

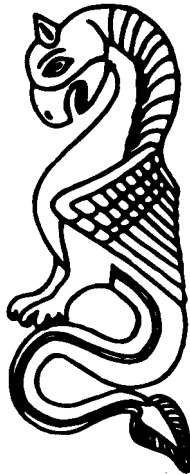
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RICHARD MAIDSTONE'S *PENITENTIAL PSALMS*

By VALERIE EDDEN

Being neither fish, flesh nor fowl, neither quite Biblical translation nor yet quite in the mainstream of English devotional literature, the *Penitential Psalms*¹ of the fourteenth-century Carmelite friar Richard Maidstone² have largely escaped critical and scholarly attention. Margaret Deanesly³ dismissed them very properly as outside the sphere of her study of Biblical translations. More recently Derek Pearsall⁴ paid tribute to their literary merit, though necessarily briefly. Others seem not to know of their existence.⁵

This essay argues that Maidstone's psalms move beyond psalm paraphrase, using the psalms as the basis for a single, continuous penitential meditation to be used in private devotion and in preparation for the sacrament of penance. Since they were apparently intended for a lay audience, they are also of interest for what they reveal about lay spirituality and the devotional tastes of the English aristocracy and gentry in the late fourteenth century.

The Psalms: Structure

The seven *Penitential Psalms* combine translation and meditation. Each eight-line stanza⁶ begins with a close translation of the Biblical verse or versicle, usually (but not invariably) in two lines, which is expanded in the rest of the stanza. Although Psalm L occurs independently in some manuscripts and was apparently considered suitable as a separate anthology piece,⁷ the psalms are joined together into one meditation with no breaks between individual psalms. Links are made between them, a single theme unites them and they have a coherent structure: the penitent sinner reflects on his sins and places his trust for the grace to repent in the redeeming Lord "pat dere us bou3te". The poem covers the seven psalms as follows (using the Vulgate numbering):

- 11.1-8: Introduction
- 11.9-88: Ps.VI
- 11.89-200: Ps.XXXI
- 11.201-384: Ps.XXXVII
- 11.385-544: Ps.L
- 11.545-776: Ps.CI
- 11.777-840: Ps.CXXIX
- 11.841-952: Ps.CXLII

Traditionally the seven psalms were interpreted in the light of David's remorse for his treatment of Bathsheba⁸ and they were given an overall coherence by linking them to the seven deadly sins.⁹ Mabel Day,¹⁰ in the only notes so far made on Maidstone's psalms, attempts to fit his poems into this scheme, assigning them thus:

VI: Anger
XXXI: Pride
XXXVII: Gluttony
L: Lust
CI: Covetousness
CXXIX: Envy
CXLII: Sloth

It is difficult to accept a scheme as precise as this, though the seven deadly sins do figure on occasion: Ps.CI speaks of men walking "vndir þe weigt / Of alle þe deedly sinnes seuene" (700); a passage in Ps.XXXVII (347-9) deals summarily with four of the sins but not the one which is the subject of the psalm according to Miss Day; Ps.VI deals with anger, but this is not the sin of anger but the wrath of God against the sinner. Further, in the final psalm (CXLII) the penitent prays,

I may not wepe, I am so badde,
So bareyn and so sorowlees (883-4)

which could well indicate symptoms of Accidia, but in fact these lines merely form part of a prayer to repent:

Therefore I preye þe, prince of pees,
Helpe me þat I summe teris hadde,
That goostly fruyte myȝte haue encrees. (886-8)

It is repentance, not sloth, which is the subject of the meditation, and there does not appear to be any reference to Pride, Lust, Covetousness or Envy in Maidstone's treatment of the psalms assigned to these sins in Miss Day's scheme; indeed Maidstone's meditation on Psalm L is remarkable in comparison with other meditations and commentaries for its failure to link this psalm either generally with lechery or specifically with David's adultery with Bathsheba.

Maidstone's actual scheme is rather different from this, as I have indicated. His overall theme, which links the remorse of the sinner with the merits of the redemption, is stated clearly in the introductory stanza:

To Goddis worschipe, þat dere us bouȝte,
To whom we owen to make oure mone
Of alle þe synnes þat we haue wrouȝte. (1-3)

The phrase "dere bouȝte" is then repeated throughout the poem,¹¹ providing a consistent framework of redemption and promised forgiveness for the penitent sinner. The treatment of each of the psalms

thus gives it a place within an overall scheme of meditation, leading from acknowledgement of sin to a prayer not to sin again, which may be tabulated as follows:

- VI: Acknowledgement of sin
- XXXI: The penitent's need of a clear conscience and true shrift
- XXXVII: Confession
- L: Prayer for grace
- CI: Dramatic dialogue between Christ and the sinner, assuring him of Christ's atoning action at the Crucifixion
- CXXIX: Contemplation of Judgement
- CXLII: Direct address to Christ. Prayer for grace to resist further temptation.

This scheme, which links the recital of the seven psalms with a penitential meditation, is apparently Maidstone's own, but may be influenced by the practice of reciting the seven psalms as an addition to the daily office, and by the renewed interest (amongst clergy and laity alike) in penitential practice;¹² it also owes a little to exegetical tradition.

From their earliest use, the context in which the penitential psalms were recited linked the penitence of the individual sinner with Christ's passion and redemption. The recital of the complete group, and also of Psalm L on its own, formed part of the preparation for penance. The twice daily recital of the penitential psalms was introduced at Cluny in the tenth century. They were combined with the fifteen gradual psalms, offices of the dead and a litany to form the *Trina Oratio* and were recited in addition to the normal daily office. Both Sarum and York breviaries follow the penitential psalms with the antiphon *Ne reminiscaris, domine, delicta nostra*. ("O Lord, remember not our sins.") By the mid-thirteenth century in England this practice was much diminished: the *Trina Oratio* was recited but once daily and in some monastic houses only in Lent. Its renewed popularity in the late Middle Ages comes from its inclusion in the vernacular primers (laymen's prayer books).

The position of the penitential psalms within the primers varies. Presumably, since the lay man or woman was not necessarily in a position to regulate his or her life according to the canonical hours, individual devotions came to be associated less with times of the day than with particular occasions or circumstances. On the evidence of the primers, they were considered especially suitable as prayers for the sick and dying;¹³ Rolle comments that Ps.VI "is songen in the office of dedmen".¹⁴ Psalm L is repeatedly linked with the general confession.

In addition to this devotional context, Maidstone has at his disposal a long tradition of Biblical commentary interpreting these psalms, but he is highly selective in what he uses. His overall scheme leads him to prefer spiritual interpretations in which the penitent reader may become the speaker of the poems. At no point is there any suggestion of the "literal" (historical) reading in which

the speaker is David and the psalms express his remorse for his love-affair with Bathsheba. The speaker in Maidstone's psalms is indeed normally the penitent sinner, i.e. the reader. They may thus be seen as meditations in the tradition usefully described by Rosemary Woolf, who differentiates medieval devotional verse from metaphysical:

Their [i.e. the medieval poets'] personal moods and emotions are therefore not revealed in their poetry, for they are not concerned with the question of how they feel individually, but only with what kind of response their subject should properly arouse in Everyman . . . Whereas the seventeenth-century poets show the poet meditating, the medieval writers provide versified meditations which others may use: in the one the meditator is the poet; in the other the meditator is the reader.¹⁵

Each stanza begins with a translation of one biblical verse or versicle (as already indicated); the divisions correspond precisely to those in Rolle's *English Psalter*, not to those in the Vulgate. Maidstone's translation is careful and accurate; whilst in some places his version of the Latin seems to be entirely his own, there appear to be many places where it is indebted to previous English psalters, notably Rolle's which it resembles in combining meditation with translation. It is interesting that Maidstone appears to have used the later version of the Wycliffite Bible, giving striking proof that initially vernacular versions of the Bible did not excite hostility even from the most vocal of Wycliffe's opponents.¹⁶

The Psalms as Penitential Meditation

The poem was to be read in its entirety as a devotional exercise leading the reader through the different stages of penitence.

In Psalm VI the sinner acknowledges his sin and God's wrath:

In many a synne my-self I see:
And drede rennith in my thoght
Bat thow wil a-wreked be. (12-14)

If I do synnes more and more,
Thanne me must suffir peynes moo. (27-8)

Whan I think what is me with-inne
My consciens maketh a careful cry. (37-8)

Synne is cause of my mornyng,
I fele me feynt in goostly [f]ight. (53-4)

Wele I wote I haue doo mys
And greuyd God with werkes wrong. (59-60)

This much is entirely in the spirit of the psalmist. But Maidstone's

meditation is in fact Christocentric; God's wrath is always juxtaposed with his mercy, each stanza concluding with a prayer beseeching God to remember his promises of mercy in Christ:

Ihesu mercyable and meke,
Lese noght þat thow boghtist ones. (23-4)

Therefore thy pytee, Lord, vnpyenne,
That I may mende me ther-by. (39-40)

Maidstone also introduces an image of God as king (and feudal lord) and the penitent as his subject, which is to recur in the sequence. The sinner claims for himself the benefits of Christ's passion in the presence of the wrathful king:

Now, curteys Kyng, to thee I calle,
Be noght vengeable, put vp thy swerde!
In heuen when thow holdist halle,
Lat me noght be ther-oute sperde!

Oure Lord hath herkenyd my preyer
And receyuid my oryson;
Therefore I hope to haue here
Some p[rofi]t of his passion. (69-76)

The next Psalm in the sequence, XXXI, begins with the same avenging Lord:

Bot he þat conscience vnknittith
And yeuith no force it to defyle,
Ayens hym God his wepyn whettith
To wrekyng hym a litel while. (101-4)

It also contains the same pleas for mercy:

I haue mister to make mones,
That haue doon many a wylde outray;
I cry the mercy, Kyng of Thrones,
I haue trespassed, I say not nay. (109-12)

This time however the penitent is invited to the more positive action of regaining a clear conscience and being truly contrite. The meditation on verse 5 of the psalm, itself a confession of guilt,¹⁷ is expanded over two stanzas; the penitent is encouraged to acknowledge all his sins in shrift and to trust in the grace of Christ:

In shrift shal I be alle a-knowen
Alle my mysdede, and morne among.
For certys, Lord, we trist and trowen
The welle of grace with stremys strong. (123-6)

The psalmist's *in diluuiio aquarum multarum* ("in the flood of many waters") brings to mind the need for penitential tears and possibly

baptismal water:

Them nedith noght þat ben in wele
 The water þat vs wasches here;
 Bot we that alleday fro hym stele,
 And wrathen hym that hath no pere,
 If he wil vs fro harmes hele,
 Vs nedith to wepe water clere. (147-152)

The speaker corresponds precisely to the one described by Rolle in his meditation on the psalm:

Here the prophet spekis in his person that does
 penance for his synn, and says blisfull ere
 thai, and sall be in heuen, whas synnes are
 forgifen in verray contricyon and shrift.¹⁸

Taking a hint from the psalmist, Maidstone finally introduces God himself (still a feudal lord) in dialogue with the sinner, offering him guidance and advice:

I am thy God, haue me in mynde,
 I made the fre there thou were thralle;
 That no dedely synne the schende,
 Lat witte and wisdom be thi walle. (165-8)

Therefore in myrth haue thow remoors,
 And euer among thenk wele on this. (175-6)

Psalm XXXVII is a straightforward confession, with Maidstone expanding the general comments to specify named sins:

For wanton worde and ydel othe
 And many a werk of wyckednesse. (205-6)

He is afflicted both by original sin, "Oure foorme fadres a forwarde breke" (259), and actual sin, "My sinnes eke" (261):

I erre al day and do amys,
 I stomble as thei that blynde be,
 And synne ywys is cause of this. (277-9)

He is pursued by the world, the flesh and the devil:

The world was fals, the fend was slygh,
 The flesch dide so that me forthought. (291-2)

He follows the psalmist in proclaiming his sins and reflecting on the wages of sin:

For I my wrong schal tellen oute,
 And for my synne thenk I schal
 How it is perilous to be prow[t]e,

And lecherie may lesyn alle.
 Enuye and wrath of hert[e] stoute
 Shal stand a man in litel stalle,
 When he is clothed in a clowte,
 To wonne with-in a wormys walle. (345-52)

The psalmist's anguished cry to his God becomes a plea for mercy, and as the sinner pleads through the mediation of Mary for Christ's grace, both for forgiveness and to avoid sin in the future, his acceptance of his own sinfulness marks the increasing importance of grace as an element in the penitential scheme:

I se no help, Lorde, bot thi grace. (222)

Since he cannot escape from God's anger ("hastynesse") his only hope is in the "mercy [that] passeth rightwisnesse" (232) and for grace from God who paid so dear a price for mankind:

Bot, Lord þat boghtest man so dere,
 Let hym no blys in balys bryng,
 But sende hym myght to amende hym here,
 And graunt hym grace of vprysyng. (317-20)

Taking up the theme of the previous psalm, the penitent prays for the grace to weep for his sins (343-4).

Psalm XXXVII thus moves from confession to the need for grace; Psalm L is itself a prayer for grace and here most of all Maidstone departs from the usual commentaries and interpretations. Medieval commentaries on Psalm L can be divided into those which insist on the supremacy of the literal or historical sense (with King David as the speaker) and those which stress the spiritual sense (in which the speaker represents Christ figuratively.)¹⁹ Maidstone's version reflects rather the devotional use of the psalm: the speaker of the psalm is the penitent sinner, addressing a God who has already made his redemptive love known in Christ. Rolle, drawing on Peter Lombard, relates the psalm to David's adultery and to sins of the flesh "in ensaumpil till men noght to fall, bot if thai be fallen, for to rise, and to shew al manner of meknes".²⁰ But Maidstone reflects on the torment which his sins have caused Christ and prays for the marks of the passion to be evident in his own heart:

Allas! thi t[our]ment and thi tene
 Made thi brest and bak al blewe;
 Now g[raun]t[e], Crist, it may be sene
 With-inne my herte, thy hydouse hewe! (469-72)

He renders *delibera me de sanguinibus* as "Delyver me from blameful blode" but goes on to comment,

Thi ryghtful bloode ran doun on rode,
 That washe vs fro oure fleshly felth. (501-2)

The sacrifice required by God then reminds Maidstone of the

inadequacy of any sacrifice on the part of the sinner, in the face of the supreme sacrifice:

For thow were offrid vp hongyng
 For mannes sake on rode tree,
 And of thin hert gan bloode oute spryng. (517-19)

In the final stanza the offering of sacrificial calves prompts a bold play on words, again leading the meditation to the crucifixion:

On Caluarie a calf ther crepte,
 Crist on crosse both clene and clere;
 For teris that his modir wepte,
 He schild vs fro the fendes fere! (541-4)

This devotional treatment of the psalm places the cry for mercy with which the psalm begins at the centre of its meaning, repeatedly linking God's mercy with his grace, needed by the penitent both to avert the consequences of his past sin and to strengthen him against future temptation:

Let thi pite spryng and sprede,
 Of thi mercy that I noght mys.
 After goostly grace I grede;
 Gode God, thow graunt me this,
 That I mote here my lyfe lede
 So that I doo no more amys. (387-91)

3if any strengh[e] wil me stele
 Out of the close of thi clenness,
 Wys me, Lorde, in wo and wele,
 And kepe me for thi kyndenes. (397-400)

Greet is my gilt, gretter thi grace. (459)

So lat me neuer mercy mysse. (487)

Thi mercy is oure wasshyng welle. (512)

And at Doomsday all men will be eager for mercy:

For ryche and pore, hygh and lowe,
 And euer[y] wight, I am certayne,
 On domesday, whan thow schal blowe,
 Of thi mercy wil be fayne. (413-16)

In this psalm alone Maidstone turns to address the sinner in the third person:

Synful man, beware of wreche,
 And thenk on Crist with al thin hert,
 How he become thi louely leche,
 And for thi sake ful sore smert. (491-4)

This introduction of a different speaking voice takes a more dramatic turn in Psalm CI, to which texts and commentaries alike (following the Hebrew manuscripts) give the title *Oratio pauperis cum anxiaretur, et in conspectu domini effudit precem* ("The prayer of the poor man when he is anxious and pours forth his prayer in the presence of the Lord"). Here, as in Psalm L, Maidstone rejects the literal interpretation in favour of the spiritual one. Commentators from Augustine onwards suggest that this poor man is Christ, *qui propter vos pauper factus est* ("who for your sakes became poor", II Cor. viii 9).²¹ In his tract *Protectorium Pauperis* Maidstone declares firmly in favour of such allegorical readings of the psalms,²² and in this meditation he takes the suggestion that the speaker of the psalm is Christ and turns CI substantially into a dramatic dialogue between Christ and the penitent sinner, in which Christ relates the details of his passion as an assurance of his atoning love. The metaphoric description of the psalmist's miseries in vv.5-6 become figurative references to the scourging, the crowning with thorns, Christ's humiliation on the cross and the drink of vinegar and gall. In order to maintain his reading of the psalm, Maidstone does not use the usual tradition which interprets the three birds (the pelican, the night-crow and sparrow) as three types of men (they become the hermit, the penitent and the righteous man in Rolle's version); instead he follows the tradition in which each of the three birds signifies Christ.²³ Maidstone's allusive lines assume a knowledge of the symbolic handling of this material:

I was maad liyk the pellycan,
 That vpon wylde[r]nesse hym-silf sleep,
 So redily to the roode I ran
 For mannys soule to suffre deep;
 And, as the ny3t-crowe in hir hous can
 By ny3te se to holte and heep,
 So purposide I to saue man,
 For hym I 3af my goost and breep. (593-600)

The pelican slays its young, mourns them for three days and then revives them with its own blood;²⁴ the phrase "hymself sleep" seems to suggest that the pelican dies in the attempt. The night-crow who can see in the dark seems to derive from Augustine's comment that the night signifies the night of ignorance of the Jews who crucified Christ.²⁵ The sparrow's solitary home on the roof signifies the resurrection. But Maidstone extends the sparrow's role to support his overall theme in this poem and throughout the sequence. The sparrow rests on the roof but has his narrow nest on the tree,²⁶ referring here obviously to that other tree where Christ, like the sparrow, was indeed alone:

Vpon the tre my neest was narowe,
 There-on my3te I no briddis carye. (603-4)

The torture of Christ's body is compared with the harrowing of the earth:

As erþe is hurlyd vndir harowe,
So was þe fleisch þat sprange of Marye. (605-6)

This not only emphasises the physical brutality of the torture, but also equates flesh and earth, thus underlining the references to the flesh and its destination which recur in the meditation.²⁷ This image of the passion as a "harrowing" is unique at this period (as far as I know) though it may owe something to the homonym harrow "parchment maker's frame", which is used several times in this period figuratively for Christ's body drawn on the cross.²⁸

In v.11 *a facie ire et indignacionis tue, quia eleuans allisisti me* ("In the face of your wrath and your indignation, because lifting me up, you have cast me down"), the poet takes up the paradox of the incarnate deity lifted up (both figuratively exalted and literally lifted upon the cross) and cast down (again both figuratively reviled and cast literally into Hades) for the sake of man. Here the antithesis of lifting up and casting down and the miracle of God made man are emphasised by repetition and by the use of similar syntactic units to express these two contrasting actions:

Fadir, I was to thi plesaunce
Lyfte up as God in God dwellyng. (627-8)

Thow droue me adoun to chese a chaunce
As man for man the deep takyng. (631-2)

Christ's address to the sinner concludes at l.640; thereafter the psalm is interpreted anagogically. "Syon is Holy Chirche trewe" (651) built on the foundation stones of the twelve apostles (as in almost all the commentaries). Stanzas 88-90 present a straightforward account of the theology of atonement. As the meditation draws to its conclusion, the contemplation of Judgement Day begins in preparation for the psalm following.

In Psalm CXXIX, the psalm of the office of the dead, contemplation of judgement forms the central theme; the penitent asks for Christ's mercy to be shown to him, acknowledging the depths of his sin:

For, by þe lawe of rigtwijsnesse,
Eendelees þanne were oure peyne. (795-6)

but he may hope for God's mercy at Judgement Day:

But euere we hope to þi goodnesse,
Whanne þou schalt al þis world affreyne,
With mercy and with myldenesse
Thi rigtful doom þou wilt restreyne. (797-800)

The penitent has cause to hope for God's mercy since in "plenteuous raunsum . . . he payede for us his owne body." (826-7)

Sin is presented as a physical wound:

For synne is scharp as knyues oord,
And makiþ hem lame þat liggiþ in lust (811-2)

but the image shifts, as the penitent submits himself to the discipline of Christ in another forceful (and, I think, original) image:

Therefore, Ihesu, thou louely lord,
Pere I am roten, rubbe of þe rust,
Or I be brougt to shippis bord,
To sayle into the [d]ale²⁹ of dust. (813-16)

The poem ends in hope, contemplating the final defeat of the old enemy on the Last Day and the destiny of the saved in their heavenly home.

The last psalm, CXLII, is a direct address to Christ, thus providing a parallel to Christ's address to the sinner in Psalm CI. The sinner asks Christ for the grace to resist future temptation:

Late neuere þe feend us drawe down,
Ne dreedful deuel us disseyue! (847-8)

In this first instance he revives the image used earlier in the sequence of God as a feudal lord; here the sinner asks Christ for assistance in fighting off an intransigent enemy (the devil):

And sende me grace to be vertued,
So þat I may þe feend wipstond. (863-4)

Thinke how þou diedist for my sake,
And graunte me grace, eer þat I go,
Of my trespas amendis make. (902-4)

Late neuere feend oure papis blende,
Ne us bitraye neuere eft! (919-20)

The poem ends with a request for grace to amend, and an assurance of heaven:

[3it], 3it, Lord, abyde and spare,
þat I be amendid or I dye. (943-4)

Sende me grace thee to plesen,
And vouch saaf, whanne doom schal be,
Into þe kingdom of heuen me seysen. (949-51)

Christ has now become the shepherd who gathers into his fold the souls he has bought (877-8), opening up the "postern" (back door) for his followers.

Maidstone and his Audience

Maidstone's treatment of the psalm sequence does not lend itself to theological controversy, though it is worth commenting

that Maidstone's orthodoxy is not open to question: one would hardly expect doubtful dogma from an Oxford-educated Carmelite friar writing during the period in which Wycliffe wrote his most controversial works. A reference to the Eucharist is unequivocal about the Real Presence:³⁰

He payede for us his owne body,
In foorme of breed boþe lyme and lith. (827-8)

Throughout it is assumed that the penitent sinner will receive the merits of the atonement through the normal channels of the institutional church, through the sacrament of penance.³¹

It has already been suggested that there may be some link in readership between these psalms and the vernacular primers which first appear in England in the late fourteenth century. The owners of the primers were generally lay, literate, devout and of varied social class (or at least not exclusively knightly). It is a moot point whether the preponderance of prayer-books in the wills of women at this period argues for their greater faithfulness or whether it merely results from the fact that generally men had a greater variety of chattels to bequeath and tended to refer merely to "books". These men and women provided a ready-made audience for devotional verse.³² Something further may be deduced concerning Maidstone's audience from the fact that he wrote in English, for Latin was his normal medium, not just for his academic and scholarly works, but also in the *De Concordia*,³³ a celebratory poem upon a civic occasion. The audience of *De Concordia* must have been courtly and included laity as well as clergy. Maidstone must then have intended the *Penitential Psalms* for a wider audience.

The language of these psalms also reveals that Maidstone considered his audience sympathetic to courtly literature, though of course a courtly treatment of Christ's role as a mediator is by no means unusual. It is found (for example) in both the *Ancrene Wisse* and *Cursor Mundi*. As we have already noted, God is the "curteys Kyng", who holds his hall in heaven and whom the penitent poet beseeches to "put vp [his] swerde" (69-71); Jesus too is "curteys and kynde" (917). The commonplace notion of a man as a pilgrim in an alien land is transformed so that the poet asks God to comfort his "febil knyght/that fer is flemyd out of thy lond" (215). The penitent reveres Mary, "that Lady fre" (323).

Maidstone's actual readership can be further defined by the contents of the manuscripts in which the *Penitential Psalms* are found. Their usual context is an anthology of devotional pieces, often (as in the Wheatley manuscript) directly linked to prayers in the liturgy or the prayer-book. In addition to the *Penitential Psalms*, the Wheatley manuscript contains a vernacular version of the lessons from the *Dirige* (*Parce mihi, domine*, "Spare me, Lord"); a poem ("Ther is no creatour but oon") based partially on the responses in the *Dirige*; another ("This is Goddis own compleynt") based on the Reproaches, part of the liturgy for Good Friday; and a prayer at the elevation ("Heyl Ihesu Crist Word of þe Fadir".) Maidstone's psalms are frequently set alongside Richard Rolle's; indeed (as we

have seen) most manuscripts ascribe them to Rolle, who was by far the most popular devotional writer in the late fourteenth century, particularly among the laity. The association with Rolle undoubtedly enhanced the reputation of Maidstone's poems, though they are quite unmythical and also in fact considerably more polished literary productions than anything of Rolle's. There is not scope here for a detailed study of all the manuscripts, but two particularly reveal the tastes of their compilers.

In Ashmole 61 (Bodley 6922), a fifteenth-century manuscript, Maidstone appears as usual in the company of "Rolle", for the psalms are followed by an abridgement of the pseudo-Rollian *The Prick of Conscience*. There is a selection of devotional and liturgical pieces: hymns for morning and evening, the Eucharistic hymn, "Welcom lord in form of bred" and the hymn to the Virgin Mary from the *Speculum Christiani*, "Mary modour wel þu be" (which is also in the Wheatley manuscript). But the compiler also has a taste for more practical religion ("How the wise man taught his son" and "How the good wife taught her daughter") and for religious pieces with an exciting narrative line or an exotic setting: the legend of the Crucifix; the romance of the Stations of Jerusalem; the legend of the woman who committed suicide; the Romance of the Passion and the Romance of the Resurrection; and "The complaint and warning of Sir William Basterfield's ghost". The original owner of the manuscript must have been a layman with an interest in property (hence "Cautions in buying estates") and a taste for English romance: the manuscript contains a large collection of secular romances alongside the religious ones (including *Sir Orfeo*, *Lybeaus Desconus*, *The Erle of Toulous*, *Sir Corneus*, *Sir Cleges*, *Sir Isumbras* and the *Geest of King Edward and the Forest of Sherwood* [= *The King and the Hermit*]) and a fabliau, "A quarrel among the carpenter's tools". Whoever he was, his tastes are at a considerable distance from any pious lady of unworldly inclinations.

A slightly different aim is revealed by Digby 102,³⁴ but one which accords precisely with the readership which Maidstone appears to have envisaged. Rosell Hope Robbins writes of the political poems in the manuscript:

Not only is their approach consistent - throughout deeply moral, church-supporting, gentry-favoring, monarchy-loving . . . The Digby poems . . . may best be regarded as occasional closet verse, written by some lesser religious dignitary in one of the orders, for circulation among sober-minded laity and clergy who had a special interest in practical politics.³⁵

The manuscript also contains a number of religious poems which, whilst not being polemically anti-Lollard, are avowedly orthodox, such as "On the sacrament of the altar".

It seems reasonable to conclude that Maidstone's *Penitential Psalms* met a need for vernacular devotional material of a penitential nature amongst the literate laity in the late fourteenth century; they also fulfilled the additional function of ensuring

that (at least in this case) such material was theologically orthodox, pro-clerical and designed to supplement rather than replace the official prayers and liturgy of the Church.

- 1 The poems have been printed in the following editions: i) M. Adler and M. Kaluza, "Studien zu Richard Rolle de Hampole", *Englische Studien* 10 (1887) pp.232-55, uses three Oxford manuscripts: Digby 18 as a copy text, corrected by Rawlinson A389 and Ashmole 61. The editors incorrectly ascribed the psalms to Rolle. ii) *Psalmi Penitentiales* ed. F.S. Ellis (Kelmescott Press, 1894) reprints Pierpont Morgan Ms. 99; see also Curt Bühler, "The Kelmescott Edition of the *Psalmi Penitentiales* and Morgan Manuscript 99", *Modern Language Notes* 60 (1945) pp.16-22. iii) *The Wheatley Manuscript*, ed. Mabel Day, EETS OS 155 (London, 1921) prints BL MS Additional 39574. All quotations are taken from this edition. For manuscripts see Carleton Brown and Rossell Hope Robbins, *The Index of Middle English Verse* (New York, 1943) and *Supplement* (Lexington, 1966) 1961 and 3755.

- 2 The ascription to Maidstone is normally said to rest on one piece of evidence only: MS Rawlinson A389 (dating from the early fifteenth century) has an additional stanza placed after the first, beginning, "By frere Richard Maydenstoon, / In Mary ordre of þe Carme, / That bachilere is in dyuynite ...". This stanza may not have been written by Maidstone himself, though this does not necessarily invalidate the ascription. Other manuscripts wrongly attribute the poems to Richard Rolle; see Hope Emily Allen, *Writings ascribed to Richard Rolle, Hermit of Hampole* (Oxford and New York, 1937) p.371. But the ascription to Maidstone is confirmed by Bale, who lists among Maidstone's writings, "In septem psalmos, Anglice, incipit Ad honorem dei, qui nos redemit" (John Bale, *Scriptorum Illustrium Maioris Brytannie . . . Catalogus* (Basle, 1557) p.498). This is undoubtedly a translation of "To Goddis worschip þat dere us bouȝte". Since Rawlinson A389 is not among the many manuscripts known to Bale, we can safely accept these two independent testimonies to Maidstone's authorship. The psalms cannot be dated precisely. Maidstone gained his D.D. before 1390 since he is described as D.D. when licensed to preach in that year. By 1392 he must have been in London: he wrote an account of the reconciliation of Richard II with the people of London in August 1392, the *De Concordia*, which seems to have been an eye-witness account, and he may have been John of Gaunt's confessor at about this time. According to Bale he died in 1396. In his disputation with John Ashwardby whilst still at Oxford, he castigates Ashwardby for treating theological material in the vernacular, so it is probable that the psalms are the work of a different (and later) period of his life when he feels it is more suitable to address a lay audience in English, though the psalms are of course not theologically controversial. Some time in the last two decades of the fourteenth century seems to be the probable date of composition. For the *De Concordia*, see *De Concordia Inter Ric. II et civitatem London.*, ed. Thomas Wright, Camden Society 3 (London, 1838). For the dispute with Ashwardby see "*Protectorium Pauperis*, a defense of the begging friars by Richard of Maidstone, O. Carm. (d.1396)", ed. Arnold Williams, *Carmelus* 5 (1958) pp.132-80).

- 3 *The Lollard Bible and other Medieval Biblical Versions* (Cambridge, 1920) p.147.

- 4 *Old and Middle English Poetry* (London, 1977) p.135.

- 5 For example, Richard Twombly, discussing Wyatt's penitential psalms, comments that "on the whole paraphrases of the psalms are rare" ("Thomas Wyatt's Paraphrase of the Penitential Psalms of David", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 12 (1970) p.348). H.A. Mason, in his study of Wyatt, does not appear to know of Maidstone's psalms, speaking of "the earliest surviving verse paraphrase in English, written about 1414, attributed to Thomas Brampton" (*Humanism and Poetry in the early Tudor period* (London, 1959) p.208).

For Brampton's psalms see James R. Kreuzer, "Thomas Brampton's Metrical Paraphrase of the Seven Penitential Psalms", *Traditio* 7 (1949-51) pp.359-403: they were written some twenty years after Maidstone's death and appear to borrow Maidstone's basic format (the 8-line stanza, each stanza containing a translation of the biblical versicle and a meditation) and Maidstone's overall theme but keep much closer to the scriptural text, partly because Brampton uses a much shorter line.

- 6 They rhyme abababab. Maidstone writes in irregular octosyllabics, though it may be argued that it is the alliterative phrases which give the verse its real rhythm. For example: *But when my cors is cast in creke* (21); *Therefore I wepe and water wryngge* (55); *Ther was no scorne ne spytouse speche* (495); *And deede men out of her dennys drawe* (806). The alliteration is variable but pervasive and tends towards establishing a rhythm of three stresses in each line.
- 7 See Brown and Robbins Index, 2157.
- 8 See, for example, St Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 38, p.600; and Rolle, *The Psalter or psalms of David . . . with a Translation and Exposition by Richard Rolle of Hampole*, ed. H.R. Bramley (Oxford, 1884) p.183.
- 9 The linking of the seven psalms with the seven deadly sins was commonplace: see Morton Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Michigan, 1952) p.178 and fn.158; also *Monumenta Ritualia Ecclesiae Anglicanae*, ed. William Maskell (London, 1846) II, pp.79, 80, 82, 84, 86, 88 and 89.
- 10 *The Wheatley Manuscript*, pp.104-8.
- 11 Ll.1, 15, 24, 79, 184, 317, 536, 788, 878.
- 12 For the practice of penance in the middle ages, see Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, 1977).
- 13 *Horae Beatae Mariae Virginis or Sarum and York Primers*, ed. Edgar Hoskins (London, 1909 repr. 1969) pp.146, 280.
- 14 Rolle, *Psalter*, ed. Bramley, p.24. In quoting from this edition I have silently replaced the *punctus elevatus* by a semi-colon.
- 15 Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1968) p.6.
- 16 See *The Holy Bible . . . made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and his followers*, and also reprinted with an introduction by Sweet (Oxford, 1881). There are many very small instances of indebtedness to the later version of the Wycliffite psalter, but two seem decisive in determining Maidstone's debt to these translations: in both cases Maidstone and "Wycliffe" agree in a translation which not only differs from all the others, but which interprets rather than translates and hence is unlikely to have been produced independently. The first example is at Ps. vi 7, where both Maidstone and the Wycliffite psalter idiosyncratically translate *stratum* as "bedstraw". The second is at Ps. ci 7, where Maidstone follows the Wycliffite psalter in three distinctive translations: *domicilium* as "roof" (other medieval English psalters all translate as "eaves"); *solitudo* as "wilderness", and *nycticorax* as "night-crow". A *nycticorax* (*nycticorax*) seems to have been a sort of owl but early readers of the Latin psalms were

troubled by its identity and almost all the early commentators gloss the word in various ways. In glosses both *bubo* and *noctis corvus* ("night-raven") occur commonly, often together. The usual English translation of *nicticorax* is "night-raven". This is found as a gloss in the Old English Psalters (see Bosworth-Toller, s.v. *niht-hræfn*). The first recorded translation as "night-crow" is in the early Wycliffite Bible at Deuteronomy xiv 17 (though not at Psalm ci 7) as we have seen. Trevisa also calls the *nicticorax* "night crow" (see M.E.D. s.v. *night* 6(a)). The translation becomes commonplace in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

- 17 *Delictum meum cognitum tibi feci, & iniusticiam meam non abscondi. Dixi: Confitebor aduersum me in-iusticiam meam Domino; & tu remisisti impietatem peccati mei.* ("I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said: I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." [Authorized Version: other translations are my own.]
- 18 *Psalter*, ed. Bramley, p.111.
- 19 For a discussion of medieval commentaries on Psalm L see A.J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic literary attitudes in the later Middle Ages* (London, 1984) pp.104-9.
- 20 *Psalter*, ed. Bramley, p.183.
- 21 St Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 40, p.1425, and also Peter Lombard, PL CXCI, 905; *Glossa Ordinaria* PL CXIII, 1011.
- 22 The interpretation is rather similar. He is arguing that Christ was himself a poor man and cites *Ego autem mendicus sum et pauper* ("But I am needy and poor", Ps. xxxix 17) in support. John Ashwardby, whose views he is opposing, has argued that this line cannot refer to Christ, but Maidstone cites an impressive list of patristic and more recent scholars in support of his reading. The text was one of several much disputed during the controversy about mendicant poverty. See *Protectorium Pauperis*, ed. Williams, pp.148-50.
- 23 See Peter Lombard, PL CXCI, 909: "Vel per has aves Christus accipitur. Pellicanus dicitur, etsi non certum sit rostro pullos occidere suos, et triduo lugere, tunc rostro sanguinem suum super eos fundere, unde illi reviviscunt. Sic Christus occidit, ut Paulum persecutorem, et sanguine suo vivificat, juxta illud: *Ego occidam, et ego vivere faciam; percutiam et sanabo* (Deut. xxxii). Dicitur autem habitare in solitudine, quod Christo proprie congruit, quia solus de Virgine natus est: post nativitatem vero, venit ad passionem, ubi a ruinis occiditur, id est a Judæis qui ceciderant excæcati. Sed et eos amat Dominus dicens: *Pater, ignosce illis, quia nesciunt quid faciunt* (Luc. xxiv). Tunc ideo fuit quasi nycticorax in parietinis, sed qui in passione dormierat, vigilavit in resurrectione, et volando in cœlum factus est sicut *passer singularis in tecto*, [Cassiod.] id est in cœlo, ubi interpellat pro nobis. (Or else Christ is to be understood by these birds. He is said to be the pelican, even though it is not certain that it kills its own young with its bill and mourns for three days, and then pours its own blood on them with its bill, through which they are brought back to life. In this way, Christ killed Paul as a persecutor and brought him back to life with His blood immediately afterwards: *I will kill and I will give life; I will strike down and I will heal*. On the other hand, it [the pelican] is said to live in solitude, which is particularly appropriate to Christ, because He alone was born of a virgin; indeed after His birth He came to His passion, when He was slain by ruins, that is by the

Jews, who killed [Him] in their blindness. But our Lord also loved them, saying *Father forgive them, for they know not what they do*. Then therefore He was like the night-owl on the ruined walls, who had slept in the passion, but kept vigil in the resurrection, and by flying up into heaven was made like the solitary sparrow on the roof, that is in heaven, where He intercedes for us.)"

- 24 The legend goes back to the fourth century at least. For a standard treatment of it see Hugh of St Victor, PL CLXXVII, 29.
- 25 *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, p.1432.
- 26 The introduction of the sparrow's nest may have been suggested by St Augustine, who links this psalm to Ps. lxxxiii 4, *etenim passer invenit sibi domum: et turtur nidum sibi* ("Even the sparrow finds a home, and the dove a nest for himself"). However Maidstone's lines do not seem to reflect Augustine's interpretation in which the nest signifies the Church, made from the wood of the cross.
- 27 For example 11.300-4 and 351-2.
- 28 E.g. "Oure blessed fadir . . . suffred hym to be streyned on the hard cros, more dispitously & greuously þan ever was schepys skyn streyned on the wal or vp-on þe parchemyn makeris harowe, aȝens þe sonne to drye". (*Meditation on the Five Wounds of Christ*, quoted in M.E.D. s.v. *harwe* 2.)
- 29 The reading of Pierpont Morgan Library 99, Oxford Digby 18 and Oxford, Rawlinson A389. This is clearly a better reading than the Wheatley Manuscript "sale of dust", both because it makes better sense and also because of the alliteration.
- 30 See Day, *The Wheatley Manuscript*, p.108.
- 31 See 11.651-6 and *passim*.
- 32 For a summary of late medieval tastes in books (particularly devotional books) revealed by wills, see Margaret Deanesly, "Vernacular books in England in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries", *Modern Language Review* 15 (1920) pp.349-58; M.G.A. Vale, *Piety, Charity and Literacy among the Yorkshire Gentry, 1370-1480*, Borthwick Papers 50 (York, 1976).
- 33 See above, note 2.
- 34 See EETS OS 124 (1904) p.vii for a discussion of the contents of this manuscript.
- 35 *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English*, ed. A.E. Hartung (Connecticut, 1975) V pp.1417-18.