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Introduction

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In a review of W. Meredith Thompson’s 1958 edition of Þe Wohunge of ure Lauerd, the anonymous reviewer from the Times Literary Supplement describes the edition as possessing a ‘disciplined competence and a judicious enthusiasm’.¹ This description amounts to the only fully positive comment about the edition written by this reviewer, one who seems mainly to draw from other reviews rather than to make constructive criticism of her own. Other reviews comment on problems now very well known to readers of the Wohunge in Thompson’s edition, missed opportunities to cross-reference in the glossary, for example, and the diplomatic nature of the edition, which G. V. Smithers notes is intended for ‘those experienced in reading ME MSS … [and] scholars who cannot lay hands on any sort of reproduction of the MS’,² but which, as a result, is more difficult for ‘all other classes of readers’.³ Smithers, Phyllis Hodgson, Beatrice White, Elizabeth Salter and the anonymous TLS reviewer all reviewed Thompson within about eighteen months of the appearance of the edition, and none of the reviews is particularly surprising, although one major issue is left out of each review, and that is that the appearance of Thompson’s edition began a new chapter in early English medieval scholarship which has come to its fruition with the present volume (and with forthcoming new editions of texts within the Wooing Group and its associated works).⁴ Until the EETS volume was published, few scholars knew Þe Wohunge of ure Lauerde or even of its existence, and fewer still knew that there was such a thing as the Wooing Group.⁵ However, once the edition became available, a whole generation of new students and scholars was able to read and discuss these works within the context of Ancrene Wisse⁶ and beyond. Besides Thompson, the other names that have made scholarship of the Wooing
Group possible for current scholars are Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson, who in their 1991 edition of what they called _Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Related Works_, brought about a revolution in scholarship of the Wooing Group, the Katherine Group and, for many scholars, _Ancrene Wisse_ itself, which until then had not been published in a scholarly, affordable paperback edition of any kind. As a result, the majority of scholarship (with some important exceptions) on the Wooing Group has been produced since 1991, a momentous year for me as it was the first year of my own doctoral studies and the year I encountered the English anchoritic works for the first time. Since that time, there have been several books devoted to English anchoritic subjects, including three very useful collections: _Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs: Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages_, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Marie Hughes-Edwards (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005); _Approaching Medieval English Anchoritic and Mystical Texts_, ed. Dee Dyas, Valerie Edden and Roger Ellis (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005); _Rhetoric of the Anchorhold: Space, Place and Body within Discourses of Enclosure_, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008); these will shortly be followed by _Anchoritic Spirituality: Enclosure, Authority, Transcendence_, ed. Susannah Mary Chewning (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming). These collections represent a growing scholarly awareness of the significance of the anchoritic tradition in medieval English theology, literature, archaeology, linguistic studies and cultural studies, and represent only the beginning of what will certainly continue to be a growing scholarly focus on these works, authors and figures and their world.

Scholarship of the Wooing Group has grown into a very strong and enthusiastic enterprise, with five recent doctoral dissertations devoted to it, as well as a number of high-profile medieval scholars writing and publishing frequently about these works. Considering the brevity of the works, which in Thompson amount to fewer than forty pages in all, the vast number of scholars and students whose interest has turned to these works is remarkable and is, indeed, a tribute to the editions of 1958 and 1991, as well as to the rise in interest in female subjectivity, gender studies, Early English and anchoritism in general since the late 1980s. _Ancrene Wisse_ has been the subject of a large body of scholarship, beginning with James Morton’s 1853 edition and translation and maintaining a steady stream of scholarship throughout the twentieth century (although it, too, did not become as important or frequent a scholarly choice until the last two decades). This volume, then, although devoted to specific works defined as the Wooing Group, represents a response to and participation in the grow-
ing circle of scholars whose focus includes the anchoritic tradition, female authorship and reception of medieval works, and hagiographic works such as those found in associated anchoritic works as well as the lives and works of such figures as Christina of Markyate, Richard Rolle, Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe.

The Wooing Group and its Context

What we now call the Wooing Group is a collection of seven works which are found in five manuscripts. In Thompson there are six works listed: On Ureisun of Ure Louerde, On wel swuðe God Ureisun of God Almihti, On Lofsong of Ure Louerde, On Lofsong of Ure Lefdi, Pe Oreisun of Seinte Marie and Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd. To this list, for the purposes of this collection and as an accepted addition among scholars of the Wooing Group is added A Talkynge of the Loue of God, a fourteenth-century ‘pastiche, of which the first part is paraphrased from the Ureisun of God Almihti and the last part from the Wohunge’, making the total seven works. The texts appear in six manuscripts: MS Lambeth 487, which contains On Ureisun of Ure Louerde (an incomplete version of On wel swuðe God Ureisun of God Almihti); MS Cotton Nero A.xiv, which contains On God Ureisun of Ure Lefdi, On wel swuðe God Ureisun of God Almihti, On Lofsong of Ure Lefdi, and On Lofsong of Ure Louerde; MS Royal 17 A.xxvii, which contains ‘a fragment of the Lofsong of Ure Lefdi there called Þe Oreisun of Seinte Marie’; MS Cotton Titus D.xviii, which contains Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd; and MSS Vernon (Bodleian 3938) and Simeon (Brit. Mus. Add. 22283), both of which contain versions of A Talkynge of the Loue of God. Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd is the longest work (besides A Talkynge) in the Group and thus provides its name. Other works associated with the Wooing Group are, obviously, Ancrene Wisse, versions of which appear in three of the manuscripts, and the works known collectively as the Katherine Group, excerpts of which also appear in several of the Wohunge manuscripts.

The genre of literature into which the Wooing Group (and the Katherine Group) fit is the English anchoritic tradition, referring to works written by and for anchorites, religious solitaries whose presence in England flourished between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries. Anchorites are hermits whose location is fixed and permanent. This provided a geographical focus for the recluse, but also affected the spiritual and physical life of these people, as well.
By a process of internalization, both the physical martyrdom of the earliest Christian centuries and the search for the desert that had followed in its wake (and which was in itself a substitute for bloody martyrdom) became mental states. What had been actual became symbolic ... the virgin, the martyr, the repentant sinner, the ascetic and would-be mystic, the pilgrim, the soldier – all found a desert retreat as well as a deserved or necessary prison in the anchorite’s cell of the Middle Ages.18

Although other forms of reclusive and solitary life existed throughout Europe in the early medieval period, ‘anchoritism evolved into a spatially fixed and physically restricted vocation, whereas the hermit, equally solitary ideologically, was freer to move about ... thus the anchoritic life ... rapidly became imbued with notions of a physically static environment’.19 The English anchoritic tradition begins, according to all scholarly accounts, with St Guthlac who retreated to rural Lincolnshire in approximately 699, living in a hut in the fens near Croyland (where an abbey was founded in his memory).20 Guthlac wished to emulate the desert fathers but did so in a particularly English location, choosing his indigenous swamps and fens over the biblical desert. As McAvoy and Hughes-Edwards have argued, his reclusion in Lincolnshire represents ‘the caves of the desert fathers being transformed both literally and rhetorically into the nascent English anchorhold of much later tradition’.21 Two early English female anchoritic figures are Christina of Markyate and Ælfwynn: Ælfwynn is described as an anchorite in Christina’s Vita, which notes that Christina (born Theodora in about 1095) lived with Ælfwynn for about two years (1115–16). Christina was enclosed as a hermit from about 1116 to 1122, after which, in about 1131, she entered the monastery at St Albans. Ælfwynn is always discussed with respect to her having given shelter to Christina, but her presence as an anchorite (the Latin references to her are anachoretam and inclusa) in the first two decades of the twelfth century support the idea that the practice was fairly popular and that the twelfth-century audience of Christina’s Vita would have understood what an anchoress (or anchorite) was. Still, whether it is Christina or Ælfwynn who is under discussion, Christina’s Vita confirms the presence of women living as anchorites by the early twelfth century. Throughout the twelfth century the presence of anchorites grew in England; the next well-known figure is Wulfric of Haselbury who lived alone as a recluse in the wilderness of Somerset for a few years and officially as an anchorite, enclosed at the church in Haselbury Plucknett, where he died in 1154. Both Christina (and perhaps Ælfwynn) and Wulfric reinforce the data of the growing number of anchoritic cells and anchorites in England in the twelfth century, so the
need for texts such as *Ancrene Wisse* and those of the Wooing and Katherine Groups is clear: as more people sought the enclosure of the anchorhold, guides and texts were necessary to provide them with structure and focus, as well as to reinforce the presence of the larger Church in their daily lives.

The evidence of Christina, Ælfwynn, the *De Institutione Inclusarum* and *Ancrene Wisse* certainly supports recent scholarly claims that there was a particular attraction to the anchoritic life among women of the period, and indeed that the English anchoritic tradition was somehow always already feminine, starting with the feminization of enclosure in the *Vitae* of Guthlac and leading to a feminization that ‘heralds the type of imagistic and exegetical development … of representations of the anchorhold in the later Middle Ages as a womb-like space and of the anchorite, whether male or female, as highly eroticized sponsa Christi’.

**Enclosure and the Anchoritic Experience**

The anchoritic life was distinct from the lives of other medieval religious in several ways. Anchorites were seen, by some, as ‘spiritual aristocrats’. Within the manuscripts of works like *Sawles Warde* and the *Wohunge* are also included the lives of female martyrs such as Margaret and Katherine. As Savage and Watson point out, ‘there is a persistent implication in the [works] that anchoresses are the latter-day equivalents of the martyrs.’

Like the communities of nuns and beguines, there was no actual order that determined the rules for life within the anchorhold. In the case of the female anchorites, however, informal rules did exist in the form of Aelred of Rievaulx’s *De Institutione Inclusarum* and, of course, *Ancrene Wisse*. The earliest English rule, *De Institutione*, was written in approximately 1160 for a female recluse (possibly Aelred’s sister). Aelred is mentioned as a saint in the earliest manuscripts of *Ancrene Wisse*, indicating that the author knew him and his work, and that his *De Institutione* may have served as a source for *Ancrene Wisse* itself. Some scholars see Aelred’s work as more open to possibilities for female sanctity and independence, arguing that by the date of *Ancrene Wisse* possibilities for women had begun to diminish and that the text itself serves as an effort on the part of a (male) author to rein in the potentially unruly behaviour of religious women and reinstate the authority of the Church. In any case, *De Institutione* and *Ancrene Wisse* (and thus the Wooing and Katherine Groups) form a continuum of anchoritic experience and literature in the
early Middle Ages and provide the basis for the discussions of the anchoritic tradition within the essays presented in this volume. 

Ancrene Wisse describes the style of dress, amount of food, schedule of prayers, and contact with the outside world that would be experienced by the anchorite. The life of the anchorite was more confined than that of any other religious of the period. She was, in effect, a hermit.

Within the interior of a convent or attached to a church there was to be a room twelve feet square which communicated with the world through three narrow windows. One window was to look into the church and through it the recluse could watch mass, receive communion, speak with his confessor, and hear confession from others if he were a priest. A second window was for service: through it food and other necessities for his living were provided. A third, to allow light, was to be covered with a horn. If the recluse were a priest the cell might contain an altar. A garden was permitted.33

Each anchorite would participate in her own funeral mass in order to be considered dead to her past life and material concerns. This is different from communities of nuns and beguines, for example, for whom much of their time was spent in ministering to the community. The anchorite would have no commerce with the community except through her maidservant (whom she rarely saw), her confessor and any traveller who wished to speak to her. This kind of conversation (like the one documented between Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe) would have taken place through a black curtain with a cross cut into it into which white fabric was inserted.

\[\text{Þe clað in ham beo two-fald. Blac the clað, þe cross hwit wiðinnen ant withuten. Þet blake clað bitacned Þet ȝe beoð blake and unwurð to þe world withuten ... Þe hwite limpeð ariht to hwit meidenhad ant to cleannesse þet is muche pine wel forte halden.}^{34}\]

(Let the cloth in them be of two kinds: the cloth black, the cross white, both inside and outside. The black cloth symbolizes to the world outside that you are black and unworthy ... The white cross is proper to white maidenhood and to purity, which it is very hard to keep well.35)

Any contact that the anchorite would have with others (including other anchorites) would be through letters or messages delivered by each woman’s maid or spoken through this curtain. Further, leaving the anchorhold was strictly forbidden. It was similar to the vows taken by a nun; if a nun wished to leave the cloister and rescind her vows, contact would have to be made with the pope for permission to be given. It would
be much easier for a beguine to leave her community. As Galloway writes, ‘in terms of survival of beguine communities, the women could retain the use of private property and work to support themselves. They were free to leave the beguinage at any time to marry or enter an established order.’ An anchorite, on the other hand, relinquished all material goods, all personal relationships, and was not expected to leave the anchorhold until her death. Elkins describes the ritual of enclosure, recorded ‘near Canterbury in the mid- to late twelfth century’:

The ritual of enclosure took place during a mass, over which a bishop normally officiated. The recluse lay prostrate during the office of readings in the western part of the church, ‘where it is customary for women to stay’ … After the recluse was sprinkled with holy water and censed with the thurible, she stood to receive two lit candles … after the gospel reading, the recluse made her petition … [after a homily or further readings] the choir intoned the funeral antiphon … and the rites for the dying were begun … with holy water and incense, the celebrant prepared the recluse’s cell, called a ‘sepulcher’ in the liturgy. She would then enter her ‘sepulcher’ singing the antiphon, ‘Here I will stay forever, this is the home I have chosen.’ The bishop would then sprinkle dust over the recluse and the service would end with the ‘prayers traditionally said over the body of the deceased in the bier’.

The recluse or anchorite would then be left alone in her cell. This initiation ceremony was not too far removed from that of the enclosure of the nun within the cloister (in some cases); however, the other alternative for religious life, the beguinage, was quite distinct. Galloway writes,

each community [of beguines] regulated its own order of existence and defined the way in which members of the house were to behave … beguines took no irrevocable vows … aspirants appeared before the parish priest or bishop’s officer, promised to observe celibacy while living in the community and to cultivate a humble and frugal lifestyle and renounced personal wealth.

While beguines and nuns had some mobility, the anchorite occupied a fixed location and would, generally, remain in her cell until her death. The most notable exception to this, for a female anchorite, is Christine Carpenter who was enclosed at Shere in 1329 and sometime thereafter left her cell but by 1332 was requesting permission from the pope to be re-enclosed:

she has lightly left her anchorhold and has gone back to the world. Now by the Lord’s remedy changed in heart and wishing to return to her former place and established way of life, she has made humble petition to us that she may be
treated mercifully … the same anchoress to you within the space of four months from this our jurisdiction, and she having appeared, you should restore her to the said reclusory or, if she will not be secure there, she should be re-enclosed elsewhere lest, by gadding about [evagando] for longer through the world, she be exposed to the bites of the rapacious wolf and – heaven forbid – her blood be required at your hands.42

As Liz McAvoy has argued,43 the reason for Christine’s departure from her cell is unknown (in the film Anchoress it is speculated to be a reaction to her mother’s death) but the fact that she requested to be re-enclosed indicates some preference for life inside the cell as opposed to that beyond it. There are other examples of anchorites who left their cells, either to be re-enclosed later or not;44 however, for the most part an anchorite remained enclosed until death and was very often buried in the anchorhold itself:

Ancrene Wisse recommends that anchoresses should ‘each day scrape up the earth of their graves, in which they will rot’. Skeletons have indeed been discovered in the foundations of a number of those cells which have been excavated, including one at the church of St. Anne Lewes (Sussex), where the squint is so positioned that, in order to be able to see the altar, the thirteenth century anchorite would have had to kneel in her own grave.45

Although we know very little about most anchorites in the Middle Ages, we can speculate on what they must have been like based on the information gathered through recent scholarship. The women who may have been the intended readers of the Wooing Group were most likely aristocratic, educated daughters of prominent Anglo-Norman families whose understanding of fine amor and the literary traditions of chivalric romance and vernacular love poetry prepared them well for the text, which includes all of these traditions as it seeks to instruct its audience on the proper behaviour and spiritual deportment of female anchorites. Whether the audience (intended or inherited) was wide or small,46 there was clearly a need by about 122547 for multiple texts for female anchorites which would instruct them as to their inner and outer lives, as well as texts upon which they could meditate and consider their personal, intimate relationship with Christ. Catherine Innes-Parker in her essay in this volume, ‘Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd and the tradition of affective devotion: rethinking text and audience’, re-examines some recent approaches to the audiences of the Wooing Group, connecting the texts to the Franciscan works of the later thirteenth century (perhaps through their transmission from Franciscan scriptoria) and to specific communities of women such as the de Braose family, exempla of the
kind of women for which both *Ancrene Wisse* and the Wooing Group were created. Although she does not argue that these women were the subjects of *Ancrene Wisse*, she seeks to re-examine how we understand female readers of medieval texts:

We must assume a maturity of outlook far removed from what we have come to think of as the ‘reader of romance’, the maidenly anchoress, or the inexperienced girl, cloistered and sheltered from the world. Rather, we should think of the readers of the *Wohunge* as sophisticated, educated, aristocratic and awe-inspiring women, who have, after experiencing a full, rich and, possibly, rewarding life in the world, have turned away from all that life has to offer and chosen the solitude of the anchorhold – bringing with them all that they have learned from the world, and fully understanding what they are leaving.48

What we know for certain about the life of an anchorite, at least as far as her life is described by the rules and ecclesiastical writings of the Middle Ages, is that hers was a life of sensual deprivation, solitude and contemplation. The response that the individual anchorites had to such isolation forms the thematic and symbolic content of the Wooing Group, works intended to be read by female anchorites which sought to provide a space for their spiritual and creative expression, and, as will be demonstrated by several of the contributors to this volume, their erotic and poetic activity, as well.

*The Language of the Wooing Group*

The language of the Wooing Group is Middle English. The dialect of the Middle English has been referred to as the ‘AB language’ since J. R. R. Tolkien’s invention of the term in his 1929 article, ‘*Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meiðhad*’. Tolkien defines it as AB based on his study of two of the *Ancrene Wisse* manuscripts, Corpus 402 (A) and Bodley 34 (B). The earliest likely date for the AB language, and thus the Wooing Group, is about 1200 (although this is widely contested).49 Because *Ancrene Wisse* appears to have been copied from an earlier original, the AB language actually refers to the dialect of that now lost original ‘ur-text’ from which they derive. Tolkien opened up a new field of Middle English language study with this article, arguing: ‘the localization or dating of either the manuscripts, or the language of A and B is then of much greater importance to the general problem of the Ancrene Wisse than has been allowed.’50 W. Meredith Thompson, in his 1958 edition of the Wooing Group, identifies the dialect of the Group as AB, stating:
each [manuscript], in several important features, agrees with AB. Also, the language of each manuscript can probably be explained as the admixture of not more than two dialects (AB+x); and, when variants occur, one of these, in nearly every case, is consonant with AB … it is therefore clearly evident that the [Wooing Group] manuscripts … are closely connected, not only in content and style (as has been shown) but linguistically: moreover, that the bond of their relationship is a common AB element which they all share.51

In his article in this collection, Jeremy Smith points out that ‘MSS A and B, although copied by different scribes, may simply derive their language from the writing-system of a single scribe who produced their exemplars. That single scribe could well, of course, have been the same person as the scribe of either A or B.’52 The AB language is unique because, although the manuscripts are all post-Conquest, they retain an approximately equal amount of Old Norse53 words and Anglo-Norman (French), with more Old Norse, based on the date, than one might expect. S. R. T. O. d’Ardenne argues that this occurs because the scribes of the AB manuscripts were ‘conservative clerks who loved the English language as they knew it’.54 As suggested in Michael Sargent’s article in this collection (and in Thompson and elsewhere), there is evidence to suggest that the texts found in the Wooing Group are original and may pre-date Ancrene Wisse. It is really impossible to date any of the works exactly, though Jeremy Smith has made great headway in locating the probable site of their composition as north Herefordshire or mid-Shropshire.55 This location for the composition of the texts may contradict a long-held belief that they were written in Wigmore Abbey, in Herefordshire, which was first posited by E. J. Dobson and has been supported by most scholars since.56 What we do know about the language and provenance of the Wooing Group manuscripts is that they were written in answer to some need among the anchorites of a particular region of thirteenth-century England for literature and for guidance. The author of Ancrene Wisse refers to other books that are available to his audience: ‘ȝe habbeð of þeos blissen iwriten elleshwer, mine leoue / sustren’57 and specifically to a copy of the life of Margaret (‘ower Englische boc of Seinte Margar= / ete’.58 Thus we know a community of female anchorites existed who shared texts (perhaps whole manuscripts, perhaps single sheets of vellum, as suggested by the brevity of many of the Wooing Group works) which were ‘small enough to hold without weariness, clear enough to be read in the dim light of a cell’.59 We know they must have been affiliated with a monastic house, though the type of order is unknown; we know they were literate and therefore came from a class of women who would have been able to read English. Beyond that, we know very little beyond what
we know of actual women who were enclosed in the twelfth and thirteenth century, and that evidence, too, is limited, although some examples are available, such as Christina of Markyate and Christine Carpenter; it is also assumed that Julian of Norwich, about whom a great deal more is known, read Ancrene Wisse, though there is no conclusive evidence. However, the relationships between her ‘short text’, A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman, and the works of the Wooing Group are clear and are suggestive of a tradition of English mysticism and anchoritism – from these works in the thirteenth century to Rolle and Hilton, through to Julian and Margery Kempe in the fifteenth century – with a unique theological, literary and linguistic presence within the larger tradition of medieval devotional writing.

The Wooing Group in its Literary Context

The connections between early medieval English literature and the Wooing Group are clear; these are works that stand up both to theological and literary scrutiny. As Watson writes, ‘the anchoritic works suggest a spirituality which demanded considerable self-knowledge and subtlety on the part of those who attempted it; the brilliance and humanity of the works should be seen as reflecting their audience as much as on their authors.’ As has been argued by Thompson (and noted in this collection by Michael Sargent), the Wooing Group texts are probably original, except for ‘the Lofsong of Ure Lefdi [which] freely translates the Oratio ad Sanctam Mariam of Marbod of Rennes’. As such, Thompson includes the Oratio as a final appendix to his edition. However, although these works are original, they are closely related to the works associated with them, particularly Ancrene Wisse. Scholars such as Savage and Watson, Bella Millett, Robert Hasenfratz, and Thorlac Turville-Petre have successfully argued for a literary context into which Ancrene Wisse fits, drawing on its earlier English antecedents (such as Laȝamon’s Brut and The Owl and the Nightingale) while also being influenced by the twelfth-century Latin literature of the Continent. Referring back to traditional sources of the Group, such as Bernard of Clairvaux and The Song of Songs, Bella Millett, in her essay in this volume, ‘The Conditions of Eligibility in pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd’, traces connections between such works as the ‘pseudo-Ambrosian “Passion of St Agnes”’ and Isidore of Seville, noting the relationship between the language of desire and erotic union in the Wooing Group texts and these earlier works. In her essay, Millett re-emphasizes the nature of the erotic, the marriage relationship between the anchoritic audience and Christ, while...
also claiming for the Group an authority through the patristic works that has rarely been associated with it.

A central connection among these works, one which may be less significant in the Katherine Group and *Ancrene Wisse*, is the notion of mysticism: the works of the Wooing Group clearly participate in an English mystical tradition begun in the Anglo-Saxon period with *The Dream of the Rood* and extending through, again, to the works of Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe and the later work associated with the Wooing Group, *A Talkyng of the Loue of God*. In his contribution to this volume, Michael Sargent explores the relationship of *A Talkyng* to the rest of the works in the Wooing Group and its connection to patristic works of its own century, examining not only to what categories these works may actually belong, but also the idea and structure of the categories themselves, deconstructing, to an extent, the way we read medieval mysticism and how we see it in relation to other genres of medieval writing. Not all anchorites are mystics, of course, nor are all mystics anchorites.

The mystic exists paradoxically in a type of *figurative* exile even from within a community; alone, though not solitary, by means of her extraordinary experience of God, she is separated spiritually and emotionally from those people with whom she may have physical contact. So, too, the anchorite embodies this same paradox because of the relative physical and social isolation which she experiences, often within a larger urban setting.67

Aelred of Rievaulx’s insistence that anchorites remain in solitude sets the stage for the mystical transcendence experienced by so many of them, for in place of the love of human beings, Aelred argues for an intense and focused meditation upon God, divine love and the recluse’s symbolic marriage to Christ, all of which prefigure the imagery of the *Wohunge* and other mystical texts produced by women. Aelred instructs his sister to ‘picture herself as being at the crucifixion and watching as the soldier opened Jesus’ side’.68 The speaker of the *Wohunge* makes a similar suggestion:

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Hwat mai þole for þe
for al þat þu þoleses for me? Ah me
bihoueð þat tu beo eað to paie .
a wrecche bodi & a wac bere
ich ouer eorðe . & tat swuch as
hit is haue 3iuen & 3iue wile
to þi seruise . Mi bodi henge
wið þi bodi neiled o rode . sper-
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(what can I suffer for you for all that you have suffered for me? Ah, you must be easy to pay! A wretched body and a weak one I bear over earth – and that, such as it is, I have given and will give to your service. My body will hang with your body, nailed to the cross, fastened, transfixed within four walls. And I will hang with you and nevermore come from my cross until I die.)

In the Wohunge, and similarly in contemporary works such as Sawles Warde and Ancrene Wisse, the narrator finds herself participating in the Crucifixion, not only watching the action and kissing Christ’s abject body as Aelred describes, but being pierced and beaten with him, celebrating her physical death with his in order to find even more glory in a mutual resurrection. In her essay in this volume, “‘Þe blod þ[at] bohte”: The Wooing Group Christ as pierced, pricked, and penetrated body’, Michelle M. Sauer addresses the relationship of the Wohunge texts to medieval and contemporary notions of the blood of Christ, examining their impact on the text as a metaphor and on the reader of the text, the anchoritic figure enclosed and contemplating Christ’s death, whose participation in Christ’s death empowers her to a kind of ‘spiritual perfection’ otherwise unavailable to her. She writes:

The anchoress lived with a constant threat of rape and violation; through mimetic mapping, Christ’s wounded presence relieves her of some of that fear. As well, the anchoress’s body threatened the purity of the church, while Christ’s stainless, bleeding body neutralizes potential harm. When the two merge, his body becomes a stand in for hers, able to withstand sin and temptation, and able to overcome pollution and corruption through his saving blood, thus making the wounded, bleeding Christ a necessary part of the anchoritic vocation.

The climate that produced the Wohunge was one in which relationships between religious men and women were ambiguously defined, and the energy of the recluse which would have been used in human relationships was to be channelled into a more passionate union with Christ. The Wohunge is an example for the recluse of how such intense emotion and energy might be used when applied to a meditation of the crucified body of Christ. Inherent in the experience of the anchoress was her own suffering, her own worldly death, and a personal contemplation of the death of Christ. This makes her experience different from that of nuns or beguines who...
very often focused their vocation on service and community. That is not to say that nuns did not, in some cases, take on a life of self-inflicted suffering (through flagellation, starvation and isolation), but the kind of suffering and abjection *gloried in* by the anchoress is distinct from anything that normally took place within a convent or abbey. The medieval mystic knew all too well about this side of life—i.e., the sensual nature of bodily function, as Watson describes it, a ‘constancy of suffering, this positive activity of the manufacture of joy out of pain’. Thus the *Wohunge* becomes a manual, or *exemplum*, of the kind of mystical union that could be achieved when the “body” was denied and a union of the spirit was pursued.

The truly innovative literary qualities of the Wooing Group extend beyond the rules and orders of *Ancrene Wisse*. In the texts of the Wooing Group the authors create a space for feminine desire to be expressed, for the female imaginary to be articulated, and for a feminine voice, privately found and publicly denied, to be expressed in relation to the object of desire which is the focus of the works: the body of Christ. Sarah Salih, Anne Savage and myself, in our contributions to this volume, argue for a postmodern critical approach to the nature of the mystical abjection and erotic discourse found so beautifully expressed in the works of the Wooing Group. Anne Savage examines the ‘emotional engagement’ and affective piety of the works of the Wooing Group in her essay, ‘The Wooing Group: Pain, Pleasure and the Anchoritic Body’, using the work of French feminists such as Julia Kristeva and Chantal Chawaf as well as those of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida to explore notions of pain and pleasure as they are expressed in both *Ancrene Wisse* and the texts of the Wooing Group. She writes:

> Emotional engagement is written into the anchoritic texts: attention is drawn again and again to affective response. That affect is bodily, not simply spiritual, is also recognized in medieval writing generally … meditation on emotions directed by such readings, and the performance of devotions, open[s] the walls of the body further and further into the dimension of the Divine.74

Salih pursues potentially queer readings of the works in her essay, ‘Transvestism in the Anchorhold’, by discussing the gender of the author of the works and the relationship of Wooing Group itself to gender and particularly to queer notions of identity and subjectivity. Focusing in part on sexuality and materiality, she argues that

> an anchoress might be susceptible to erotic stimulus from a man, a woman, herself or even, as it later transpires, ‘a ladles þing’ (innocent thing). [These works]
show an assumption that sex is usually expected to be between a man and a
woman. This is not a heterosexuality, because sexual difference is not the issue:
men and women are more like each other than women and women, less like each
other than women and things.75

In my article, titled ‘Speaking of flesh and soul: linguistic and spiritual
translation in the Wooing Group’, I explore possible variations on the idea
of translation in the Wooing Group, examining the textual, social and spir-
ritual ramifications of the notion of translation (of the texts themselves, the
mystical experience, the flesh, the subjectivity of the feminine speakers)
from the position of gender and cultural criticism. Influenced by queer the-
ory, gender theory and the works of many of the contributors to this
volume, particularly Anne Savage, I examine the bleeding body of Christ
and the abject body of the anchoritic mystic in terms of a mutual translation
of identity and flesh.

The Wohunge itself, as is demonstrated admirably by the contributors to
this volume, is a sensuous meditation on the Passion of Christ in which the
speaker witnesses and participates in Christ’s death, grieving for his suffer-
ing while also ‘joying in’ his abjection (and her own, both of which end
through his Resurrection). The text relies on metaphors of courtly romance
and biblical sources, drawing mainly from the Song of Songs but making
reference throughout to other biblical texts such as Psalms, Proverbs and
her contribution, focuses on what she calls the mantra of the Wohunge, the
passages such as that that begins the poem, ‘A iesu swete iesu mi luue . mi /
lef . mi lif . mi luue leuest’. Brown discusses the formulaic nature of the
work, emphasizing its potential for memorization and, as such, its true
meditational nature. Brown uses recent approaches to both the Wooing
Group and the Song of Songs to address the transference of identity
between Christ and the feminine subject of the works, explaining that the
text provides a ‘slippery’ location for the nature of wooer and wooed. Bella
Millett also examines sources and texts which have linguistic and literary
connections to the Wooing Group in her contribution to this volume. She
argues that the Wooing Group texts draw from sermons, pastoralia and the
marriage sermons of Parisian writers such as Robert of Sorbon. But
although the Wohunge and the other texts in the Group draw on all of these
works, they remain predominately original and unique in English literature
of the period, partly in their linguistic construction, and partly in their insis-
tence on feminine subjectivity through the emotional and physical
enclosure of the anchorhold. As the contributions in this collection demon-
strate, the works in the Wooing Group represent a moment in time in which
the language of desire and the voice of the marginalized, abject anchorite merge into a discourse of love, erotic and divine, and provide a framework upon which the later anchoritic writers in English, Richard Rolle, Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich among them, could continue to build.

Conclusion

Many of the essays in the collection overlap; most quote from and discuss multiple works within the Wooing Group. This in itself is an achievement of sorts, for although several scholars have begun to cite and discuss *Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd* in the context of medieval mysticism, gender, literary history and anchoritism, this seems to be the only text from within the Group that gets mentioned, at least for the most part. Perhaps this is because of the nature of the work itself; *Pe Wohunge* is a powerful meditation on the Passion, providing details that startle the imagination in their graphic nature, both of the death of Christ and of the desire of the speaker of the work to become one with his brutalized body. However, the other works are equally fascinating and are studied at greater length here than ever before, although they all represent just a first step towards a greater understanding of the Group, its context, and its meaning to a modern audience. Another way in which the works overlap is in their approach to the main theme of the texts, which, again is the Passion of Christ and the erotic nature of the speaker’s witness to that Passion. Some of the authors represented here emphasize the erotic, some emphasize the literary nature of desire in the works; some explore the gender of the speakers of the works, while others continue the half-century-long discussion, begun in Thompson’s edition, with the gender of the author. Perhaps the most important overlap and leitmotif of the collection, however, is the frequent return to and exploration of the relationship of the Wooing Group to other works, those within its own milieu, such as *Ancrene Wisse* and the Katherine Group and its most commonly noted predecessor, the Song of Songs, as well as other more distant connections, to Thomas of Hales, for example, Bernard of Clairvaux, the Franciscan authors of the thirteenth century, the English mystics such as Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, and other works not often associated with the Group, works and authors connected to the Wooing Group through linguistic, theological and textual threads that seem to connect it with a much wider, more significant tradition.

The purpose of this collection is not to close the book, as it were, on the study of the texts associated with the Wooing Group, nor is it intended to be
the final word on such notions as authorship, language, narrative technique, anchoritic studies or any other topic associated with the works of the Group. Instead, it is intended as a starting-point for scholars who wish to explore the early English tradition of mystical writing, of the experience of women, of enclosure and the reclusive life, and of the various themes and issues brought forward by these accomplished contributors. Although the Wooing Group is an artefact of a brief moment in literary and linguistic history, its presence is a powerful testimony to the strength and authority of the late twelfth/early thirteenth centuries in England as it developed from an occupied Anglo-Saxon culture to a world power of political and social influence. Its milieu and context bring to modern scholars a glimpse of life, not only for religious people, scribes, anchorites and their communities, but for the daily intellectual and spiritual lives of English people in this era, something often left out of larger studies of post-Conquest England.

Notes

1 Anonymous, ‘Thirteenth century prose’, review of *Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerde*, EETS os 241, ed. W. Meredith Thompson (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), *Times Literary Supplement*, 3 July 1959, p. 400. It is in Thompson’s edition that he first described the texts included in the edition as ‘the “Wooing Group”’ (p. xvi); he also abbreviates the title of the poem in his edition as Wohunge. For purposes of consistency, in this edition the contributors will follow Thompson’s conventions and refer to the collection of texts as the Wooing Group and the poem itself, when not described by its complete title, as the Wohunge.

2 G.V. Smithers, review of *Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerde*, *Medium Ævum*, xxxl.3 (1962), 216–18 (p. 216).

3 Ibid.

4 Several of the texts under discussion in this volume have been edited and translated in very recent editions. *Ancrene Wisse*, for example, has appeared in two excellent editions, one by Bella Millett: *Ancrene Wisse: 2 Volumes: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 402, with Variants from Other Manuscripts* EETS os 325, 326 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005 and 2006); and one by Robert Hasenfratz: *Ancrene Wisse*, TEAMS Middle English Text Series (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS, 2000). While Millett’s is more exhaustive and thorough, Hasenfratz’s is more affordable, and since they are both based on Corpus Christi, MS 402, they can both be used with confidence by a scholar examining these works in Middle English. As stated previously, Savage and Watson’s 1991 translation is the best version available in Modern English. Several works of the Katherine Group were edited in an en face edition of Modern and Middle English in 1990 as *Medieval English Prose for Women: From the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse*. This edition does not include the lives of St Katherine or
Juliana from the Group, which were translated in Savage and Watson’s collection and edited in Middle English for the Early English Text Society: Þe Liflade ant te Passiun of Seinte Juliene, EETS os 248, ed. S. R. T. O. d’Ardenne (1961) and Seinte Katerine, EETS ss 7, ed. S. R. T. O. d’Ardenne and E. J. Dobson (1981). The Wooing Group itself has been edited in full only once in Middle English (Thompson, 1958), but will appear in two new editions close to the time when this volume itself will be published. Catherine Innes-Parker will publish an edition and translation of the Wooing Group for Broadview Press and Michelle M. Sauer will soon publish her edition. The Wohunge Group and A Talkyng of the Loue of God: Translated from the Middle English with Introduction, Notes, and Interpretive Essay, Library of Medieval Women (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2009). Although these last two editions are excellent and will contribute greatly to the study of the anchoritic tradition in the future, since they are not yet in print the contributions to this volume will use Thompson’s edition for Middle English quotations and Savage and Watson’s edition for modern English translations. Quotations from Ancrene Wisse will be taken from Millett’s 2006–8 edition unless otherwise noted by the author(s).

5 Scholarship of the Wooing Group began with a reference to the Oreisun of Seinte Marie in Oswald Cockayne’s edition of Hali Meidenhad in 1866 (EETS os 18), although as mentioned in note 10 it owes a greater debt to Richard Wülher’s work a decade later. There was not another significant contribution to scholarship on the Wooing Group until Rose Jeffries Peebles’s 1910 dissertation from Bryn Mawr, focusing on medieval legends of Longinus, in which she argues that A Talkyng of the Loue of God was based on texts from the Wooing Group (Millett, 1996, p. 78); immediately following Peebles there were two scholarly discussions: W. P. Ker’s English Literature, Medieval (London: Williams, 1912) and George Salisbury’s A History of English Prose Rhythm (London: Macmillan, 1912). M. Konrath draws in part on Peebles in his account of A Talkyng of the Loue of God and its connections to Ureeisun of God Almihti and Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerde in ‘Eine übersehene Fassung der Ureisun of Ure Lauerde, bez. Ureisun of God Almihti (Morris, Old English Homilies I., 183ff., 200ff.) und der Wohunge of ure Lauerd (ibid 269ff.).’ Anglia, 42 (1918), 85–98 (see Millett, 1996, p. 84). There were no further direct critical responses to the Wooing Group until the 1950s.

6 Many critics refer to the texts that make up the Wooing Group, those that make up the Katherine Group, and Ancrene Wisse as the Ancrene Wisse Group. However, for obvious reasons it will be necessary to generalize with respect to the three categories themselves and the individual texts, when possible.

7 For the sake of consistency all of the contributors refer to these works as the Wooing Group, not by the Middle English title, the Wohunge Group, although beyond this volume scholars are mixed in their choice of title.

8 These dissertations include Catherine Innes-Parker, ‘Virgin, bride, and lover: a study of the relationship between sexuality and spirituality in anchoritic literature’ (Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1992); Denis Renevey, ‘The moving of the soul: the functions of metaphors of love in the writings of Richard Rolle and antecedent texts in the medieval mystical tradition’ (Oxford University, 1993); Susannah Mary Chewning, “A marriage of the unknowable”: language, gender,
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and mysticism in *Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd* (Drew University, 1996); Sarah Salih, ‘Versions of virginity in medieval texts and practices’ (University of East Anglia, 1999); and Michelle M. Sauer, ‘When you are at ease, talk to Jesus’: identity and community in the *Wohunge* group (Washington State University, 2000).


The first critical essay devoted to the *Ancrene Riwle* (as it was then known) was Edmund Brock’s article in *Transactions of the Philological Society* in 1865, although a brief article did appear following Morton’s edition in 1854, in *Notes and Queries*, written by F. Madden. The earliest published critical essay focused on the Wooing Group was Richard Wülher’s ‘Übersicht der neuangelsächsischen Sprachdenkmaler’, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, 1 (1874), 57–88. According to Millett (1996) this article provides ‘a detailed critical survey of the [then] current state of scholarship on eME works produced c. 1200–1250, including … the works of the Katherine Group and the Wooing Group (p. 69)’. The next article to discuss the Wooing Group at length is Eugen Einenkel’s ‘Eine englische Schriftstellerin aus dem Anfange des 12. Jahrhunderts’, *Anglia*, 5 (1882), 265–82, which argues that *Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, as well as other Wooing Group texts, were authored by a woman (Millett, 1996, p. 70). This idea has remained the central controversy about the authorship of the Wooing Group, although most of the authors represented in this volume, and indeed most recent scholarship, have agreed that the author is male.
An eighth text that is often associated with the Group is the *Love Rune* of Thomas of Hales, ed. Susannah Grier Fein (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS, 1998). The *Love Rune* is associated with the Wooing Group because of its placement in the Vernon manuscript with *A Talkyng of the Loue of God* and its linguistic connections to the earlier works in the Group, as well as its theme of Christ as a lover, a *leſman*, for a misguided religious woman. However, it is not included here as a part of the Wooing Group due to its absence from any of the earlier manuscripts and its connection to a specific historic author. See Thompson, p. xxii, and Richard Morris and Walter W. Skeat, *Specimens of Early English*, pt. 1: 1150–1300, ed. Richard Morris (Oxford: Clarendon, 1887), p. 124.

There is some confusion about the two texts titled by Thompson as *On Lofsong of ure Leſdi* and *Pe Ureisun of Seinte Marie*. The *Lofsong* appears in two manuscripts, Nero and Royal, and the *Ureisun* appears as a fragment in Royal. Morris gave the *Lofsong* its title, while the *Ureisun* has a title in the Royal manuscript. *Pe Ureisun of Seinte Marie* is a fragment of thirty-one lines and appears to be a transcription of the first forty-four lines of *On Lofsong of ure Leſdi*. The confusion lies with a third text, *On God Ureisun of ure Leſdi*, which appears only in Nero. It was edited by Morris in *Old English Homilies and Homiletic Treatises* alongside *On Ureisun of ure Louerde*, *On Wel Swuðe God Ureisun of God Almihti*, *On Lofsong of ure Louerde*, *On Lofsong of ure Leſdi*, *Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, and, in an appendix, *Pe Ureisun of Seinte Marie*. Morris does not explain the context of the works and, apparently, saw *On God Ureisun of ure Leſdi* as part of the Wooing Group. The work, however, is a love poem to Mary, in the tradition of what Thompson describes, citing Hope Emily Allen, as ‘the cult of the Blessed Virgin’ (p. xx). Thompson leaves it out of his edition entirely, as do Savage and Watson, who write: ‘Nero also contains two other English works, *A Good Prayer to Our Lady*, which is in verse, and a version of the Apostles’ Creed in English. The association of these with the circle that produced the anchoritic works is not established, and so they have not been included here’ (p. 428, n. 1). Thus for the purposes of this collection, *On God Ureisun of ure Leſdi*, although a tantalizing possibility as being by the same author or, even more likely, intended for the same audience as the Wooing Group, is not included within the Group in this discussion.

Ancrene Wisse is found in two of the Wooing Group MSS, Cotton Titus D.xviii, which also contains the texts of the Katherine Group, and the Vernon MS, which also contains *A Talkyng of the Loue of God*.

The Katherine Group contains five works, all translated by Savage and Watson: *Sawles Warde*, *Hali Meiðhad* and the lives of St Katherine, St Margaret and St Juliana, all of which appear in Wooing manuscripts Titus and Royal.

Nicholas Watson’s article, ‘The methods and objectives of thirteenth-century anchoritic devotion’, is the first work since Thompson’s introduction to the *Wohunge* in 1958 that thoroughly discusses these two groups from the perspective of spirituality and aesthetic quality. He distinguishes them from the mystical works of the fourteenth century (such as Hilton’s *Scale of Perfection*, Rolle’s *Meditations on the Passion*, the *Prickynge of Love*, Nicholas Love’s *Mirrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ*, the *Book of Vices and Virtues* and the *Cloud of Unknowing*). These
later works, for Watson, are characteristic of ‘a spirituality of ascent or progress …
a spirituality of the interior life’ (pp. 135–6) and seem ‘relatively unspecialised,
making little distinction between the solitary, the monastic and the secular life’ (p. 136). Part of this lack of ‘specialization’ may be due to an obvious difference in
audience between the two kinds of works. Rolle’s audience was similar to that of
the earlier works, in that he wrote some of his works for one or more enclosed
women; Hilton and the Cloud author, however, wrote exclusively for a monastic
audience – and in the case of the Cloud, that audience was decidedly male.

In this text as much as possible the word anchorite will be used rather than the
sexualized term anchoress. Several scholars have weighed in on the problem of the
word anchoress (Hasenfratz, Sauer, McAvoy); the word as it appears in the title of
MS Corpus 402 is ancrene, which is non-gendered but, in the context of Ancrene
Wisse refers to female anchorites. As such, the non-gendered anchorite seems a
more appropriate modern word to use in reference to these figures, whether they
are male or female.

17 Warren, p. 9.
19 Although Guthlac may be the first named, recorded anchorite in England, the word
anchorite, in an early form, anker, appears in the Peterborough Chronicle in the
following phrase: ‘Muneces þa wolden drohtien here lif on anker setle’ (AD 656).
This text was compiled in the last decade of the ninth century, so the form of the
word, anker, is not Anglo-Saxon, but the presence of the anchorhold (or whatever
is being described there) refers back that far. Still, since the location of this ‘anker
setle’ is unclear and the disposition of the monks who sought to live there (if they
were indeed recluses or if they were living a monastic life) is equally unknown, the
best first account of an anchorite in England is still Guthlac. There is still some
speculation, however, about the use of anchorite in English; for a discussion of the
word’s origins and its distinction from reclusae and hermits, see Warren, 1985.
21 Talbot, pp. 88, 92.
22 See Bhattacharji, p. 42.
24 Nicholas Watson. ‘The methods and objectives of thirteenth-century anchoritic
devotion’, in The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England, ed. Marion Glasscoe,
25 Savage and Watson, p. 20.
26 Jacques de Vitry defines the beguines as ‘discreet and devout maidens [who] do
not find it suitable to remain in their parents’ homes … who are unable to find
monasteries which will receive them [and] live together in a single house … in
profound poverty, having naught else but what they can acquire by spinning and
working with their hands’ (quoted in Galloway, p. 93).
27 Grimlaic, a tenth-century French recluse, wrote a rule, Regula Solitariorum, which
indicated that the anchorites he knew lived communally ‘in a separate but con-
nected cell whereby they would be able to support each other’ (in Warren, p. 30, n.
22). Grimlaic’s text appears to be the earliest known rule for anchorites, followed
in the twelfth century by Aelred of Rievaulx.
As has been argued by Hasenfratz, Wada and others, the title Ancrene Wisse, added by the scribe who copied the Corpus manuscript, seems to resist calling the text a rule: ‘Wisse is a rare word derived from the OE verb wissian “to direct, guide, show the way” and, more rarely, “to rule, govern” … Dobson suggests that the author uses it here to avoid the implication that the text is an actual rule … and that it may mean something more than “advice” but less than “command”’ (Hasenfratz, p. 419).


Roy, pp. 120–2.

There has been a long debate over the gender of the author of the works associated with Ancrene Wisse, and in particular the Wooing Group. Critics who assume a male author in this text include Savage and Watson in their 1991 edition of the poem; Millett in ‘Women in no man’s land: English recluses and the development of vernacular literature in the 12th and 13th centuries’, in Women and Literature in Britain 1150–1500, ed. Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and a much earlier critic, John Bugge, who in 1975 assumes (without evidence or support) a male author. He writes, “it is clear that the author of the Wohunge is exhorting his female audience to return Christ’s love in kind, that is, with the same lacerative physical sensibility he demonstrated toward them in his passion [my emphasis]’ (p. 98). Bugge is also the earliest contemporary critic who makes the distinction that the author is almost certainly male, while the speaker is definitely female: ‘in De Wohunge of Ure Lauerd the speaker describes herself yielding to Christ’s supreme act of love [my emphasis]’ (p. 106).

Warren, p. 31.


Savage and Watson, p. 66.

Galloway, p. 3.

Elkins, p. 151.

Ibid., p. 152.

Evidence exists that some recluses lived in communities, within the same anchorholds (Elkins, p. 159). Because of this, both Aelred’s Rule for a Recluse and Ancrene Wisse make comments about friendships between women. Elkins writes, ‘[Aelred] discouraged visits from nuns and other women … the recluse was to “sit alone then, in silence, listening to Christ and speaking with him … For then she is with Christ, and he would not care to be with her in a crowd”’ (p. 154). Elkins goes on to argue that by the time of the Katherine Group (the period in which the Wohunge was probably first written), a fear of close relationships between celibates – heterosexual relationships as well as homosexual – was growing, so that by the late thirteenth century recluses were even further restricted: ‘virginity was protected and the friendships abandoned’ (p. 160).

Galloway, pp. 3–4.

Christine Carpenter has been the subject of much speculation and contemporary study since the 1993 film Anchoress, written by Judith Stanley-Smith and Christine Watkins and directed by Chris Newby, and the novel Anchoress of Shere by Paul Moorcraft (London: Poisoned Pen Press, 2002). Scholarly treatments of Christine’s story include Miri Rubin, ‘An English anchorite: the making, unmak-
ing and remaking of Christine Carpenter’, and Liz Herbert McAvoy’s work (see notes 42 and 43 below).


44 In the fourteenth century Matilda and Anna (of Leicester and Lincolnshire respectively) were accused of Lollard heresy; both were removed from their anchorholds and held in state prisons; Matilda returned to her anchorhold as ‘anachorita reducta ad viam weritatis’ (quoted in Warren, p. 80), while Anna’s fate is unknown. Warren reports several recluses who left their solitary cells and entered the Bridgettine community at Syon Abbey (pp. 178–9). A Carmelite friar, Thomas Scrope, remained an anchorite for twenty years (1426–46) in Norwich but left his anchorhold and became bishop of Dromore in Ireland and, later, auxiliary bishop of Norwich (Warren, p. 211).


47 The earliest manuscript date for Ancrene Wisse is 1225–30 according to Hasenfratz, p. 30. The Wooing manuscript has been dated by Thompson as 1200, possibly earlier (p. lx); Savage and Watson date it between 1220 and 1240 (p. 245). Innes-Parker, pp. 96–122.

48 The extant manuscripts date from approximately 1225 to 1250. Savage and Watson (1991) agreed with this estimate; however, in an earlier work, Nicholas Watson is less certain about the date of the Wohunge: ‘Dobson’s arguments … allow one to date Ancrene Wisse at 1210–1225 … Wohunge is presumably later than this … [but] a major dating problem … is that in these works composition and adaptation are often indistinguishable activities, and that in the forms we have them some of the works may at once have influenced and have been influenced by
the same other works in various stages of the latter’s existence’ (1987, p. 148, n. 11). In her contribution to this volume, Millett argues that ‘the internal evidence of the work [Ancrene Wisse] suggests a date of composition most probably in the late 1220s’ (p. 30). See Millett, 1996, pp. 6–17 for a discussion of the controversy of dating the original AB source, as well as the extant texts themselves.

51 Thompson, pp. lii, lv.
52 Smith, pp. 84–95.
53 Old Mercian according to Hans Käsmann, who connected the phonology of Ancrene Wisse to a likely source, the Vespasian Psalter. This is echoed by Jeremy Smith in his article in this collection. See Hans Käsmann review of Ancrene Wisse: Parts Six and Seven, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd, Anglia, 80 (1962), 327–9.
55 See Millett, 1996, p. 11.
56 Bella Millett, in the introduction to her bibliography, Ancrene Wisse, the Katherine Group, and the Wooing Group (1996) reviews the various arguments for location of the original author and leans towards Smith’s evidence of a Shropshire provenance, finally acknowledging that a definite location or date for the manuscripts is ‘hard to establish with any certainty’ (p. 11).
59 Savage and Watson, p. 28.
60 Hope Emily Allen suggests this in her discussion of the then newly discovered Trinity manuscript of Ancrene Wisse when she argues that Trinity (which includes a French version of Ancrene Wisse) ‘was accessible to the world of Julian of Norwich’; ‘The Ancrene Riwle’, letter, Times Literary Supplement, 24 October 1936. Other editors and readers of Julian have also implied that Julian must have read Ancrene Wisse, including her most recent and successful editors, Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, as well as Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins.
61 Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins, in their recent edition, separate what has been known until now simply as the short text and the long text of Julian’s Revelations into two distinct works, A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and Revelations of Divine Love (Introduction, p. 1).
62 Watson and Jenkins, p. 3
63 Watson, 1987, p. 146.
64 Thompson, p. xvi.
66 Millett in Hasenfratz, p. 2.
68 Elkins, p. 155.
69 Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd, ll. 584–95.
70 Savage and Watson, p. 256.
72 Watson 1987, p. 144.

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The body that is denied here is the vessel in which the soul travels. The concept of the body (the sensual and corporal) was very much attached to the mystic’s journey to the divine: it is denied at first and later celebrated (or, at least, its functions are ‘joyed in’) as part of the process of abjection of self.

Savage, pp. 166–78.

Salih, pp. 149–65.

See Savage and Watson, pp. 435–42.