam chast
 Byhoues vse greete metes mast
- 30 And noght delicious dayntese
 Þat makes many chastite to lese 11390
 Nihil deest timentibus deum
- (11^r) For whi nathying þat may auayle *SVRE*, ll.10125–28
 To lyf or saule sal hym fayle
 Þat in erd god dredes and lufes
 Als haly wryt says and proues
- 5 Þarfor we suld oft to god call *SVRE*, ll.10289–98
 Þat we noght in nathefes handes fall 10290
 And cry to hym with outhen fayntyse
 Agayne þe fyre of couatyse
 And agayne þe fyre of lechery
- 10 Þat brynnes bathe saule and body
 Þat hevs graunt þe water of teres 10295
 To slek swylk fyre als vs deres

- Pat it noght oure hart vmlap
 Ne of oure saules for do þe chap
 15 De virginitate seruanda
 It kepes chastite charpnes of lyfe *SVRE*, ll. 11849-60
 Pat with þe flesshe byhoues stryfe 11850
 For wha so kepe will maydenhede
 Hys flesshe hym byhoues sherply lede
 20 And it chasty and hald in awe
 And put it aft vnder fote lawe
 Thurgh fastyng wakyng and prayer 11855
 And hard lyggyng þat may it dere
 And gret tra[y]uayl with litel rest
 25 þus may men kep þat state best
 And who so felos hys flesshe will
 þe state of maydenhed he sal spyll 11860
 Maydenhed þat es wemles *SVRE*, ll. 11977-84
 Of sa a gret a valow it es
 30 Pat it nemay on nan wyse
 Be praysed vnto certayn pryse 11980
 Wharfor haly wryt says þus
 Pat nathyng es so precious
 Ne sa werthy þat men may tast
 35 Pat may be weghed agayn hert chast
 (11^v) Wharfor a spot þat es blak *SVRE*, ll. 12257-64
 Pat comonly men will lak
 Semes mare foule in þe eghenamely
 þan in a nother lym of þe body 12260
 Right so me thynk in gode fa^y^the
 5 þe spot of lychery es mare laythe
 And mare peryllous ay to ken
 In clerkes þan in lawed men
Quartum folium qui custodit castitatem
 est timor dei et verecundia
 10 þe ferth lef þat chastyte kepes *SVRE*, ll. 11777-11802
 Es dred of god ad shamfulnes
 For þai þat verray mayndens ben
 Dredful and shamfuler oft sene 11780
 Pat es lytel wonder to se
 15 If þai dredful and shamful be
 For þai bere ful precious tresore
 In afeble vessel þar fore
 Wharfor our leuedy mayden mary 11785
 Was in pryue place anely
 20 And dredful was and symple [loue] lete

- When þe aungel come hire to grete
 Bot dred of god als yhe may here
 May be called þe tresurere 11790
 Þat kepes ay [þ]as es gret nede
 25 þe ryche tresure of maydenhed
 Þat þe fend of hell on nan wyse
 May it stele thurgh quayntyse
 For dred of god als clerkes can tell 11795
 Kepes þe yhates of þe castell
 30 Þar closed es þat ryche tresoure
 Þat es ful syker warnnystoure
 þe ryght yhates of þe castell
 Of þe hert þar þat tresoure sule dwell 11800
 Of clene maydenhed namely
 35 Er þe fyfe wittes of þe body
 (12^r) Þat þe drede of god kepys ay
 So þat þe enmy noght entre may
 Bot some men may to heuen fast *SVRE*, ll.13161–64 de Ie
 For wordly goddes þat fayles at þelast *ronimo*
 5 Bot þai noght to none of þe day
 Fast for þe goddes þat lastes ay
 Disputacio in ter uentrem et loculum
 Bot by twene þe bely of þe gloton *SVRE*, ll.13279–96
 And the pursce es gret dispucion 13280
 10 Þar þe gloton es scars and nyce
 Thurgh comandment of aueryce
 þe bely says als it can thynk
 I wald be full of mete and drynk
 þe purs says þar a gayne 13285
 15 Nay þou sal noght spend in vayne
 Bot I will þat þou restrenye ay
 And spare and kepe all þat þou may
 þus are þere twa ay at styue
 What sall þou do þan [cayst] caytyfe 13290
 20 Þat es thrall and vnderloute
 To whylk twa lordes þat er so [stode] stoute
 Þat byddes þe hald als þai comand
 Twa mesures of weight fayland
 In other mens hous es god and large ll.13295–96 reversed
 25 With gode metes þe bely to charge
 All maner of metes þat es mans fode *SVRE*, ll. 13399–13406
 Er gode to þam þat er gode 13400
 And specialy to þam þat will
 Vse þam with mesure and with skyll

- 30 And ette þam with þe saus namely
 Of þe dred of god almyghty
 For men suld ay haf dred inthoght 13405
 Þat þai in outrage vse þam noght
- (12^v) And loue gode with gode talent
 And thank hym of all þat he has sent
 Bot þese glotons þat outrage I tase *SVRE*, ll.14887–96
 Of þare bely þaire god mas
- 5 Þat þai honoure and na god elles
 Als saynt paule þe apostele [s] telles 14890
 Certes þat man gretely reuyles
 Hym self and fouly hys saule fyles
 Þat serues with grete bysynes
- 10 Swylk alord als þe bely es
 Fra swylk a lord nathyng may come 14895
 Bot stynk and fylth þat is wlatome
 For euer þe mare þat aman *perfyte* es *SVRE*, ll. 14713–24
 Þe mare þe has of mekenes de humilitate
- 15 And þe mare þat he es in charyte 14715
 Þe les prys by hym self settes he
 Wharfor men says þat [*proffe*] prouerbs knawes
 Þat he þat best es mast hym lawes
 Wharfor he þat es *perfite* and clene
- 20 Suld be als atre þat es grene 14720
 Þat on ilk syde es charged wele
 With fayre fruyt and god to fele
 And þe mare þat it es als men trowes
 Charged with fruyt þe mare it bowes
- 25 Bot ryght als men sese noght clerely *SVRE*, ll.15039–40
 In [tpobled] trobled water þat es drouy
 Ryght so þe luf þat comes ouert twert *SVRE*, ll.15033–38
 Of þis weld troubles þe hert
 Of ilk man þat here werdly es 15035
- 30 And puttes hym to vayn besynes
 And fordus þe knawyng ryght
 Of hym self and of god þe syght
 Bot þe loue of god þat es clene *SVRE*, ll.15041–42
 Of werldly luf þat here es sene

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