The Wycliffite Heresy
Authority and the Interpretation of Texts

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should emerge with such clarity in the 'sermons': for received homiletics was happily aware of its embeddedness in rhetorical, persuasive uses of language, and a cognate exegesis.64

The next chapter examines a practical enactment of the traditional 'dialogic' approach to scripture, not indeed as it finds expression in disputation, but as it informs meditative *lectio*.65 Nicholas Love's *Mirror* accepts, self-consciously, certain inherited modes of devotional reading, and deploys them against the Lollards, thereby underlining not only the hermeneutic gulf which separates this vision of valid scriptural meaning from that of the Lollards, but also the polemical, reactionary charge that traditional exegetical practices had assumed in the new heretical environment.

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Nicholas Love and the Lollards

*The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* was one of the most popular of late medieval devotional and meditative texts.1 Written in the early fifteenth century by Nicholas Love, prior of Mount Grace Charterhouse in Yorkshire, the work is extant in forty-nine complete or near-complete manuscripts and is found in the form of fragments and extracts in another twelve.2 It therefore forms, along with the Wyclifite Bible, the Brut Chronicle and Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*, one of the most widely disseminated works in Middle English prose. The *Mirror* was a free translation into the vernacular of a Franciscan text generally ascribed to St. Bonaventura in the Middle Ages, the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*.3 The *Meditationes* itself was one of the most protean and popular of Franciscan devotional works, extant in hundreds of Latin manuscripts and translated over the Middle Ages into almost every major European tongue.4 In English, there were already partial translations extant before Love's version appeared; the prose free translation known as *The Privy of the Passion*;5 the rhymed-couplet translation ascribed to Robert Mannyng;6 a third translation of the Passion section extant in eight manuscripts; and four other partial translations.7

Nicholas Love's translation was, however, endowed with a specially privileged status. It was licensed by Archbishop Thomas Arundel in 1410 as an official alternative to the Lollard Bible, the use of which had been severely restricted.8 Moreover, his certificate of approval is found attached to nineteen copies of the text. Arundel, we are informed:

post inspectionem eiusdem per dies aliquot... proprie vocis oraculo ipsum in singulis commendavit & approbavit, necnon & auctoritate sua metropolitica, ut pote catholicum, puplice communicandum fore
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decreuit & mandavit, ad fidelium edificationem, et hereticorum sive lollardorum confutationem.  

after examining it for several days... commended and approved it personally, and further decreed and commanded by his metropolitan authority that it rather be published universally for the edification of the faithful and the confutation of heretics or lollards.

The Mirror engages with Lollardy on several planes. There are passages of doctrinal polemic combating Lollard views on confession, the Eucharist, the giving of tithes, the dependence or otherwise of priestly teaching on priestly morality. Such passages are accompanied in many copies by marginal notes 'contra lollardos'. Love also adds a 'Treatise on the Sacrament' to the Meditations, thereby emphasizing orthodox views on the nature of the Eucharist. More interestingly, however, the Mirror wages a hermeneutic war on Lollard approaches to the scriptural text. Much more subtly articulated than the anti-Lollard doctrinal propaganda, Love's conservative hermeneutics is nevertheless central to the Mirror's orthodox polemic. However, it is my contention that the Mirror is ultimately uneasy in its response to Lollardy, so that an overt rejection of Lollard assumptions and aims coexists with a complex and uncertain accommodation of certain primary hermeneutic emphases of the heresy. I argue that this element of uncertainty in Love's polemical espousal of traditional hermeneutics is reflected in the presentation of the text in most of the extant manuscripts of the Mirror, a presentation which subtly refashions the Meditations' own theoretical assumptions regarding the interrelationship of scriptural and ecclesiastical authority, and 'correct' modes of reading the Bible.

Love's choice of the Pseudo-Bonaventuran meditations, in which traditional Franciscan spirituality finds one of its fullest and most definitive expressions, was a calculated one. His translation as a whole is based on what was, in the Lollard context, a reactionary approach to scriptural Word and authority. The Mirror is not merely a translation of a much-venerated Franciscan devotional work, it is also — and more importantly — a mediation of the Bible characterised by its own rhetorical strategies, and it draws on a textual-political ideology entirely removed from that of the Lollards. As has been pointed out by Michael Sargent, though the Mirror was extremely successful in 'confuting Lollard demands for an English Bible, it did not in fact answer them'.

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The Lollards had emphasised the importance of a precise knowledge of the exact words of Holy Writ, unadulterated by the 'cautela diaboli' introduced by ecclesiastical mediators. In theoretical terms, Wyclif himself, we may recall, had made a firm distinction between 'exposition' and 'text' in De Veritate: the text is the domina served by her ancilla, the exposition. Wyclif gives theoretical centrality to a concept of the Bible as a unique text, demanding from the reader a constant and significant awareness of its separate hermeneutic status. De Veritate, as we have seen, postulates categories of scriptural logic and form which dictate their own principles of explication to the properly equipped, devout, 'rational' reader. Such a reader is expected to attempt to understand the Bible 'literally', which in Lollard theory involves accessing the divine intention. 'Inspiration' (from the Holy Spirit) and 'open reason' form the twin exegetical positives; they are necessary correctives to the human propensity to become false glossators of God's Word. A governing fear in the work of Wyclif and his followers is the possibility of 'imposing' an alien (human) hermeneutics or a fallen logic on the Bible; and an important preoccupation is the need to distinguish between the authority of God and the authority of lesser auteurs, of however venerable a pedigree.

A corollary of such an insistence on the unique and separate validity of the scriptural text is the development of an academic scholarship interested in the textual condition of the Bible, and the 'authenticity' of interpolations or interpretations sanctified by tradition. Wyclif's own inadequate and perfunctory theoretical gestures in the direction of philological studies are transformed, by his followers in the practical sphere, into a profound interest in what we would now call textual criticism, and in matters of presentation of the text, evidenced not only in the Wycliffite Bible, but also in the Glossed Gospels, and in the Long English Sermon Cycle. Because of a genuine attempt at establishing a Bible 'sandel trewe', to quote the Prologue to the Wycliffite Bible, and a firm belief that human additions to God's Word must be kept rigorously distinct from what they attempt to elucidate, the Lollards display a remarkably self-conscious interest in the presentation of texts.

The Prologue to the Wycliffite Bible is acutely aware of issues of textual authenticity. The first chapter makes an important distinction between canon and apocrypha. After listing the canonical books of the
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Old Testament, the Prologue points out that ‘what euer book in the olde testament is out of these fyue and twenty before seid, shal be set among apocryfa, that is, with outen autorite of billeue; ththerefore the book of Wisdom and Ecclesiastic and Judith and Tobie be not of billeu.’ The canonical books, however divided, are of ‘autorite of billeue, either of cristen feith.’ Apocrypha, in so far as they are conducive to charity, may indeed be used for edification, but ‘not to conferme the autorite of techingis of holy chirche’. Books that are not of the number of Holy Writ ‘owen to be cast fyr awyey’. The apparent contradiction in the above is then resolved. Apocrypha fall into two main categories: books of anonymous authorship but ‘open’ truth, which may be used to learn virtue but not to prove issues of faith; and books the truth of which is doubted and therefore rejected. Judith falls in the first class; examples of the second are provided by ‘the book of the 30ng childhed of the Sauyour, and the book of the takynge up of the body of Seynt Marwe to heuen’.8

The Prologue is also intelligently aware of the problems inhering in the textual condition of the Latin Bible. The Psalter, for instance, differs much from its Hebrew original: ‘Noo book in the eld testament is hardere to vndirstonding to vs Latyns, for oure lettre discordyth mych fro the Ebreu’;9 moreover, the Church tends to ignore Jerome's translation from the Hebrew in favour of an inferior version. Many of the existing Latin versions of the Bible are corrupt, ‘ful fals’. Therefore the ‘comune Latyn bibliis han more nede to be correctid, as many as I haue seen in my lif, þat haþ þe English bible late translatiad’. Verses from the Hebrew – derived from Jerome and Lyra – are therefore set in the margins of debatable passages. The Church itself has been to blame, for ‘in ful fewe bokis þe chirche redþ þe translatiou of lerom, as it mai be preuid þi þe propre originals of lerom whiche he glosiad’.10 The Prologue therefore emphasises the need for extreme circumspection in establishing a ‘true’ text: ‘First þis symple creature hadde myche traualiþ wiþ diuere felawis and helpeþis to gedere manie elde bibliis, and þere doctouris and comune glossis, and to make 00 Latyn bible sumdel trewe’.11

The interest in establishing a ‘correct’ biblical text leads to an equal interest in separating text from commentary. Henry Hargreaves cites a remark by the Lollard scribe of London, Lambeth Palace MS 1033: ‘Here endith the prologue on Isaye, and here bigynnethe the text of Isaye. With a short glose on the derke wordis; and loke ech man, that he wryte the text hool bi itself, and the glose in the margyn, ether leve it al out.’22 Moreover, as Anne Hudson points out, ‘any glossing’ – in the extant manuscripts of the Wycliffite Bible – ‘(by double renderings or by explanatory extra words) is underlined in red so that it can quickly be perceived as such’.23

Equally self-consciously careful are the Glossed Gospels. For instance, in Cambridge, Trinity College MS B.1.38, the Prologue states:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{þe text of þe gospel is set first bi it sylf, an hool sentence togider}
\text{þanne suþ þe expositiou in þis maner: First a sentence of a doctour}
\text{declarinþ þe text is set afir þe text and in þe ende of þat sentence.}
\text{þe name of þe doctour seîngþe it is set þat men wiþ certeynli hou}
\text{feer þat doctour goþþ and so of alle doctours and lawis aleggiþ in þis}
\text{expositiou. (fol. 7r)}
\end{align*}\]

The above passage is followed by a meticulously detailed explanation of the work’s code of reference. For instance:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{whanne y seye austen here he is aleggiþ in his twye bokis of þe lordis}
\text{sermon in þe hil which sermon contenþeþ þe v and vi and vii chapters}
\text{of matheu/whanne y seye bede in his omelie. eþer gregory in his omelie}
\text{and telle not in what omeli y take þat sentence of alcynyn on matheu.}
\text{(fol. 7r)}
\end{align*}\]

What is noteworthy is that such academic precision of reference supports a work declaredly meant for the unlearned or those possessing only basic literacy: the Prologue states that it is a great work of mercy and charity to ‘telle opinli þe treuþe of þe holi gospel to lewid men and sympli lettrib prestis’ (fol. 7r).24

A similar textual consciousness informs the presentation of the text in the Long English Sermon Cycle. Anne Hudson describes in her introduction to the English Wycliffite Sermons how meticulously the Lollards distinguish between words of the sermon-lections and other quotations: ‘The care with which the lection’s words are marked off obviously reflects Lollard concern for the precise words of scripture, and for the education of the laity and clergy in the discernment of authority.’25 Similar is the case with the Lollard revision of Richard Rolle’s Commentary on the Psalter, where much attention is paid to distinguishing, by means of different scripts, between Latin biblical text, translation and commentary.26

In a short tract on the Ave Maria, the Lollard author condemns even

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apparently minor changes to biblical texts, for, as he points out, if 'pe pope may give pardoun bi addinge of þes two wordis, so may he adde ophere mo, and wipdawre, as him likiþ, and so turne Goddis lawe into lawe of Antecrist'.

Nicholas Love's translation is very different. Arundel's reply to the Lollard emphasis on the necessity of general lay access to the exact words of Holy Writ seems to have been to endorse and circulate a work which provides anything but that, a work which offers scripture along with orthodox interpretation and commentary, anti-Lollard polemic and non-biblical devotional material in one indivisible whole. The authority that the Mirror upholds is that of the ecclesiastical establishment — an authority that is political, textual and hermeneutic. The Mirror, in many ways, endorses precisely that concept of authority which the Lollards explicitly questioned in The Lanterne of Liȝt:

Here summe obiectun þat þe gospel is not of autorite but in as miche as þe chyrche haþ authorised it & cannonisiþ it, for þei sein þat no man knowiþ suche wordes to be þe gospel, but as þe chyrche haþ determined in her determinacioun, þis conclusiþ semeþ to smak heresiþ.

Against this, one may place the equally explicit affirmation of a contrary viewpoint in Arundel's Constitutions, which, in the course of laying down the procedure for recanting heretical teaching, states that 'truth' is, by definition, what the Church has determined it to be.

As opposed to the Wycliffite insistence on scripture as a text which demands, indeed dictates, its own special and unique hermeneutics, and the associated interest in establishing a correct biblical text which must not be violated, Love's translation seeks to locate authority in a discourse outside the text, in the interpretations dictated or 'determined' by the Church. Relevant biblical 'text', in this rhetorically conscious hermeneutic, is subject to modification and transformation according to the local needs of intended purpose and audience, and according to the political and historical situation of the interpreter. The aim is the creation of a 'fructuose' — to use one of Love's favourite words — meditative text.

Love's translation therefore bases itself on a literary-political ideology which is much more self-consciously rhetorical, much less insistently textual. The biblical text is used as the occasion for an affective and rhetorical literary creativity which implicitly denies the Wycliffite disjunction of divine text and human hermeneutics. Instead, the Mirror in effect insists on the univocity, the continuity of the Divine Word and the human through a constant violation of what Vincent Gillespie calls 'the decorums of textual boundaries'. Such violation of textual integrity, though possessing a long affective prehistory, had acquired, by the time Love was writing, a strong reactionary charge. The Mirror therefore begins, in a prologue added to the Meditationes, with a reference to the Pauline topos of 'Quicum scripta sunt ad nostram doctrinam scripta sunt', followed by a significantly polemical translation: 'þerfore to strenke þe & confort vs & speke þe Apostle þe wordes aforseid to this entent seying þat all thynges þat ben written generally in hole chyrche ande specialy of oure lorde Jesu cryste þey bene wryten to oure lore' (p. 9t 6–20; italics mine). The critical assumptions underlying this passage should be noted. There is first of all the rhetorical emphasis: 'to strenke vs'; secondly, there is the unsignalled hermeneutic act which interprets Paul's 'entent' and issues in a major unsignalled interpolation into the translated passage: '[written] generally... cryste'.

The interpolation is of course central to Love's own rhetorical concerns: the non-scriptural devotional material in his translation must be shown to be as 'fructuose' and therefore as 'authentic' as the actual biblical passages, and the most efficient way of doing this is by citing a major scriptural authority ('þe gret doctour & holy apostle Powle'). The saint's waxy nose, to recall Alan of Lille's image for the flexibility of 'authorities', has been, after all, only slightly bent. The point made here is taken up later:

Ande for þis hope & to þis entent with hol wyte is also bene wyten diuerse bokes and trettes ofi/devoute men no onelich to clerkes in latyn, but also in Englyshe to lewe men & women & hem þat bene of symple vndirstondynge. Amonge þe whiche þeþe wryten deweote meditacions of cristes lyfe more pleyne in certeyne partyes þan is expressed in the gospell of þe foure euangelistes. (p. 10/3–9)

The 'entent' of Holy Writ and other non-scriptural devotional material is held to be the same, though works belonging to the second class
may be ‘more pleyne’ than the gospel, the implication being a certain blurring of authoritative boundaries. The Proheme continues:

Ande as it is seide þe deoute man & worthy clere Bonavenstre wrot hem to A religiouse woman in latyne þe whiche scripture ande wrutyng for þe fructuose matere berof styryng specialy to þe loue of Jesu ande also for þe pleyn sentence to comun vndirstondynge semeþ amonge oþere sovereyne edifying to symple creatures. (p. 10/9–10/14)

Having underlined the rhetorical fruitfulness of, and the ‘plain’ edification offered by, his auctor, Love proceeds to defend the meditative technique of creating ‘imaginationes’ as efficacious in ‘styring symple soules to þe loue of god’. He continues, further on in the Proheme:

Wherfore we mowe to styring of devotion ymagine & þenk dierse wordes & dedes of him & oþer, þat we fynde not written, so þat it be not aseyms þe byleue, as seynt Gregory & oþer doctours seyn, þat boli writte may be expouner & vndurstande in dierse maneres, & to dierse purposes. (pp. 10/43–10/43; italics mine)

It is significant that the defence of the spiritual efficacy of non-scriptural devotional material should shade off into a defence of the flexibility of biblical interpretation — what is emphasised is the purpose of the devotional work. It is rhetorical intentio which determines attitudes to both text and hermeneutics; indeed, no real distinction is made between the two. Exposition or exegesis ultimately transforms, indeed constitutes ‘fruitful’ scriptural ‘text’; to borrow Rita Copeland’s words, ‘rhetorical invention is constituted through the modus interpretandi.’

And indeed that is inevitable, for the Mirror is a highly selective, affective exposicio of the sentence of both its immediate authority the Meditationes and its ultimate the Bible. What is operative is a concept of the value-laden sententia of Christ’s life finding different linguistic-textual expressions without undergoing any essential change. Because of the unfathomable profundity of the Bible, all such rhetorical reinventions of the text — modifications, additions, expositions — are regarded as fully justifiable, though inevitably only partial renderings, partial illuminations of the divine pagina or the divine vita.

In fact, Love’s espousal of this traditional, monastic model of scriptural lectio is self-conscious and polemical. We must remember that the Mirror was composed, endorsed and circulated at a time when substantial and extensive debate over the nature of religious intellection appropriate for and indeed permissible to the laity had already taken place. Bonaventure’s ‘imaginative’ meditative discourse, premised as it is on a near-complete elision of the literal words of the Bible, therefore assumes a new reactionary and polemical inflection in the Lollard environment. Love’s development of this discourse seeks implicitly to battle the biblically informed, theoretically engaged, vernacular exegetical polemics of the Lollards such as we have seen support the English Wycliffite Sermons. And because its combative usage of the inherited Bonaventuran devotional discourse is deliberate, Love’s text repeatedly betrays an abiding and uneasy self-consciousness of his meditative — and, by implication — scriptural methodology. This defensive self-consciousness finds pervasive expression in the Mirror: vocabulary which by this time had assumed strong Lollard resonances is insistently and combatively deployed; an awareness, entirely alien to the Meditationes, of the hermeneutic values informing deviative discourse repeatedly comes to the surface; and, concomitantly, there is a heightened emphasis on the spiritual excellences and fruitfulness of the devotional tradition within which Love locates himself. ‘Devout meditations’ or ‘devout imaginations’ are polarised against ‘express’ meanings, and justified by repeated references, not all of which are derived from the source text, to their ‘fruitfulness’, and their ‘sweet taste’. The category of ‘fruitful’ encompasses both the words and deeds of Christ as recorded in the gospels and expositions thereof by holy men and doctors. Discussing John 4:32 in a passage original to him, and sign-posted as such by a marginal ‘N’, Love says:

Miche more gostly fruyt is contenede in þis gospel, þe whoso desyreþ to knowe more fully he sal fynde it in þe boke of seynt Austyn vpon þe gospel of Jon, where he makeþ of þe processe of þis gospel a longe processe & clergial ful of gostly fruyt. (p. 97/31–5)

The identity of scripture and expositions of scripture assumed in the above passage is a general datum in the Mirror. Love visualises himself as part of an authoritative and holistic tradition of Christian meaning offering a particular kind of meditative exegesis. He therefore repeatedly directs his readers to other exegeses: ‘What þat þese þre þyttes of þese kynges bytoken gostly & many oþere þinges þat þe gospel more ouere telleþ at it is expownet by holy doctours is sufficently & fully
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written in many oper places' (p. 45/6–9). Discussing the episode of the raising of Lazarus, Love says, in a passage original to him: 'he reisying of Lazare principaly is comendet & souerenly is to be consideret, not onely for he soueryne miracle itself, but also for many notable hinges he befecele in he myracle & diuerse mysteries, he whech seynt Austyn clergialy treteb.' (p. 125/4–8). As a result, in a remarkable inversion of hermeneutic norm, we are given the Augustinian exposition before the letter of the story. (The related Meditationes passage deals only with the story.) The conceptual unity of the Bible and its authoritative exegesis is thus underlined.

What is of governing importance is edification, 'fruitfulness', and to this purpose it is allowable to read the Bible selectively: 'Forthermore leyung many wordes of he gospel, & takynge he semele most notable to oure edificacion' (p. 130/31–2). One of Love's favourite words in this 'fructuose' context is 'processe', meaning both 'sequence of events/progression' and 'purpose/goal'. The progression of Biblical events has as its 'in-ched' processe the stimulation of prayer and meditation and the giving of ensamples to the devout. The pattern most often followed by Love tends to include the citation of a Biblical passage (the 'ground'); a 'historical' reconstruction or invention based on this; a contemplative passage, usually of heightened tone, drawing attention to the affective potential of the invented scene and to its exemplary value; finally a passage of prayer or homiletics. Of course, the various elements might occur in a slightly different order, but this forms the general pattern. A fairly typical example would be Chapter 12 in Die Martis: 'How he child Jesus laft alone in Jerusalem' (p. 52/26). It begins with the gospel story of Jesus's journey to Jerusalem with his parents when he was twelve and his staying behind there; is followed by an affective emphasis on Mary's sorrow ('Wherfore here we mowen haue resonably gret compassion of he gret anguysh')...
active role that hermeneutics assumes in the particular mode of biblical
lectio embraced by Love.\(^{40}\) In such a theoretical framework, 'exposicio',
in the terms of Wyclif's image, is no longer 'ancilla textus', but has raised
itself to the status of 'domina'.

The determining importance of hermeneutic/rhetorical intention is
later underlined in Love's discussion of the Pater noster in a passage
original to him:

\[
\text{Bot one hinge touching his priarie, solely I trowe that whose wole
give his entent for sey it with deuocioun & haþ an inwarde desire to}
\text{be goustey vnstanstongyng herof . . . shal þe grace by processe of}
\text{tyme finde so miche confort þerinne, þat þere is none oþere priarie}
\text{made of man þat shal be to him so sauory & so effectue . . . And}
\text{so shal he fynde in his soule when god wole zifc his grace with grete}
\text{likyng dierwe vnstanstongyng herof most pertynyng to his desire & þat}
\text{oþere þan is writen in þe comune exposicion herof. \(^{41}\) (p. 86/29–40;}
\text{italics mine)}
\]

Textual meaning is here explicitly held to be dependent on readerly
'desire'. As Copeland says: 'Medieval exegesis replicates rhetoric's pro-
ductive application to discourse: as the orator fitted a speech to the
particular circumstances of persuasion, so in a certain sense the me-
dieval exegete remodels a text for the particular circumstances of
interpretation.'\(^{42}\) Indeed, there is, in this scheme of things, no separate
theoretical consciousness of 'text'; what is of importance is a continuum of 'text' – both biblical and expository – and reader, the latter composing,
within the broad outlines of the former, his own variations.\(^{43}\)

However, as I emphasised earlier, Love is conscious of what is, in
the Lollard context, his reactionary interpretative ideology. His work,
while placing itself firmly in the camp of orthodoxy, also shows an
uneasy attempt at coming to terms with the theoretical Lollard location
of authoritative meaning in the 'literal' sense of the exact words of
scripture understood according to the intention of the Holy Spirit.
This duality in-Love – emphasising the hermeneutic authority of the
Church, and of the devout reader operating within the Church, while
acknowledging the textual authority of scripture – finds, as I will go on
to show, a parallel in the presentation of the text in most of the extant
manuscripts.

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Love's problematic response to the way in which his source treats
the Bible finds repeated, though necessarily oblique expression in the
course of the Mirror. Being a self-conscious reader of the Gospels, he
retains, often with significant modifications, the Pseudo-Bonaventuran
references to suggestive omissions in the evangelical narratives. For
instance, the important passage at the beginning of Caput 15, in which
the Pseudo-Bonaventura explicitly questions and offers his own hypot-
hesis about the evangelical silence in relation to Christ's youth and early
manhood, is translated in full by Love, with suggestive expiratory ad-
ditions. 'Nec in scripturis reperitur quod in toto isto tempore aliquid
fecerit' (p. 64/6–7; p. 531) is rendered as 'we fynde no object expressed
in scripture autentike what he dide' (p. 61/3–4), thus implying that
there is the required information in the work of secondary authors. The
Pseudo-Bonaventura's glancing reference to his earlier statement that
nothing is affirmed which cannot be proved by the authority of sacred
scripture or the doctors\(^{44}\) is then drawn out in full:

\[
\text{not fully affermyng in his or oþer þat we mowe not opynly preye by}
\text{holi writy or doctours apuyde but deouely yimagyning to edificacion}
\text{& stirynge of deuocioun, as it was seid in þe proheme of his boke at þe}
\text{begynnyng. \(^{41}\) (p. 61/21–5)}
\]

The adverb 'opunly' is to be noted. It is a word which had achieved
prominent currency among the Lollards, generally used, in its adjectival
form, to describe a category of scriptural meaning held to be indepen-
dent of the interpreting reader or institution: 'open' proofs based on the
scriptures render the interpreter transparent and deny him hermeneutic
agency.\(^{46}\) A marginal note found in many copies, a variant of which
also accompanies a related passage in the Proheme, emphasises Love's
discretion: 'Nota bene pro sano intellectu' (p. 10). Indeed, as one's ac-
quaintance with such passages deepens, one realises that Love is almost
on the defensive in relation to this meditative technique of creating a
sacred \textit{vita} while in theory merely elucidating it. This is understand-
able when one recalls Lollard warnings against curious tamperings with
God's Word: 'hold we us payed on þe mesure þat God hath zyuen
vs and dreme we noht aboute newe poynts þat þe gospel leyth, for
þis is synne of curioste þat harmeth more þan profiȝteþ'.\(^{47}\) Moreover,
as Anne Hudson points out, classical anecdote, moral exemplum and hagiography were anathema to Lollard homiletics. It is worth noting at this point that the *Mirror* itself is found associated with the lives of the saints Nicholas, Catherine and Margaret in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 142; with the *Legenda Aurea* in London, British Library, MS Additional 11565; with a Middle English version of the Gospel of Nicodemus in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 207; and with texts such as the 'Charter of Jesus Christ', the 'Fifteen Oes' and the 'Fifteen Joys of Our Lady' in Tokyo, T. Takamiya, MS 4.

Love's unease in relation to his assumption of a traditional hermeneutic framework finds pervasive expression in his ubiquitous use of the word 'open'. As we have noted, the adjective 'open' was habitually used by the Lollards to emphasise their direct access to a divine intention informing a scriptural text which offers to its readers meanings of an unmediated clarity. I will provide a selection of the *Mirror*'s references to 'openness': when no pseudo-Bonaventuran citations are provided, the use of the word is original to Love.

Joseph's tolerant attitude to Mary's mysterious pregnancy is 'an opun ensampl of reprofte to gelouse men' (p. 33/26); the Epiphany is the 'opun shewyng of oure lorde' (p. 42/16); in Jesus's nativity in the manger 'we move se opune ensampl of perite mекenes' (p. 45/32–3); 'pouerte and buxumness' are 'opunly shewed' in the life of simplicity led by Mary and Joseph (p. 49/27); the apostle 'opunly sheweth' the necessity of humility (p. 62/21–2);

Jesus reproved the tempting devil 'opunly' (p. 74/20); we do not read 'opunly & fully' that Jesus began public preaching in the year following his baptism, though he probably preached in private (p. 78/29);

Jesus utters the oblique words 'jis day is his scripture fulfilled in joure eres', thereby 'not opunly expressyng or nemyng him self' (p. 79/16–7),

the 'text of he gospel opunly telleth' the true manner of prayer, fasting and of other virtues (p. 84/19). It would have been an 'opun fol' for the martyrs and saiares to have prayed for mere bodily security; therefore the *Pater Noster* is to be understood spiritually (p. 87/33). The faith and belief of one man can help and save another, as emerges from the story of the 'palatyk man'; and 'jis is opunly aзeynus sume heritikes þat holden þe contrarie opynion' (p. 89/22–3).

The gospels speak of the feeding of the multitude twice; 'in þe whiche processe takynge hede to þe wordes & þe dedes of oure lorde as þe gospel opunly telleþ we mowe se to oure edification gostly, many gude styringes' (p. 103/7–9). Jesus gave us an example in his 'openese reizing' of the second dead body: if our sins are 'opunly knowen' we ought to do 'opune penance as holi chirk haþ ordeyneþ' (p. 127/41–3). In the episode of the raising of Lazarus, Jesus first tells his disciples that Lazarus sleeps. They interpret his words literally; as a result he declares 'to hem opunly, þat he speke first mistily' (p. 130/26–7). Lazarus comes out of his tomb still bound in his grave-clothes; the disciples then 'lose and unbind him'. Augustine interprets the episode spiritually; Lazarus, i.e. the sinful man, remains bound in sin until released by 'godus ministres'. Love comments: 'In þe which we mowe se opunly a sufficient auctorite aзeynus hem [evidently the Lollards] þat repeteune confession ordeyneþ by holi chirk' (p. 135/1–2).

Caiaphas scornfully prophesied in the council of the Pharisees that Jesus would die for the salvation of mankind: and 'so hau we here opun ensampl þat wikke men & reprome of god hauen sumyte þe ȝift of prebycape' (p. 136/9–20). Jesus 'opunly declared [his] def' in John 12:8 (p. 139/34). He commended alms-giving 'as it is opunly shewed in þe gospel of Mark & of Luke' (p. 140/22). There are references to Jesus's 'opun' preaching (both in the sense of 'public' and 'clear'; pp. 143/25; 144/35); we are also informed that he submitted humbly to Thomas's doubts 'to þe more opun pruþe & certeyntyþ of his verray Ressurexion' (p. 208/31–2). Miracles relating to the Eucharist are for the 'opune preyez of þe grete vertue þeroþ' (p. 230/7); there are more references to 'opune miracles' and 'opune preyez' in the passages which follow (pp. 235/10, 15; 236/36; 237/4).

Equally noticeable for its ubiquity in the *Mirror* is the invocation of 'reason'. The nature of the role of 'reason' in faith is of course an issue with a vast prehistory in Christian thought. However, as we have already examined in relation to Wyclif and the English Wycliffite Sermons, the notion of 'reason' was put to an ambiguous and highly polemical use in Lollard hermeneutic discourse. Contemporary opponents of the Lollards noted their theoretical reliance on 'reason', and Nicholas Love seems to have been no exception. The *Mirror* is, as a result, pervasively, almost obsessively, concerned either to justify its own biblical *lectio* as rational, or to defend its transcendence of 'reason'. Towards the beginning, when translating the pseudo-Bonaventuran account of the debate
amongst the four daughters of God, Love introduces a new character: Resone, the Chancellor of God. It is he who reads out the divine ‘determination’ of the conflict (p. 169/16); and it is he who finally ‘termyn[e]s’ which person of þr[e] fader & son & Holigost one god shold become man’, choosing ‘sofast wisdome þat is son, so þat as he felle to þe fals worde of þe feende, þat he rise aȝeyne to life by þe trew worde of gode’ (p. 172/29–31). He thus devises the ‘most resonable victorie of þe emny’ (p. 177/31). ‘Reason’, here, in a fashion akin to Lollard usage, seems to stand for both ‘divine reason’ and human rationality.

Jesus was named thus because the word means ‘saviour’; therefore ‘his name resonably is aboute al names’ (p. 4037–8). When contem- plating the poverty of Mary and Joseph, ‘be resone we shold be stired to compassion’ (p. 4925–6). Jesus goes with his parents to Jerusalem ‘to honour & wirchipe his fader of heuen in hese fest dayes as reson wolde’ (p. 5731–2). When Mary discovers that he has been left behind in Jerusalem, she is grief-stricken: ‘Wherfore here we mowen haue resonably gret compassion of þe gret anguyshe þat our ladys soule is now inne for hir sone’ (p. 5826–8). Jesus chose simple fishermen instead of learned clerks as the ‘ground’ of the Church so that the worthy deeds done by them might be ascribed not to their own merits but to that of Jesus himself: ‘þis he reserueþ & kept to him self as it was reson’ (p. 8027–8). If we look upon the poverty and the hunger of the disciples, ‘we oþer resonably to be stirere to þe loue of pouerté’ (p. 9820–1). When the Jews try to trap Jesus into claiming godhead to be able to accuse him as a traitor to Caesar, he answers with innocent discretion: ‘And fortermore when oure lord hade concludet hem in þat party by reson & auctorie of holi writte, þat þei miht not aȝeyne seye, & þei not withstanding his resonable & meke answere, & so gudely wordes, continueden ... in hir malice’ (p. 12832–6). Jesus chose to have supper at the house of Simon the Pharisee where Mary Magdalen had first expressed her contrition to him, because he knew that she loved that place and wished to dêq her joy: ‘for þat one skil he chase þat place at þat tyme, specialy for Maries sake as we movye resonably suppose’ (p. 13839–41).

The monastic practice of fasting on Wednesday is defended as being ‘resonably ordeineþ’ because Christ was (supposedly) betrayed to his enemies on a Wednesday (p. 14517). There are four important notabilia about the last supper, ‘of þe whiche inward meditacion shal by reson stir
‘may be resonably trowede’ (p. 195/3); for even though ‘it is not writen in any place . . . we resonably & deouty trowe it as it is seide before’ (p. 211/4–5). After the Ascension of Jesus, we may ‘resonably trowe’ that all the host of heaven rejoiced in song (p. 217/20).

This emphasis on reason ties in with Love’s general defensiveness in relation to the devout imagination, which ‘invents’ meanings (in both senses), and forms part of his response to Wycliffite insistence on ‘open reason’ in the interpretation of the Bible. In the passages I have examined above, ‘reason’ is treated positively, either as an aspect of the divine ordinance of things, or as an aspect of the ideal devotional mentalité. There is, however, another dimension to his response to ‘reason’. In this more traditional scheme, the truths of faith transcend mere ‘reason’; therefore what is called for is ‘buxom’ acquiescence in the formulations of Holy Church. Anything in belief that passes ‘kyndely reson’ must be believed as true according to the dictates of the Church (p. 22/23–5). Later, ‘reson’ is coupled with ‘sensualite’ (the *Meditationes* has a reference only to ‘sensualitas’, p. 49/34; p. 525) as part of the incomprenension inherent in the fallen human condition: Joseph and Mary are moved by their ‘kyndly’ reason and sensuality to pray God the Father to defend his son, even though they know that the latter had assumed manhood for our salvation (p. 52/40–3). In another passage, customs ‘gondet upon reson’ are polarised against the biddings of God and the ordinances of the Church; though the former are acceptable, the latter are infinitely more important (p. 112/39–43). When Christ ordains the Eucharist, the disciples in their wonder ‘laft alle hir kyndely reson of manne, & onely restede in trew byleue’ (p. 151/33–5).

Christ’s ordinance of the sacrament is thus simultaneously ‘reasonable’ (p. 152/24), and ‘aȝeynus manns reson’ (p. 153/41).

The conflict between the two visions of ‘reason’ informs the ‘Treatise on the Sacrament’ as well. There are repeated assertions of the Eucharist’s transcendence of ‘kyndely reson’, here generally coupled with ‘bodily wittes’, and generally opposed to ‘trew byleue’ (pp. 227–9). We are warned not to ‘seke curiously in ymagniacion of reson þe merueiles of þis worhi sacrament’ – note how even the normally desirable meditative category of ‘resonable ymagnacioun’ is rejected here (p. 229/32–3).

‘Grete clerkes’ are criticised for relying upon their ‘kyndely reson, & þe principales of philosophy, þat is manns wisdame grondete onely in kyndely reson of man’ (p. 237/24–6). The ‘disciples of Anticrist þat bene clepede Lollardes’ do precisely this, relying on the false doctrine of Wyclif, ‘þe whiche þorh his grete clergy & kunnyng of philosophye was deceyuede in þat þat ȝaf more credence/to þe doctrine of Areostole þat stant onely in naturele reson of man’ (p. 238/3–6). Aristotle, along with natural reason, teaches that accidents cannot remain without substance; therefore the ‘maister of Lollardes’ relying on ‘naturele science’ repoved and scorned the sacrament (p. 239/7–13). However, after this – one would have thought – decisive rejection of the pretensions of reason in the domain of faith, Love executes a sudden volte-face: ‘In þe which [true] byleue by reson we sholde be so saddely sette þat after þe sentence of þe apostle Poule, þouhþ þere came done an Angele fro heuene & taut þe contrarye we sholde not ȝyue credence to him’ (p. 239/29–32).

I have been arguing that Love’s use of the concepts of ‘reason’ and ‘open meanings’ is polemical and combative, turning against the Lollards words which had assumed prominence in the ‘Lollard sect vocabulary’. This becomes particularly clear in an original passage (sign-posted as such by Love’s customary marginal ‘N’) in the course of the Wednesday meditation. The passage is described in the margin as against Lollard views of confession. Mary Magdalene’s contrition is wordless; and this gives rise to the ‘fals opinyon of lollardes þat shrift of mouþe is not nedeful, but þat it suffit onely in herte to be shriuen to god’ (p. 92/42–4).

Love offers ‘an answere resonable’. Jesus was both man and God, and therefore Magdalen’s inner contrition was ‘opune’ to him ‘as is to man þe spech of mouþe, as oft sipes þe processe of þe gospel telleþ, & specyally here opunly’ (p. 93/7–9). Since we do not have the God-man as our confessor, it is necessary that our contrition be expressed in words. And so Holy Church has ‘resonably’ ordained ‘knowleþ by mouþe’. Love continues:

we haue perfite ensample openly shewed in þis blessed woman þat was before so sinful Marie maudley in þe processe before seide of þis gospel, as it is opune ynoth touching þe first part & þe last, þat is to see repentance & satisfaccion. & as to þe seconde þat is confession þouh we rede it not of hir by worde spekynge, for þat was no nede to him þat knewe fully hir herte. (pp. 93/39–40/1)

Love is also conscious of the Lollard emphasis on the ‘literal’ sense and on divine intentionality; and he is as uncertain in his response to these
ben vndurstande tweyn maner lifes of cristen men' (p. 120/2–4). This piece of traditional hermeneutics, where scriptural meaning is dictated from without by the academic and spiritual establishment, is however followed, a few pages later, by an emphasis on the 'intrinsic', 'intended' meaning of the episode of the two sisters. Discussing John 11.20 in a passage original to him, Love says:

And so it seme of by these wordes, soe specialy after his letter tellyng howe these tweyn sisteres Martha & Maria, dierously hadden hem as anentes Jesu be holi evangeliast John menede gostly here as he dop in opere places ... Lo how expressely here also is tokened gostly what longe to be contemplatife. (pp. 130/36–131/39; italics mine)

The unease with a traditional hermeneutic model which finds expression here also extends to Love's attitude to the Pseudo-Bonaventura's lavish and delighted meditative uncertainty about the details of the events recorded in the gospel. The more uncertain they are, the greater is the imaginative scope offered to the devout reader. Love generally tends to curb the meditative excesses of his source. The Meditationes, describing the Last Supper, points out that the gospel does not make it clear whether Christ and his disciples stood or sat at board when the Paschal Lamb was presented to them. However, the Pseudo-Bonaventura goes on, one can meditate in both ways: 'Sed attendte quod dupliciter potes hic meditari: uno modo, ut sedeat, ut dixi; alio, ut stent recti' (p. 244/60–3; p. 596). Love is much more brusque: 'So hit shou hit stoden in hit tyme, neuerles hit seten also in opere tyme, as he gospel tellhyth in diuerse places' (p. 148/10–12). In Die Veneris, Love discusses the two possible ways in which Jesus might have been crucified: either he was nailed to the cross which had been erected already, or he was nailed prone on the cross before it was raised and set in the mortice on the ground. The Pseudo-Bonaventura, after giving one version, says: 'Sunt tamen qui credunt quod non hoc modo fuerit crucifixus . . . Quod si hoc magis placet, conspice' (pp. 271/44–272/48; p. 606). This fine Franciscan tentativeness is replaced in Love by an almost irritated dismissal of the issue: 'Bot whethor so it be in one maner or in opere sope it is hit oure lorde Jesus was mailede harde vpon hit crosse' (p. 177/37–9).

The impression produced by these slight but pervasive modifications of the pseudo-Bonaventuran passages referring to the gospel text, along
with his emphasis on 'reason', suggest that Love was having to come to terms with contemporary Wycliffite criticism of the Church’s ‘pervasive’ glossings of God’s Word and its emphasis on the non-canonical. Indeed, he occasionally leaves out some of the apocryphal material in his original: the pseudo-Bonaventurian Caput lxxxi (‘Quomodo Dominus Jesus praedixit mortem suam matri’), and references to Joseph of Arimathia and the lesser James. Love’s translation thus seeks to accommodate, even while implicitly rejecting, the Lollard valorisation of sola scriptura understood according to God's intention.

Such an impression is further strengthened by the mise-en-page of the Mirror manuscripts, which is characterised by a quite remarkable degree of uniformity for a widely-disseminated vernacular text of this period. Ian Doyle points to this:

Most copies are on skin, of small quarto or folio size, by practised scribes, with ample colour and illumination of initials, rubrics, headlines, etc., and the Latin notes... contents-table, prologue, side notes, appended treatise varying little in relative disposition, though not always all present.

I have examined forty manuscripts, including one that contains substantial extracts but not the whole text (Cambridge, University Library, Hh.i.11), and found thirty-five of them to be very similar in general disposition and lay-out. They include the important Cambridge, University Library, MS Additional 6578 which Sargent chooses as his base manuscript, and which might have been the very copy presented to Arundel for his approbation. They provide substantial evidence that the text, marginalia and the pattern of rubrication were standardised, presumably at some early point in the process of transmission.

Such standardisation has important implications. The general uniformity of the manuscripts suggests a careful interest in the ‘uncorrupted’ transmission of the text. Sargent notes that ‘the number of major alterations to the text of The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ, as compared to such contemporary texts as Walter Hilton’s Scale of Perfection, William Flete’s Remedies Against Temptations, or the works of Richard Rolle... is remarkably small, and the degree of textual variation on the whole is remarkably little’. He suggests that this textual uniformity – and, one may emphasise, the uniformity of presentation – arises from the Mirror’s embeddedness in the Lollard conflict: a polemical work must after all ensure that its polemic is transmitted without change, and the Lollards were particularly careful about the transmission of their own texts.

More recently, Sargent has identified what he designates as the β- and α-recensions of the Mirror. The former he considers to be instances of a ‘pre-publication’ version of Love’s text, circulating before it had been examined officially, and betraying, through certain textual disruptions, an ongoing process of composition and revision; the latter being a more finished, ‘post-publication’ version circulated after the approbation of Arundel had been obtained. It is to be noted, however, that the same apparatus, in terms of marginalia and patterns of rubrication, characterises manuscripts of both recensions. This would suggest that it formed an integral part of the very conception of the Mirror, accompanying the text, in the terms of Sargent’s analysis, in both the (as it were) ‘draft’ and ‘final’ versions.

What is even more interesting is the nature of the mise-en-page. Much of the marginal apparatus is devoted to the identification of cited authorities, often in scrupulous detail, and the quotation of biblical passages in the Latin of which the translations are found in the body of the text. Almost all the manuscripts display the same marginalia, with relatively few variations. There are a number which omit large sections, or discontinue the marginalia after a certain point, but the bits and pieces which do appear belong recognisably to the same apparatus. Among the manuscripts I have examined, this is the case with sixteen; of the rest only two are without any marginalia at all (Cambridge, University Library Hh.i.11, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 63.4), the remaining ones displaying a full or nearly full apparatus. Thus, despite some variation, there is a general uniformity in the presentation of the text and the contents and location of the marginalia. This uniformity would suggest that the apparatus may have been authoritatively endorsed or at least officially ratified initially, so that scribal transmission was relatively careful and regular.

The other major element in the presentation of the text is rubrication. There is a more or less consistent attempt at distinguishing biblical words from non-scriptural material by rubrication, underlining or, as occasionally in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 131, by using a different
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script. Once again, there is a degree of variation, with some manuscripts being more careful in separating biblical and non-biblical words than others. At their most rigorous, the manuscripts give the Latin biblical text in the margin in red, the vernacular translation being underlined in red in the body of the text. A variant of this pattern involves incorporating the Latin biblical citations into the body of the text in red, in which case the vernacular translations are often left unmarked. Of the manuscripts I have studied, twenty-four display a more or less uniform interest in rubrication; around twelve are lax, with occasional bursts of precision, and only four are without any attempt at rubrication. These are Cambridge, University Library, Hh.i.111, Glasgow, University Library, Gen. 1130, London, British Library, Additional 11565 and Additional 19901.

What is fascinating about this careful and self-conscious presentation of the text in the Mirror manuscripts is how substantially it differs from that of the contemporary manuscripts of the Meditations Vitae Christi. The Meditations manuscripts from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries occur in a vast variety of forms, from relatively lavish productions such as Cambridge, University Library, Kk.iv.23, to little pocket-books such as Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canon Liturg. 226, meant for quotidian personal meditation. However, the typical mise-en-page, irrespective of the quality of the manuscript, is characterised by an almost entire absence of scribal marginalia and rubrication. The text, though divided into chapters preceded by rubricated headings, is presented, within each chapter, as a solid undifferentiated mass. There is no standardised attempt at distinguishing scriptural words from the rest – even momentous utterances such as ‘Consummatum est’ can remain unmarked. There is no marginal citation of authorities, though there is intensive, unmarked citation within the text itself. A few manuscripts, such as London, British Library, Royal 7D. xvi, underline the names of cited authorities while ignoring biblical words; and one or two, such as Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 162, attempt to mark out scriptural words, though occasionally underlining what is regarded as important non-scriptural material as well. But most go for the undifferentiated presentation, the implied pattern of reading being obviously one with close affinities to the monastic lectio. The reader is expected, like St. Cecilia, to ‘port[are] ... in petecto’ the ‘Evangelium Christi’ (p. 75/–6; p. 510).

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The Mirror manuscripts on the other hand give evidence that a great deal of thought has been devoted to the presentation of the text. I have come across only one manuscript which follows the Latin pattern with neither marginalia nor biblical rubrication; Cambridge, University Library, Hh.i.111. This manuscript, however, is a special case, since it consists of a miscellany, probably made by nuns, with extensive extracts from the Mirror along with extracts from The Prickynge of Love, The Seven Poyntes of Trewe Love and Everlastynge Wisdome, the Middle English Revelations of Elizabeth of Hungary, Flete’s Remedies against Temptations, Walter Hilton and Anselm of Canterbury. Most other Mirror manuscripts are very different. Authorities are marked and identified, and biblical words are distinguished from non-scriptural material. Of course, the precision with which such a distinction is made falls far short of the consistency and meticulousness one finds in Lollard manuscripts. Indeed, the very form of the Mirror, based as it is on an inextricable mingling of the scriptural and the non-scriptural, would make the achievement of anything like Wycliffite textual precision nearly impossible. Equally interesting are the extensive marginal citations of authorities and the almost uniform omission of gospel-chapter citations in the chapter headings. The pseudo-Bonaventuran manuscripts regularly provide gospel references in the capitula, and the French version by Jean Galope in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 213, for instance, largely follows this pattern. So does Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Ital.115, the Italian version on which Isa Ragusa’s and Rosalie Green’s edition of the Meditations is based.

What emerges from this evidence is a certain indeterminacy in authorial and/or official attitude towards the text. The meditative thrust of its contents would seem to be in conflict with the academic, textual consciousness implied by the ordinatio. At the same time, the relative paucity of precise references to the gospel-chapters would fit in with the transmission of the Mirror as an implied substitute for the gospel. As with Love’s attitude towards the tradition of meditative reinvention of the gospels which supports the Meditations, there seems to be a central dubiety in his attitude towards his chosen ordinatio and its ideological implications. In mediating to a vernacular audience a familiar text with its own, associated, modes of reading in a political context critical of received notions of text and authority, Love shows himself
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to be caught between two worlds: one insisting on the identity of the authority of scripture and that of the ecclesiastical establishment, the other emphasising the disjunction between the two. The tradition of the exegetical reinvention of scripture, of which the Meditationes forms an important part, was one which rendered unnecessary an academic presentation that pointed out textual or authoritative boundaries. In fact, the new textual consciousness extends, in Love's case, to making a distinction between his additions to the pseudo-Bonaventuran text and the original. Twenty-seven manuscripts of the Mirror are preceded by the following notice:

Attende lector huius libri prout sequitur in Anglo scripti, quod ubicumque in margine pontitur litera N verba sunt translatoris sue compilatoris . . . Et quando peruenitur ad processum & verba eiusdem doctoris [Bonaventura] inseritur in margine litera B.

Note, reader of the following book written in English, that wherever the letter 'N' is placed in the margin, the words are added by the translator or compiler . . . And when it returns to the narrative and words of that doctor, then the letter 'B' is inserted in the margin.  

But the actual realisation of this principle, at least in all the manuscripts now extant, is half-hearted, for it is only sporadically that the additions are indeed signalled by a marginal ‘N’. This is in sharp contrast to the precision of (possibly) another Carthusian of the time, ‘M. N.’, the translator of Margarete Porete's Le Mirouer des Simples Ames.  

It survives in three manuscripts, of which I have examined Cambridge, St. John's College MS C. 21. M. N.'s additions take the form of distinct and separable units, which makes his task relatively simple. In contrast, Love's inadequately realised, yet, given the unexceptionable nature of his source-text, unusually punctilious gesture in the direction of textual precision suggests once again that ideas about textual authority akin to those of the Lollards are being imposed upon a translation based on principles which simply refuse any such imposition. For the Mirror does not subscribe to any conception of textual fidelity: the alterations to the Meditationes are too minutely pervasive for it to be really possible to separate addition from original. It is as if one were to sit down with Chaucer's 'translacioun' of Il Filostrato and try to place a marginal 'C' beside each of his 'in-echings'.

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The Mirror thus articulates a hesitant and uncertain response to the ideological implications of the modes of textual presentation favoured by the Lollards. As I have argued, this uncertainty has its roots in Love's fundamentally ambiguous conceptualisation of the nature of valid scriptural 'authority'. Thomas Netter of Walden, writing his monumental anti-Wycliffite encyclopaedia in the 1420s, is, as we shall see in the next chapter, far less ambivalent about fighting the enemy on its own ground. Extant manuscripts of the Doctrinale Antiquitatum Fidei Catholicae Ecclesiae such as Cambridge, University Library, Dd. viii. 16–17 or Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 262 scrupulously distinguish Netter's own contributions from those of his authorities: these original passages are always prefaced by the word 'actor' in red.

Thomas Netter, however, was writing a work of reference in an academic-ecclesiastical textual environment. As such, his self-conscious interest in matters of presentation, though of heightened significance in the Lollard context, is not entirely unexpected. In contrast, the evidence of the Mirror manuscripts is indeed remarkable. It is tempting to suggest that the Mirror bears witness to orthodox recognition of an important Lollard achievement: the breaking-down of the barrier between an enclosed academic milieu with its own rules and conventions of written communication, and a wider, comparatively unlearned world of lay devotion.