

# Leeds Studies in English

## Article:

Angela M. Woollam, 'Naming of Parts in "Hos seip þe soþe he schal be schent": Lessons in Rhetoric', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 33 (2002), 77-98

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## Naming of Parts in 'Hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent': Lessons in Rhetoric

Angela Woollam

'Hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent' is one of the twenty-three refrain lyrics that are found together at the end of the late fourteenth-century Vernon manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, *Eng. poet.a.1*) and that are found in the same order in the slightly later Simeon manuscript (London, British Library, Additional 22283).<sup>1</sup> The lyric can be more precisely dated through a probable historical allusion. If, as seems likely, the fifth stanza refers to the persecution and murder of a Carmelite friar, Brother John Latimer, at the hands of parliament, the poem was written in 1384 or shortly thereafter.<sup>2</sup> 'Hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent' is also one of the eight Vernon refrain poems that are attested in later manuscripts other than the Simeon: a redaction exists in Cambridge, Trinity College, 0.9.38, dated to the middle of the fifteenth century. The Trinity redaction omits the third and fourth stanzas, reverses the order of the fifth and sixth, and includes many variants. In his descriptive index of the Trinity manuscript, A. G. Rigg argues that although the Trinity version of the poem 'is unusually corrupt and often fails to make sense[,] . . . [t]he editorial practice of SV makes it likely that the order and number of stanzas in [Trinity] represent the original'.<sup>3</sup> The 'editorial practice' Rigg refers to is that hypothesized by Carleton Brown and others, of a Vernon scribe or compiler who took liberties in editing his material.<sup>4</sup> John Burrow has recently granted that Rigg 'may be right', and suggested that stanzas three and four in the Vernon text may be from the hand of the same interpolator who added stanzas to two other Vernon refrain lyrics: 'Euere to þonke god of al', and 'Pis world fareþ as a Fantasy'.<sup>5</sup> In Burrow's view, all of these stanzas 'exhibit a peculiarly learned and curious mind, with an interest in the concrete exemplifying instance'.<sup>6</sup>

Andrew Wawn, however, arguing that the Trinity scribe found the text 'difficult' and 'interesting', posits the primacy of the Vernon text of 'Hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent', and a close reading of the lyric provides thematic and

structural evidence that the Vernon version, though not without its share of textual difficulties, is likely closest to the original.<sup>7</sup> Professor Burrow's argument that stanzas three and four are later additions, likely written by the same person who interpolated material into the other two Vernon lyrics, is based on two factors: the stanzas incorporate vivid exempla, and are written in a 'learned and knotty' style.<sup>8</sup> On closer look, however, that 'learned and knotty' style can be seen pervading the entire lyric. Its pervasiveness becomes apparent once we glimpse the poem's hitherto unrecognized, and quite remarkable, rhetorical self-consciousness. That self-consciousness involves the speaker using parts of his speech as specimens, and then other parts to comment on those specimens.<sup>9</sup> He oscillates between demonstrating and criticizing sycophantic speech, and in doing so his speech is covert and compressed, 'learned and knotty', throughout. Certain particular stylistic traits in stanzas three and four also appear elsewhere: stanza three concludes with a syntactical modulation of the refrain similar to that at lines 60 and 84, and the idiom of beginning a sentence with 'Let' or 'For let', used twice in the two stanzas (27, 38), is used elsewhere (19, 49). Moreover, the vivid exemplum in stanzas three and four participate in the oscillation between specimen and commentary, for it demonstrates the use of 'paynted words' that the speaker elsewhere disparages (16, 65). Although there may be a single interpolator in the Vernon texts of 'Euere to þonke god of al' and 'Pis world fareþ as a Fantasy', it is likely not the case with 'Hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent.' The Trinity text of the poem, with its loss of stanzas and its lexical and syntactical obscurities, occludes the poem's rhetorical self-consciousness.

The phrase 'hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent' became 'the central aphorism of the literature of truth-telling and articulate citizenship in late medieval English'.<sup>10</sup> Given the range of potential denotations of 'schente', from 'disgraced' (*MED* s.v. *shenden* v. 3a) to 'killed' (*MED* s.v. *shenden* v. 4a), the phrase provides a vivid means of presenting problems arising from the paucity of adequate counsel caused by hostility to criticism on the part of recipients of advice, and by selfish desires to maintain social prestige on the part of counsellors. In the later fourteenth century, complaints of the silencing of truth-tellers increased, in response to the deteriorating tolerance for admonishment and counsel in various realms of society. In the political realm, the voice of the 'articulate citizen' was becoming stronger, while governments attempted to curtail, sometimes with violence, the criticism that these citizens might make.<sup>11</sup> This shutting down of exhortative mechanisms in the political realm was reflected in society at large, as laws against speech that verged on the slanderous were

extended to the 'protection' of all.<sup>12</sup> In the clerical realm, complaints abounded of friars and clerics who obscured the truth of the gospel through 'glossing'.<sup>13</sup>

The theme of the injured soothsayer was elaborated in different literary genres, as Andrew Wawn has so thoroughly shown. The dangers involved in counselling also prompted authors to use various rhetorical strategies to make criticism less explicit, or more pleasing, to the recipients. In addressing issues of governance, authors resorted to, for example, prophecy (such as *The Bridlington Prophecy*), allegory (such as *The Tale of Melibee*), and mirror of princes (such as *The Regiment of Princes*). 'Hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent' is unique in the way it both explicitly treats the theme of the injured soothsayer and at the same time dramatizes the ethical issues pertaining to the use of rhetoric in admonitory discourse. Its speaker becomes a character that dramatizes the position of Hoccleve, of John of Bridlington, or of Chaucer, trying to advise an audience that could very well harm him if it is displeased with what it hears. The poem, which can perhaps best be labelled a 'dramatic oratorical address', raises questions currently being explored in regards to known Middle English authors of political advice. To what degree is the literature being written for private advancement as opposed to public good? To what degree is the poet writing to please, rather than criticize, a wayward governing body? Is the apparent rhetoric consciously constructed or is it expressive of a hegemonic ideology or a personal desire?<sup>14</sup> In its rhetorical self-consciousness, 'Hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent' dramatically foregrounds key theoretical issues regarding the efficacy and the ethics of using rhetoric in discourses of complaint and advice.

Although the poem is anonymous, the speaker in 'Hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent' is 'embodied'. By 'embodied', I mean that his manner of speech portrays him as having a physical presence in a particular setting.<sup>15</sup> In this case that setting is an oratorical scenario. The voice not only takes on the quality of a character, but it also gives the sense that that character is speaking in a specific social setting, addressing an audience that threatens to harm anyone who dares to give advice. Although the speaker does sometimes forthrightly exhort, he more often uses rhetorical figures, and thereby demonstrates the kind of mystification of meaning in which sycophants engage when trying to give advice, in order to protect themselves.

In the way its voice becomes embodied into a character, the poem shares some similarities with the didactic confessional satires from Harley 2253 and other earlier manuscripts: 'The Papelard Priest' (*IMEV Suppl.* 2614.5) from London, British Library, Additional 45896, 'A Satire on the Consistory Courts'

(IMEV 2287) and 'The Man in the Moon' (IMEV 2066) from London, British Library, Harley 2253.<sup>16</sup> Carter Revard labels these the lyrics 'dramatic monologues', and argues that in each one the speaker 'is not the poet but a 'character' and its satire is secondary to its revelation of its speaker's nature'.<sup>17</sup> For example, the satire of the moral corruption of the consistory courts in 'A Satire on the Consistory Courts' is 'secondary to the self-satirizing revelation of its speaker's character'.<sup>18</sup> The speaker is a servingman, a household retainer, accused of having carnal knowledge of a woman and not marrying her. He maintains that he has been slandered, but his speech gradually reveals that he is guilty. The speaker's speech gradually builds him up as a character, and in that way, the speaker becomes somewhat 'embodied'.

But the kind of 'embodied' speaker evident in 'Hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent' is different still. What further distinguishes this poem is the speaker's explicit identification of the situational irony he is involved in, and of the rhetorical figures he is using. The speaker, very much an oratorical teacher, enacts different forms of duplicitous speech, and points to them, directly and indirectly, as specimens to support his 'lesson' (95).

The incorporation of linguistic specimens complicates the nature of the lesson and the ethos of the speaker. From one perspective, the specimens are presented as the unfortunate consequence of hostility to soothsayers in society, and thereby support a lesson in morality. From another perspective, the specimens, and the way the teacher consciously marshals them, are presented as examples of how to use rhetoric to admonish effectively, and thereby constitute a lesson in rhetoric. So long as a divide can be maintained between the teacher's stable, authoritative voice and the artful voices of his specimens, the two perspectives are relatively complementary: he is clearly using rhetoric to demonstrate how 'not' to speak. As so often in such multi-vocal texts, however, the divide between voices is porous. When the teacher identifies his whole performance as a specimen, as he does most remarkably in his final words, his selfless objectivity is brought up for question, the lesson is recast on another level, and the two perspectives are brought into tension.

The presence of linguistic specimens also produces a poem that has a more linear structure than has been recognized. John Burrow finds that any given Vernon refrain poem's 'thought will tend to be radial rather than linear. Instead, that is, of a sequence of argument from stanza to stanza, one finds each stanza relating independently to the thought expressed by the refrain, like spokes to a hub'.<sup>19</sup> In fact, although stanza five, and possibly six, in 'Hos seiþ þe soþe he schal

be schent' exist as arguments of their own, the remaining six stanzas, including the two that comprise the exemplum, form three argumentative pairs. The first two stanzas and the last two stanzas present the most clear-cut instances of direct rhetorical pointing. In each of these pairs, pointing directs attention back and forth between the stanzas. The final two stanzas, moreover, enact a grand finale, exposing in a more exaggerated and direct form the situational irony of the speaker.

The address opens in the voice of a sycophant who blatantly misleads by advising people to 'plese' this 'wikked world' (5). The teacher's voice then enters at the beginning of the second stanza, pointing to what has gone before with an indicative 'Pus' (13). This is the first of the teacher's many uses of indicative pronouns and adverbs to situate what he is saying at a given moment in reference to other parts of his discourse, which are pointed to as examples, causes, or effects of specific styles of speech. As so often in the lyric, there is some ambiguity about what is being pointed at. 'Pus' (13) may identify the proverbial statement of the refrain as the reason for the widespread use of verbal deceit, but it also tends to identify the preceding speech as an example of how 'þe soþe [is] kept in close'. Stanza two then proceeds to describe forthrightly the duplicity of sycophants and the social pressures that define modes of speech.

From here the poem moves on to the two stanzas that do not exist in the Trinity version and, again, the authenticity of these stanzas is supported by the fact that their speaker's manner of speech, and his self-consciousness about it, enact the situational irony evident in the rest of the poem. In the metaphoric language of stanzas three and four, the speaker ironically uses the 'painted words' that he elsewhere disparages (16, 65). He develops a poetic conceit of moral decay as physical sickness, through the complementary metaphors of false and deceitful words as noxious food which causes sickness, and a moral guide as a physician who is needed to restore health. Lines 25-26 present an explicit metaphor of moral corruption as internal bleeding. That injury is identified later on as being the result of the self-protecting 'counsellor' who 'fedes' his lords lies and flattery ('flaterynge' (30), 'lesynges' (32) and 'blaudise' (34)). This sycophantic activity is also presented as resulting in a particular kind of injury: making the lord 'blent' (34). '[B]lent' signifies most readily here as 'to impair or destroy (someone's insight, discernment, moral sense or natural feeling), mislead' (*MED* s.v. blēnden v.(1) 2. (a)). The corporeal metaphor, however, educes the physical sense, 'to deprive of vision, make blind' (*MED* s.v. blēnden v.(1) 1. (a)).

The next stanza develops the corporeal conceit by spelling out how moral

exhortation can reform a person through a metaphor of the soothsayer as a 'leche' nursing a 'wounde' (38). This metaphor functions as a figurative description of the process of moral healing effected through admonitory discourse. But does this complex figuration inculcate the speaker for using the 'peynted wordes' he criticizes elsewhere? The irony of the speaker's style accords with the tensions created elsewhere in the address through the techniques of impersonation and pointing, which makes it highly likely that stanzas three and four come from the same poet's hand.

After the straightforward criticism of stanza five and six, the final two stanzas return to the oscillation between demonstration and commentary evident in the first two stanzas. Specimens in the penultimate stanza are identified more explicitly from within the stanza, and possibly from the preceding stanza as well. '[P]is gyle' (71) may refer to the verbal duplicity indicated throughout the poem, but it may also point forward to the next two stanzas, which provide illustrative specimens. Stanza seven contains two specimens, and identifies them as 'saamples': 'Such saamples we han and oþer two' (80). 'Such saamples' likely refers back to lines 73-79 as one example. There the teacher impersonates a profligate blithely declaring his *carpe diem* attitude, until being suddenly shocked into a moment of awareness as he remembers the impending final judgement: 'I drede hit draweþ to domes-day' (79). One of the 'oþer two' 'saamples' immediately follows line 80. The teacher impersonates a soothsayer who, on the verge of locating the root of society's malaise in children's upbringing, breaks off, suddenly realizing the danger he faces in criticizing – 'But hos seiþ soþ, he schal be schent' (84).

Even without the recasting of voices ushered in at the poem's end, the status of the two 'saamples' in stanza seven is vexed. Unlike the unequivocal profligate dramatized in the opening of the poem, these dramatic monologues enact psychological shifts. The first begins as a profligate urging dissolute behaviour, but his sudden shift to self-awareness reverses his initial endorsement of immorality. The second begins as a candid soothsayer, but his sudden shift to restraint compromises his character by revealing traits of a sycophant. The two cannot both be examples of a compromised soothsayer or of a regretful profligate; yet the fact that they are categorized together as 'saamples' indicates that in some respect they are equal. Their parity, it seems, can reside only at one remove from the teacher's impersonation: they are both examples of a soothsayer who resorts to rhetorical, dramatic means to teach his 'lesson', impersonations of a soothsayer using impersonation. The 'gyle' being pointed to in stanza six and exemplified in

stanza seven, then, is not, or at least not only, the guile used selfishly by people intending to mislead, but the artful, rhetorical techniques resorted to by soothsayers. The moral status ascribed to those techniques, however, is still difficult to peg. Perhaps most strongly, the teacher suggests that soothsayers resort to rhetoric only out of a selfish desire to protect themselves. But he may also be suggesting that soothsayers incorporate artful techniques out of a selfless desire to guide people in leading a good life, and that their efforts are endorsed by the Horatian advice *miscere utile dulci* (to combine the useful with the pleasant). The ambivalent designation of the 'saamples' is compounded in the teacher's final self-reflection.

The second of the two 'saamples' promised in stanza seven occurs at the end, when the speaker points to himself: 'Pis lesson lerneþ alle at me' (95). Exactly what this 'lesson' is, however, is unclear. The teacher's self-reflection may be ironic, or it may break down the stability of his teaching 'character', which, by positing a firm point of reference up against which irony can be measured, enables irony. The teacher would seem to be forwarding himself as an example of the lack of self-awareness and trustworthiness in society, by implying that he cannot see his 'oune defaute' (90) and that no one can 'trust' him (91). From one perspective, this self-inculcation is ironic, because the very act of identifying himself implies self-awareness: the teacher thereby exposes his previous statement as a fallacy of false generalization. On the other hand, the self-inculcation registers an admission of defeat, a moment of psychological awareness similar to that in 'I drede hit draweþ to domes day' (79). From this second perspective, the teacher's incorporation of rhetorical tactics that spice his 'lesson' is presented as evidence of his 'defaute': he suggests that his speech is sycophantic. In this suggestion he aligns his whole performance with the 'saamples' in the previous stanza, and the ambivalent status accorded to the soothsayers in those 'saamples' is accorded to him. A question looms at the end: does this teacher incorporate artful techniques out of a desire to help, or merely to protect himself? The answer depends, to some degree, on whether or not one finds a decisive divide between the teacher's 'real self' and his dramatic persona. There are moments when he would appear to be speaking forthrightly, for example in the exemplum of the 'pore prechour' (49-60). Or is he there just impersonating another, earnest way of speaking? Should the divide between the teacher's 'real self' and his dramatic persona be found, the poem would stand as a lesson in rhetoric as well as a lesson in morality. Should, however, one find that the teacher's 'real self' collapses into his dramatic persona, the poem would



present a moral lesson along with a negative view of rhetoric. Even in the latter condition, however, rhetoric must be at least somewhat condoned, if paradoxically so, given the effectiveness of the moral lesson it enables.

The array of possible endings to this poem exhibits most intensely its fluid, open status. There are, no doubt, more and different ways of understanding the end, and the poem as a whole, than those suggested here. Still, there appears to be no way of eradicating the paradoxes and ironies. Altogether, with its various attitudes, the speech presents an ambivalent view of the teacher's ethos and of the status of rhetoric. From one perspective, in pointing to his performance as a lesson the teacher avers that he is compromising himself by using verbal dalliance instead of candidness; he thereby dispels rhetoric from having any useful purpose. From another perspective, he presents himself as one who is in control of his speech, and who is making claims that rhetoric can serve constructive purposes. The poem's fluidity makes it difficult to say for certain what it 'means', as desirable as that may be for many reasons.

This fluidity is enhanced when we imagine the staging of the lyric. The ambiguities in the text would inevitably have spilled over to create a more or less conflicted moment of individual and social consciousness in the present audience. The performance of 'Hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent' would transform the poem from a dramatic monologue into a dramatic oratorical address, in which the whole communicative scenario would take on a quasi-fictional aura. In reciting the poem, the reader would be performing, and the 'real' social occasion of delivery would be turned into a drama in a way that incorporated the audience into a quasi-dramatic role. The speaker would play the role of the dramatic teacher (lending the tension between the teacher's 'real' and 'fictional' personae yet another dimension), and the present audience would be cast into the role of the audience implied by the speaking character, that is, an audience pressuring the teacher into either cloaking his admonition or concealing it altogether. Insofar as the teacher would identify himself as one who will be 'schent' for telling the 'soþe', he would imply that he is bound to suffer by the very audience he is addressing. In subtly casting the audience as persecutors, the performance likely would have created a sombre moment of social and individual consciousness. That sombreness, however, would have had a more or less sharp ironic edge, depending on how it was performed. A forthright charge of the audience's villainy might well have issued in an ironic tone, as might a performance that educed the potential comedy of the impersonations: the address could then have issued in the reverse effect of constructing the audience as individuals who are above the

corruption of those whom it criticizes, and who most certainly will not 'schend' the teacher for telling the 'soþe'. But even then the tone of the moment likely would have been conflicted, given the niggling suggestion that the reason why the audience will not harm the teacher is because he has resorted to guile. In all the various ways in which the audience's response may have been defined, the experience of the drama itself would have had a fundamental heuristic and admonitory effect. Those present would be incited to reflect on their role as the audience implied by the address, and their awareness of how they were being depicted would have effected an experiential 'lesson'.

In light of the foregoing reading, it seems reasonable to entertain the possibility that readers and scribes intervening between the poem's authorial text and the Trinity version either failed to tease out its voices and consequent ironies, or censored its rhetorical technique. In addition to the loss of stanzas three and four, many variations in Trinity can be explained as stemming from efforts to present a mono-vocal text, and they almost always result in a flatter text.

In the first stanza, for example, the first person pronoun is missing in line 3 of the Trinity text, which effectively shifts the discourse from a dramatic impersonation to a description of the problem, spoken by a third-person, authoritative voice. Lines 47-53 in Trinity maintain some element of the dramatized profligate who experiences a sudden awakening as in its Vernon parallel (V 73-79), though the full impact of the speaker's motives for speaking is decreased by changing the initial 'Sipen' (V 73) to 'There for' (T 47). The second of Vernon's dramatic 'saamples' in that stanza, however, is reduced to direct statement in Trinity. Vernon's 'so' (83) may denote 'in the following manner' (*MED* s.v. *sō* adv. 2a. (a)), 'to such an extent' (*MED* s.v. *sō* adv. 8. (a)), or 'so very, exceedingly' (*MED* s.v. *sō* adv. 9a.): its function is uncertain in Vernon because of the break in thought effected with the retracting 'But' of the next line. In Trinity, however, the function of this 'so' (56) is unequivocally *MED* meaning 2a.(a): it points forward to the refrain as a text that children are 'taught', a text which is paradigmatic of teachings that encourage sycophantic behaviour. Although this is itself a clever modulation of the refrain's function, it destroys the original dramatic monologue and obscures the logical argument that unfolds in reference to such 'saamples' of dramatic techniques. The precise pointing separating the two 'saamples' in stanza seven is also lost as Trinity replaces the word 'saamples' (V 80) with 'warnyngys' (T 54), and the explicit enumeration and direction 'and oþer two' (V 80) to the indefinite 'one or two' (T 54). The word 'saamples' exudes a suggestiveness that is key to the poem's rhetorical self-

consciousness: it identifies parts of the address not according to their apparent function – as 'warnyngs' – but to their technique of demonstration. As we have seen, that identification raises uncertainty over what the 'saumples' are demonstrating, and consequently over what the 'lesson' finally is.

In addition to the erosion of the poem's logical structural complexity effected by Trinity's change of 'saumples' to 'warnyngs', another form of lexical replacement in Trinity results in loosening the semantic texture and structure of the poem. The best example of this is Trinity's substitution of 'norissched' (V 83) with 'tawght' (T 56). 'Norissched' denotes most precisely here 'to bring up (a young person), foster, raise' (*MED* s.v. norishen v. 5a. (a)). The word, however, exudes two different resonances in this context. It alludes to 'noriture', a component of the education programme provided for children in royal or noble households. 'Noriture' denoted instruction which led to the attainment of social graces, and it also included athletic, musical and perhaps literary pursuits.<sup>20</sup> Specified with reference to an elite educational programme, this critique of children's upbringing stands as an analogy for that of the lord's 'sacratarie' (29), as an anti-courtly complaint: the teacher avers that now children are being flattered and deceived instead of instructed, and are also learning to use their skill in courtly etiquette to manipulate and exploit. The charge is further inflected as an anti-court critique by the fact that it draws upon, and effectively magnifies, the governing conceit of Vernon's stanzas three and four. The most literal meaning of '[n]orissched', 'supplied with food or drink, feed' (*MED* s.v. norishen v. 1. (a)) also resounds, and suggestively equates the teaching that children receive with the noxious 'flaterynge' (30), 'lesynges' (32), and 'blaudise' (34) of the lord's 'sacratarie' (29), all of which cause moral disease.

As well, although the final two stanzas of Trinity are in the same order as those in Vernon, the sequence lacks cohesion because the pointing performed by 'oper two' (V 80), which in Vernon prepares the audience for one, final 'saumple' is lost with the indefinite 'one or two' (T 54).

As well as explaining the greater authenticity of the Vernon text over the Trinity text, the rhetorical self-consciousness of 'Hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent' inflects the corpus of Middle English complaint literature and fictions of advice. For one, it represents another sub-genre, that of the dramatic oratorical address. Other lyrics take up the subject of truth-telling, most of which are later, and many of which are written in the same stanzaic refrain form. The most well-known group of these is from Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby 102, a miscellany of political and complaint poetry compiled in the early years of the fifteenth

century.<sup>21</sup> Some of these lyrics involve an acknowledgement by the speaker of the dangers he faces in telling the truth, and thereby make some dramatic use of the fiction of an embodied speaker.<sup>22</sup> When present, however, that pose is only resorted to for a few lines, and in all cases the speakers continue earnestly, despite their acknowledgement of impending harm, and without any extensive attempt to cloak their advice, or their earnestness. 'Hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent' stands apart from these in its extensive playfulness. But 'Hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent' does something other than represent a sub-genre in the tradition of complaint and advisory literature in later medieval England: it dramatizes the ethical issues surrounding the relation between author and audience, and surrounding the legitimate and effective use of rhetoric, in all the other works in that tradition.<sup>23</sup>

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The usual number of Vernon refrain poems is twenty-three, which numbers those appearing together in the last section of the manuscript (section V), on folios 407a through 412v. The whole series appears in *Minor Poems of the Vernon Manuscript, Volume II*, ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS o.s. 117 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1901), pp. 658-735. All but 'Pat selden I seize Is sone forȝete' (IMEV 5) appear in *Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. by Carleton Brown, rev. by G. V. Smithers, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), pp. 125-205. Kenneth Hunter's Ph.D. dissertation provides a diplomatic transcription of the lyrics from the Vernon manuscript, and lists textual variants 'of substance' ('The Vernon Lyrics' [Birmingham, 1978]). Five lyrics without refrains also appear among the group of twenty three: 'Deus caritas est' (IMEV 678), 'Of alle floures feirest fall on' (IMEV 2607), 'Crist ȝive vs grace to loue wel holichirch' (IMEV 606), 'Ave Maris Stella dei Mater Alma' (IMEV 1081), and 'Sit laus deo patri summo Christo decus.' The group of twenty-three refrain lyrics and five lyrics without a refrain appears in the same order in the Simeon manuscript, on folios 128b-133b. Two additional lyrics follow the group in the Simeon manuscript, one with the refrain 'But he sey soth he schal be schent' (IMEV 4135) and another in the same eight-line stanza but without the refrain, which Furnivall and Hunter call 'A Morning Thanksgiving and Prayer to God' (IMEV 1369). The former is edited in *Minor Poems*, pp. 740-43, and in *Religious Lyrics*, pp. 205-08. The latter is edited only in *Minor Poems*, pp. 744-46.

<sup>2</sup> Among others, John Burrow refers to this incident as a means of dating the poem, 'The Shape of the Vernon Lyrics', in *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, ed. by Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990), pp. 187-99 (p. 188). Brother John Latimer was brutally tortured and killed for telling the king that the Duke of Lancaster was plotting against his life. The circumstances of his telling and his final days are reported in *The Westminster Chronicle*, ed. and trans. by C. Hector and B. F. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 68-81.

<sup>3</sup> A. G. Rigg, *The Glastonbury Miscellany of the Fifteenth Century: A Descriptive Index of Trinity College, Cambridge, MS.0.9.38* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> *Religious Lyrics*, pp. xx-xxi. Other arguments for a 'Vernon interpolator' are listed by A. I. Doyle, 'The Shaping of the Vernon and Simeon Manuscripts', in *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, ed. by Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990), pp. 1-13 (p. 9, fn. 34). It should be noted that some of the studies Doyle lists do not clearly support the theory. Nita Scudder Baugh, for example, in her study of the affiliation of the Vernon/Simeon text of *The Debate of the Body and Soul* with the text of London, British Museum, MS. Additional 37,787 writes:

It has often been thought that Vernon's scribe was an editor and made changes in the text. The existence of Additional proves that at least in the

text of the Body and Soul the changes must have been made in a parent MS. from which all three descend directly or ultimately. (*A Worcestershire Miscellany Compiled by John Northwood, c. 1400: Edited From British MS. Add. 37,787* (Philadelphia: [n.p.], 1956), p. 45.)

More recently, O. S. Pickering has written: '[i]t is now agreed that such editing can hardly be attributed to the scribe, and . . . it is uncertain to what extent it can be attributed to the compiler or organizer of the volume.' ('The Enduring Popularity of Thirteenth-Century Verse: The *Estoire del Evangelie* and the Vernon Manuscript', in *Chaucer in Perspective: Middle English Essays in Honour of Norman Blake*, ed. by Geoffrey Lester (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), pp. 317-33 (p. 325).)

<sup>5</sup> Burrow, pp. 192-93, 197-99.

<sup>6</sup> Burrow, p. 199.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Wawn, 'Truth-telling and the Tradition of *Mum and the Sothsegger*', *Yearbook of English Studies*, 13 (1983), 270-87 (p. 276).

<sup>8</sup> Burrow, p. 193.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Wawn points to one moment of dramatic feigning in the poem, but attributes it partly to scribal corruption: 'The penultimate verse mimics, no doubt as much by accident as by design, what might be charitably called the psychic drama and muddle of the truth-teller', p. 275.

<sup>10</sup> Wawn, p. 273. Wawn notes certain fifteenth-century compilations in which the proverb is found: *Douce Proverbs*, the *Rylands Proverbs*, and the *Middle English Distichs* of British Library MS 37049 (p. 274). It is item S492 in B. J. Whiting's *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly before 1500* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968).

<sup>11</sup> Judith Ferster describes factors that contributed to the increase in discourse critical of governing bodies. She also outlines the systems that were put in place to curtail that criticism (*Fictions of Advice: the Literature and Politics of Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), pp. 15-38).

<sup>12</sup> Ferster cites evidence showing that 'ecclesiastical and local courts offered places where people could sue each other over speech', p. 32.

<sup>13</sup> Closer to the end of the fourteenth century, anticlerical complaints against glossing became more strictly identified as emanating from the Lollards. See, for example, the excerpts from Lollard writings recorded by Anne Hudson in *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Tests and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 274-75. Hudson dates the Lollard writings between 1384 and 1414 (*English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. by Anne Hudson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 10). Wendy Scase shows how complaints against glossing were not necessarily factional, grounded as they were in the Franciscan

tradition which held that the vow of poverty included a renunciation of 'intellectual dominance' (*The New Anticlericalism in 'Piers Plowman'* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 78-83). Scase includes an excellent account of the various meanings of 'glos' in anticlerical complaints of the later fourteenth century, p. 82.

<sup>14</sup> For instance, recent criticism argues that opportunism is the motivating force behind Chaucer's moral platitudes: see Paul Strohm's 'The Textual Environment of Chaucer's 'Lak of Steadfastnesse'', in his *Hochon's Arrow: the Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 57-74. Much has also been written lately of how authors writing for Henry V are not working out of disinterested principle, but are engaged in aggrandizing the regime by complying with Henry's scheme of 'royal self-representation.' The idea is developed most thoroughly by Paul Strohm in *England's Empty Throne: Usurpation and the Language of Legitimation 1399-1422* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> The way I use the term 'embodied' here differs from the way it is used in modern critical theory, and especially in feminist writing. In critical theory, 'embodied' defines the physical, material aspect of the thinking subject. The term is used with a consciousness that the Western intellectual and cultural tradition has valorized the *disembodied* intellect, at the expense of degrading the body or overlooking the impact material conditions have on a subject.

<sup>16</sup> 'The Papelard Priest' was edited by A.H. Smith in 1951 in 'The Middle English Lyrics of Additional MS 45896', *London Mediaeval Studies*, 2.1 (1951), 45-67 (pp. 42-45). 'The Man in the Moon' and 'A Satire on the Consistory Courts' (now entitled, more representatively, 'On the Ecclesiastical Court') are printed in *Alliterative Poetry of the Later Middle Ages: an Anthology*, ed. by Thorlac Turville-Petre (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 32-33, 28-31.

<sup>17</sup> Carter Revard, 'The Lecher, The Legal Eagle, and the Papelard Priest: Middle English Confessional Satires in MS Harley 2253 and Elsewhere', in *His Firm Estate: Essays in Honour of Franklin James Eikenberry*, ed. by Donald E. Hayden (Tulsa, OK: University of Tulsa, 1967), pp. 54-71, (p. 57). Revard credits E. T. Donaldson for pointing out to him the self-satirizing nature of all the poems, p. 70, fn. 12.

<sup>18</sup> Revard, p. 62. Thorlac Turville-Petre discusses the implications that the self-satirizing speaker has for the implied audience of the poem, 'English Quaint and Strange in "Ne mai no lewed lued"', in *Individuality and Achievement in Middle English Poetry*, ed. by O. S. Pickering (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), pp. 73-83.

<sup>19</sup> Burrow, p. 189.

<sup>20</sup> The other educational component was known as 'lettrure', which involved training in reading, writing, languages, and history. A very good discussion of the education of children at court is provided by Richard Firth Green, *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), pp. 71-91.

<sup>21</sup> The twenty-four lyrics are printed in *Twenty-Six Political and Other Poems*, ed. by

J. Kail, EETS o.s. 124 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1901). In his introduction, Kail shows how the poems refer to topical issues, and frequently to discussions in parliament. The group has also received commentary by R. H. Robbins, 'Middle English Poems of Protest', *Anglia*, 78 (1960), 193-203. Robbins suggests that the poems were written for wealthy supporters of the king, p. 198.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, the opening four lines of a later poem with the title '*De Veritate & Consciencia*' (IMEV 3120) ('The Middle English Verse in MS Wellcome 1493', ed. by George Kane, *London Mediaeval Studies* 11 (1951), pp. 61-65); and similarly the opening of 'Treuthe, Reste, and Pes' (IMEV 817) from Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby 102 (*Twenty-Six Political and Other Poems*, ed. Kail, pp. 9-14.). Likewise, in the macaronic poem known as 'On the Times' (IMEV 3113), likely written in the autumn of 1380, the speaker gestures slightly to the dangers he faces in giving advice, in the opening lines, 'Syng y wolde, butt, alas! / *decidunt prospera grata*' (James M. Dean, *Medieval English Political Writings* (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1996), pp. 140-46).

<sup>23</sup> It is a pleasure and an honour to thank a number of people for their help with this article: Professor Ralph Hanna, Professor David Jeffrey, Professor Nicholas von Maltzahn, and Professor Eyvind Ronquist. The research was supported by doctoral and post-doctoral fellowships from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, for which I am very grateful.



**Hos seiþ þe soþe, he schal be schent**

**Text and Date:** The poem exists in three manuscripts: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Eng.poet.a.1 (3938), Vernon Manuscript; London, British Library, Addit. 22283, Simeon Manuscript; Cambridge, Trinity College, 0.9.38 (1450). The Vernon and Simeon manuscripts are dated circa 1385-95 and contain almost identical versions of the poem. The Trinity manuscript is fifteenth-century. It omits stanzas III and IV, sets the rest in the following order – I, II, VI, V, VII, VIII, and includes many variants which weaken the sense. The present is a punctuated and articulated edition of the Vernon text. Variants in the Simeon and Trinity texts are listed.

**Editions:** There are three previous editions based on the Vernon manuscript: Hermann Varnhagen, *Anglia* 7.2 (1884), 301-04; F. J. Furnivall, *Minor Poems of the Vernon Manuscript*, Part 2, EETS o.s. 117 (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1901), pp. 683-86; Carleton Brown, *Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), pp. 152-54. Kenneth Hunter's D. Phil. dissertation – 'The Vernon Lyrics' (Birmingham, 1977-78) – contains a transcription from the Vernon manuscript and a list of all textual variants. An edition of the Trinity College version can be found in A. G. Rigg's D. Phil. dissertation, 'An Edition Of A Fifteenth-Century Commonplace Book (Trinity College, Cambridge, MS 0.9.38)' (Oxford, 1965), Vol. 1, 35-37; Vol. 2, 255-59.

- I. 'Pe mon þat luste to liuen in ese  
Or eny worschupe her to ateyne,  
His purpos I counte not worþ a pese,  
Witterli, but he ordeyne 4  
Pis wikked world hou he schal plese  
Wiþ al his pouwer and his peyne.  
3if he schal kepe him from disese  
He mot lerne to flatere and feyne – 8  
Herte & mouþe loke þei ben tweyne,  
Pei mowe not ben of on assent –

4 **Witterli** Truly      **ordeyne** devises, prepares  
9 **tweyne** two

And 3it his tonge he mot restreyne,  
For hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schente.' 12

- II. Pus is þe soþe ikept in close,  
And vche mon makeþ touh and queynte  
To leue þe tixt and take þe glose.  
Eueri word þei coloure and peynte: 16  
Summe þer aren þat wolden suppose  
For no tresour forte ben teynte  
Let a mon haue not to lose:  
He schal fynde frenschipe feynte. 20  
Summe þat semen an innocent,  
Wonder trewe in heore entent,  
Pei beoþ agast of eueri pleynt,  
For hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent. 24

- III. Pe wikked wone we may warie,  
Pat eueri mon þus inward bledes.  
Let a lord haue his corlarie,  
He schal wel knowe of al his dedes. 28  
Pau3 he be next his sacratarie,  
Wiþ flaterynge his lord he fedes  
And with sum speche he most him tarie,  
And þus with lesynges him he ledes; 32  
To gabben his lord most him nedes  
And with sum blaundise make him blent:  
To leosen his offys euere he dredes,  
For 3if he soþe seiþ he schal be schent. 36

14 **makeþ touh and queynte** speaks or writes elaborately, deceptively

18 **teynte** attained

25 **wone** evil

27 **corlarie** sycophant

32 **lesynges** lie

33 **gabben** deceive

- IV. And al is wrong, þat dar I preue,  
For let a mon be sore iwounde,  
Hou schulde a leche þis mon releue  
But 3if he miȝte ronsake þe wounde? 40  
For þauȝ hit smerte & sumdel greue,  
3it most he suffre a luitel stounde;  
3if he kneuh of his mischeue,  
With salues hi miȝte make him sounde. 44  
Were grace at large þat lippe ibounde  
Hap and hele mihte we hent;  
Lac of leche wol vs confounde  
For hos seiþ soþe he schal be schent. 48
- V. For let a frere in Godes seruise  
Pe pereles to þe peple preche,  
Of vre misdede & vre queyntise  
Pe trewe tixt to telle and teche, 52  
Pauȝ he beo riht witti and wyse  
3it luytel þonk he schal him reche,  
And summe þer ben þat wol him spise  
And bleþely wayte him with sum wreche; 56  
Pis pore prechour þei wolen apeche  
At counseyl and at parliment,  
But 3if he kepe him out of heore cleche  
For his soþ saw he schal be schent. 60

39 **leche** doctor

40 **ronsake** examine

41 **smerte** be painful

42 **stounde** while

45 **lippe** The word is 'lippe' in the Vernon manuscript, where it is commonly read as a scribal error for 'lippe'.

46 **Hap and hele** happiness and health

50 **pereles** perils

51 **queyntise** deceit

54 **reche** receive

56 **wreche** punishment

- VI. Seþþe þe tyme þat God was boren  
Pis world was neuer so vntrewe;  
Men recchen neuer to ben forsworen  
To reuen þat is hem ful duwe; 64  
Pe peynted word þat fel biforen  
Behynde hit is anoþer hewe;  
Whon Gabriel schal blowe his horn  
His feble fables schul hym rewe; 68  
Pe tonges þat such bargeyn gon brewe  
Hit weore non harm þouȝ þei were brent;  
Pus þis gyle is founde vp of newe  
For hos seip soþ he schal be schent. 72
- VII. 'Sipen the soþe dar no mon say  
For drede to geten him a fo,  
Best I holde hit, in good fay,  
Let o day come anoþer go, 76  
And mak as murie as we may  
Til eueri frend parte oþur fro –  
I drede hit draweþ to domes day!'  
Such saamples we han & oþer two: 80  
'Now knowes a child boþe weole & wo  
Pat scholde ben an innocent,  
Whil it is ȝong is norissched so –  
But hos seip soþ he schal be schent.' 84
- VIII. Pis world wol han his wikked wone,  
For soþe hit wol non oþer be;  
His cursede cours þat is bigonne,  
Per may no mon from hit fle; 88  
Pat haþ longe among vs ronne,  
His oune defaute mai he not se;

63 **recchen** care      **ben forsworen** break an oath

64 **reuen** regret

90 **defaute** flaw, sin, sinfulness

Pe fader trust not to þe sone, Ne non to oþer in no degre; Falshede is called a sotilte, And such a nome hit hap hent. Pis lesson lerneþ alle at me: Ho seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent.	92     96
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**Textual Notes  
and Variant Readings in Manuscripts**

V = Oxford, Bodleian Library, Eng.poet.a.1 (3938), Vernon Manuscript  
S = London, British Library, Addit. 22283, Simeon Manuscript  
T = Cambridge, Trinity College, O.9.38 (1450)

Heading T: Hosø sayth the truth shall be shente

- 1 Pe . . . to] T: Who so wyll
- 2 Or eny] T: And hys; her . . . ateyn] T: woll not alayne
- 3 His] T: And; I . . . pese] T: the contray not to dyspleyse
- 4 Witterli] T: Certes; he] T: he wull
- 5 hou . . . schal] T: he muste
- 6 and] T: & all; peyne] T: mayne
- 7 schal] T: wyll
- 8 flatere] T: flatery
- 9 loke] S: ko; loke . . . tweyne] T: he muste refrayne
- 10 Pei . . . of] T: That it be nocht at
- 11-12 T: omitted
- 13 soþe] T: sede
- 14 vche] T: euery; mon] V interlined by corrector; touh] T: it thowght
- 15 To] T: They; take] T: takyth
- 16 Eueri] T: Wyth euery; þei colore] T: y colouryd
- 17 aren] þat] T: beth men
- 18 no] S: non; forte . . . teynte] T: that woold be attaynte
- 19 T: Yff thow sey ofte yn there prese
- 20 He schal] T: Thow schait it; frenschipe] T: bothe febell &

- 21 Summe] T: Som ther beth; an Innocent] T: a seynte  
22 Wonder] T: And wonder  
23 eueri pleynte] T: eche compleynte  
24 For hos] T: And who; þe] T: omitted  
25-48 T: omitted  
45 lippe] S: lippe  
After 48 T inserts lines 61-72  
49 For] T: omitted; in] T: omitted; seruise] T: lawe  
50 pereles] T: perell  
51 T: Of here doying and of here sawe  
53 T: Som there byth woll be full fawe  
54 T: Fayne of hym to take wreche  
55 T: Hym to pryson to hong or drawe; summe] S: summen  
56 T: Wyth outyn ryght they wolde hym reche; wreche] S: wrenche  
57 prechour] T: frere  
58 At] T: Yn; and at] T: or yn  
59 out] T: omitted  
60 For . . . sawe] T: Who seyth soth  
61 Seppe] S: Seipe T: Nevyr syth; þe tyme] T: omitted; boren] T: y bore  
63 Men . . . neuer] T: A man reccheth noght; forsworen ] T: forsoore  
64 þat . . . ful] T: the ryght there it ys  
65 T: They peynte here woordys feyre a fore  
66 is] T: ys of  
68 T: Suche bagenys schall hem sore a rew  
69 bargeyne gon] T: bagenys  
70 non . . . þou3] T: no charge thought  
71 þus] T: omitted; gyle] T: gyse; vp] T: omitted  
72 For hos] T: Who  
73 Sipe] T: There for no man; no mon ] T: omitted  
74 For . . . to] T: Leste he  
75 Best . . . hit] T: There for y rede yow  
76 come] T: come &  
77 mak] T: make we  
78 frend] T: man  
79 drede] T: leue  
80 saamples] T: warnyngys; & oþer] T: one or  
81 knowes] T: omitted; boþe] T: can; T: This line was copied in error after

- line 83, the error being indicated in the margin by the corrector
- 82 þat] T: By skylle he
- 83 Whil . . . ʒong] T: yn hys yowthe he; norissched] T: tawght
- 84 But hos] T: Who
- 85 world] T: wykkyd world; wikked] T: omitted
- 86 For soþe] T: y wys; oþer] T: other wyse
- 87 cursede] T: omitted; þat . . . gonne ] T: a monge vs so long hathe ronne
- 88 may] T: ys; hit] T: hyt may
- 89 T: Thys it fallyth by all and summe
- 90 His . . . not] T: Noman hys fawtys can a
- 92 Ne] T: Nother; to] T: tyll
- 93 Falshede] T: Falsnes; called] T: holde
- 94 T: Yn what man that it ys lent
- 95 alle at] T: ye of
- 96 þe] T: omitted
- After 96, S: Explicit . A song . Ho seip þe soþe he schal be schent.