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Christ the Codex: Compilation as Literary Device in *Book to a Mother*

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Recent study of late medieval devotional texts has considered the compilation as a largely fifteenth-century phenomenon, resulting from anxiety over Archbishop Thomas Arundel's *Constitutions* of 1409. It was perhaps safer, when authorship of heterodox works could be severely punished, to avoid claims of authorship altogether and draw on the works of authors writing before censorship.¹ However, the importance of the *Constitutions* may have been overstated—Arundel's legislation was, after all, not a bolt out of the blue but the climax of at least two decades of mounting concern over authority for religious texts—² and, although it seems undeniable that the culture of compilation expanded rapidly in the fifteenth century, sophisticated compilation texts such as *Be Lyf of Soule*, *Be Holy Boke Gratia Dei*, and *Book to a Mother* were composed and circulating pre-*Constitutions*.³ *Book to a Mother* in particular demonstrates that compilation offered not only authority and protection in an anxious climate, but also useful structural possibilities to a writer with didactic and devotional purpose.

Book to a Mother is so called because of its claim to be written as a gift from a son to his mother. Little studied until recently, *Book to a Mother* is now the subject of some critical enquiry, particularly into the matter of its orthodoxy. Nancy Warren discusses the text's ambiguous orthodoxy in relation to women, its potential both for regulating women's conduct and 'serving just the opposite function—that is, for encouraging women's independent material and spiritual initiatives'.⁴ Nicholas Watson has indicated the striking juxtaposition of 'reformist and devotional modes of the thought' in the compilation; he notes too that similar contrasts are to be found more broadly in the manuscripts in which *Book to a Mother* survives, which contain a mixture of mainstream devotional texts and works advocating religious reform.⁵ Nicole Rice considers the careful balance which the author⁶ creates between the attribution of spiritual and intellectual

power to the lay addressee and insistence on the sacramental power of his priestly office—the author is, she argues, a parish priest.⁷

The mother to whom the book is addressed is shown as empowered through striking images of reading and writing. If the mother can live like Christ, she will gain a true authority to write:

[. . .] loke wher þi lyuynge accordiþ wiþ Cristes liuinge, and þanke him þerof; and þer it doþ not, scrape it out wiþ sorew of herte and schrifte of mouþe and satisfaccioun [. . .] Þy penne to write wiþ schal be þi loue [. . .] And þus þou maist lerne aftir þi samplerie to write a feir trewe bok and better konne Holi Writ þan ony maister of diuinite þat loueþ not God so wel as þou [. . .] (38/19-39/9).

There is thus also a questionable orthodoxy about the textual roles which the writer of the *Book* creates: Watson considers that the son, by making his mother a writer, plays down his own role as instructor and dispels any notion that learning allows him a 'preacherly privilege'.⁸ Rice asserts that the *Book* nonetheless offers no fundamental challenge to the 'author's priestly authority as spiritual father', nor alters the 'actual roles' of the 'fleshly mother and son'.⁹ This paper will consider how the negotiation of the roles of mother and son, reader and writer/teacher, laywoman and priest is facilitated by the sophisticated self-reflexive compilation structure of *Book to a Mother*. The images of the book itself and its addressee, the mother, are vital to the *Book's* structure: the development of these images through the compilation draws the reader's attention to the immediate dynamic experience of reading a book. The physical reality of the book being thus highlighted, this paper will also allude to the guidance offered the reader by the mise-en-page of *Book to a Mother* manuscripts.

When the son tells his mother that Christ-like living will enable her to 'write a feir trewe bok' better than a master of divinity, he claims that experience and not book-learning grants authority, but this claim may appear paradoxical in a compilation text which rests on the authority of the *auctores* that it weaves together. The text is in danger of undermining its own message. But the compiler exploits his paradox rather to strengthen his text, through the image of Christ as book. In order to know how to live like Christ and thus gain authority to write, the mother must 'stude [. . .] bisiliche in þis bok' (38/18). The central image of the book enables the compiler to control and appropriate to his own purposes the wealth of

textual authority which he cites; it also enables him to make his *Book* available for the devotional use of his mother in her own appropriation of it, as she holds a physical book in her hands and imaginistically ingests it, gestates it and writes it.¹⁰

The Compiler's Manipulation of his Sources

Many voices resonate within the *Book to a Mother*, because the compiler's material is largely biblical and the Bible of course includes a vast range of generically varied material. Thus, in *Book to a Mother*, Pauline exegesis, prophetic exhortation, and the love-lyrical voice of the Song of Songs are juxtaposed, sometimes directly cited in compilation, sometimes paraphrased, appropriated or imitated. Scriptural commentators like Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux are also cited. This paper will briefly demonstrate the compiler's varied treatment of his sources and their distinctive voices; it will then go on to show how these voices are disposed and their authority appropriated within the developing logic of the compilation's structure.

The teaching of the *Book to a Mother* can be divided into three seemingly discrete sections¹¹—long scriptural passages, a passage developing the image of Christ as book, and the material of Pecham's syllabus: the Paternoster and Ave, the Apostles' Creed, the Decalogue, the beatitudes, and the seven sacraments, gifts of the spirit, deadly sins and deeds of mercy.¹² That the treatise seems designed largely to teach this syllabus is an aspect of its orthodoxy. In presenting the seven deeds of mercy, the compiler begins with a direct citation of God's words at the Last Judgement, as they are presented in the gospels: 'Cometh, 3e blessed' children 'of my Fader; take 3e þe kyngdome þat is aparayled to 3ou fro þe bigynnyng of þe world. I hungerd, and 3e 3af me mete.' (5/2-4: compare Matthew 25:34-5). This the compiler interprets in two stages, his interpretation introduced with the phrase 'þat is'. Interestingly the first stage of interpretation is offered as if in the divine voice: 'þat is, whan the leste of myne þat schal be saued was hungry for defaute of gostly mete [. . .] and 3e taghten hem' (5/4-7).¹³ The second stage of interpretation, which is interpolated into the first, is in the compiler's voice: 'þat is, for to kepe gods hestes' (5/6). From this calm exegesis, however, the compiler suddenly breaks into a lament which seems to echo the medieval complaint tradition as well as the biblical prophet weeping over God's flock, but which he does not indicate to be citation: 'Bot alas and weylawei, whuch a general pestilence is now in al þis world for defaute of þis mete!' (5/8-9). Urgent advice

on the responsibility of preachers and others to meet the spiritual hunger of the world follows, before God's voice, from its gospel source, reasserts itself in discussion of the second deed: "'I thristid, and 3e 3af me drynke'" (5/22-3, Matthew 25:35). The gospels are cited directly, but their meaning is mediated by voices of exegesis and then prophetic exhortation which, in this case at least, have no recognised source and may be the compiler's own words.

In the Apostles' Creed, cited after the Ave near the beginning of the compilation (1/14-2/3) and separated from it only by a red capital in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc 210 (fol. 20^r), the only extant manuscript to preserve this section intact, the believer speaks in the first person to an unspecified audience. Like the preceding prayers, the creed appears to have been reported directly, unmediated, but in fact there is a brief but significant interpolation: 'I beleue in þe Holy Gost; holy Chirche' is glossed—'þat is, alle þat schulle be saued' (2/1-2). This glossing then continues in the Decalogue, which, unlike the preceding items in the syllabus is given some introduction specifying speakers (here cited as it appears in MS Laud Misc 210):

¶ Alle þese ten hestes God spak to Moyses in þe hul of Synay: I am þi Lord God, þat delyuered þe of wicked seruage þou schalt haue no fals goddis þat is þou schalt loue noþyng more þan me . noþyng aȝen my wille . ffor as Seynt Austyn seyth . þat þyng þat a man loueþ most; þat he worschipeþ for his god / þerefore proude man worschipeþ pryde for his god . þe glotoun glotonye . þe lecchour leccherye . and so of alle dedely synnes ¶ þe secunde heste is . þou schalt not take gods name in veyn þat is . þou schalt neuere be ydel ne swere bot it be nedful ¶ þe þridde heste is . . . (MS Laud Misc 210, fols 20^r—20^v).

As in the brief interpolation into the Creed, the compiler does not label his glosses as such in his account of the Ten Commandments. He quotes God in the first person, without acknowledging the textual mediation of a biblical *auctor*: he does not then consistently indicate points at which additional words are provided from some other source. That on one occasion he does name Augustine as a source might suggest that where he does not name anyone the glosses are his own.¹⁴ It also obscures further the presence of the anonymous interpolations, as does the fact that the gloss adopts God's first person: 'þou schalt loue noþyng more þan me . noþyng aȝen my wille'. The compiler's voice is presented as God's:

interpolation is marked only by the phrase 'þat is', a ubiquitous glossing phrase but one across which the first person presentation of God is maintained. The compiler's manipulation of his sources is here enabling him to 'play God', to appropriate divine authority for his own words while obscuring the extent to which he is guiding the reader.

Although textually the distinctions between voices are thus blurred here, the *mise-en-page* might at first appear to reflect an interest in identifying voices, as it picks out the beginning of God's speech with a blue capital. However, thereafter only the enumeration of the commandments is highlighted, each individual commandment marked by alternating red and blue paraph marks within the body of the text. The paraph mark in each case indicates not the reappearance of God's voice but the numbering of the commandments: '¶ þe secunde heste is [. . .] ¶ þe þridde heste is [. . .]'. Such control of material through enumeration is one of the marks of compilation, although here of course the control is that of a biblical compiler of the commandments, rather than the medieval compiler of the treatise. Thus the *mise-en-page* contributes to the compiler's manipulation of the voices he compiles.

At the end of his presentation of the seven gifts of the Spirit, which are matched with beatitudes to indicate Christ's blessings upon them and then each briefly and simply glossed, the compiler observes that the soul that has these gifts and blessings will respond with a song 'of louelikynge þat Cristes specyal syngeþ in þe Boke of Songes' (10/19-22): brief phrases from the Canticles are then cited, interlaced with glossing commentary. The commentary is influenced by that of Saint Bernard, but is 'independent in expression':¹⁵ it interprets many passages as relating to active and contemplative life. Strikingly, the commentary does not explain away the sensual imagery of its text, but rather participates in and adopts it. For example, the 'litel bed [. . .] helid with floures' is explained: 'þat is with reste of contemplacioun þat þou hast made fayre with vertues' (11/1-2), and 'Vnder his schadowe I desirede to sitte, and his fruytes were swete to my taste' draws the imagistic commentary: 'With his schadowe he refresched me, and with his frut he fedde me þat my strengþes fayle not in tribulacioun' (12/2-6). The compiler, in his commentary, begins a striking impersonation of the voice of his source. Such impersonation enables the writer to privilege his *auctores* within the text while at the same time strengthening his own authority in their reflected light. It authorises, in this case, a language of sensual enjoyment by which he may deepen the appeal of his text to his reader.

Similarly, when the compiler cites the Psalmist's 'Þe kyng hap lad me into a

wyn selere and haþ ordeyned me in charite', the comment that this refers to the 'grete multitude of his swetnes' (12/7-9) maintains rather than interprets the sensual imagery; the compiler then translates the image of the wine cellar as the setting for the Annunciation: 'In þis wyn seler oure Lady was loken with seuen 3iftes of þe Holy Gost whan Gabriel here grette in þe conclaue' (13/7-8). This is a highly spiritualised wine cellar, and one which connects Psalter, Gospel and apostolic history, for the cellar is also then John the Baptist's desert, and then the wine which comes from the cellar is that which, once drunk, inspires the faith of Paul and St Cecilia, the Patriarchs and the Prophets (13/7-21).

The images of wine and wine-cellar, and joyful intoxication, thus spiritualised, may at one level evade more literal endorsement of intoxication; the positive associations created between wine and joy may possibly have the opposite effect. The compiler has used a very concrete image to weave an appealing but rather abstract and elusive text from a variety of sources. *The Book to a Mother* is held together by such repeated references to central images: its movement comes from the accumulation of new sources and voices which further enrich the images at each stage. The central images by which this is done are those of 'mother' and 'book', and it is these, and their influence on the form of the treatise, which will now be examined.

The Images of 'Book' and 'Mother'

Throughout the *Book to a Mother* the treatment of the images 'mother' and 'book' is characterised by a two-way movement between physical and spiritual interpretation.¹⁶ Repeated address throughout the treatise to 'modir' keeps a 'real mother' audience in the foreground. The evidence for this is summarised by Adrian McCarthy, who observes a general concern to render instruction relevant to a woman, and specific references which appear to offer insight into the biographical circumstances of the treatise's composition.¹⁷ Examples of general 'feminising' are observable in the treatment of the commandments, where lechery is explained as 'doyng with man bot he were þyn housbounde' (2/25-6), and the tenth commandment is interpreted as 'þou schalt not desire no wommans housbonde' (3/12-13). McCarthy's claim that the interest in the love-lyrics of the Song of Songs is evidence of female audience is not entirely convincing; more compellingly he sees an appeal to a maternal audience in the instruction to 'tak to þe þe swete childe [Christ] and swetliche swaþ hit in his [c]radil wiþ swete loue bondes [. . .]' (50/3-5).

References pointing to the 'real' mother include the compiler's allusions to 'þine two hosbondis—Crist and mi fadir' (30/6) and her patron saint, Andrew (37/16, 37/24). The 'real' mother once offered money for her son to become a canon: 'for Crist wiþ his couent axeþ not twenti marc, as þou woldest sometime haue 3eue for me to haue ben a chanoun, and þei wolde not receiue me lasse þan twenti pound' (122/15-17). This passage, in combination with the compiler's attack on convents which are only interested in recruiting nobility (56/18-23), indicates that both mother and son, while possessing enough wealth to be tempted to excessive interest in it, were nonetheless not wealthy enough to buy their way into orders: this may lie behind the compiler's emphasis throughout the *Book* on a form of inner vocation rather than a formal religious life.¹⁸

Both Warren and Rice discuss the compiler's attitude to religious orders as central to the *Book*. Rice writes of the compiler's proposal that his mother should seek to live the apostolic life 'in the context of the parish, rather than seeking it through the imitation of actual monastic life, which has been compromised by the desire for "propurte"'.¹⁹ Warren considers the 'Janus-faced' operation, in the *Book*, of elements drawn from female monasticism, which, she writes, functions 'ambiguously [. . .]: it is both positive model and negative exemplum of religious life, both a source of symbolic capital and a sink of corruption'.²⁰ So the compiler condemns the convents as corrupted by material wealth and lust, but implies the value of the Rule and of claustration when he writes that for those who are so corrupted 'it hadde be bettur þat þei hadden holde Seint Benettis rule, faste iclosed in a cloister of foure stronge wallis, þat ben riȝtfulnes, strengþe, sleiþe and temperaunce' (120/25-121/2). The cloister is here cast in a positive light but also allegorised so that it is made available to those outside real, physical convent walls.

The compiler of *Book to a Mother* seeks to call the mother to a religious life which goes beyond external obedience to a rule, to an internally regulated obedience to Christ's teaching.²¹ So, when the compiler comes to teach the Decalogue, material is arranged around the story of the rich young ruler of the gospel narrative, and not, as is more commonly the case in compilations, around the two great commandments.²² Instead of drawing together the ten commandments by reference to loving God and loving one's neighbour, the listing of the commandments concludes with a gospel passage which alludes to the Decalogue so as to point beyond it:

A nere biþath þat semeth streit to hem þat litel sauour or loue
haueth of God and of heuenliche þynges is forte holde Gods

counseyles. þat mowe be vnderstonde in on answere þat Crist
3af to a man þat seyde he had kept Gods hestes fro his 3oupe.
'3it,' quop God, 'on þyng þe lackep. 3if þou wolte be parfite, go
and selle al þat þou hast, and 3if hit to pore men; and come,'
lyue as I do, 'and þou schalt haue tresour in heuene.' Þat is, first
3yue þiself holly, bodi and soule, parseuerauntly to Crist þat
was most pore for oure loue, and to alle þat schullen be saued;
for of hem Crist spake þo (3/17-4/4).

The modern punctuation here highlights, by placing outside quotation marks, the compiler's interpolations into this piece, but in the manuscripts the absence of such citation marks makes the compiler's voice harder to disentangle from 'God's' (actually Christ's) words as reported in the gospels. In the gospels, Christ is clearly instructing the rich young ruler to sell physical goods for the benefit of the poor, and asking him to go with him physically; this is evident from the comments which follow in which Christ discusses the difficulty for a rich man of entering heaven and suggestively concludes with the eternal reward for those who leave family for Christ. The passage is thus connected to that with which the treatise opens, to which this paper will turn next.²³ The compiler's spiritualising of this passage looks away from physical wealth and interprets charity to the poor, strikingly, as placing one's life at the service of Christ and the body of believers: the subtle substitution of 'lyue as I do' for Christ's 'follow me' makes claims for this way of life as *imitatio Christi*, claims which are not inherent in 'follow me' as Christ's literal instruction to the rich young ruler. The passage in *Book to a Mother* could appear to be an allusion to religious vocation, although the compiler later, as has been noted, favours a rather more internalised vocation.

Although such references, apparently autobiographical, indicate that the author might have envisaged—or at least desired to appear to envisage—his 'real' mother as the audience of his work, the first allusion to motherhood is a highly spiritualised one. It heads the entire treatise:

To knowe þe bettere my purpos in þis boke, wite 3e wel þat I
desire euerych man and womman and child to be my moder, for
Crist seyb: he þat dop his Fader wille is his broper, suster and
moder (1/1-4).

Christ's words are here taken from a gospel account in which Christ

challenges the idea that his natural family can have prior claims to his attention. Matthew cites directly Christ's words when interrupted in his teaching by the news that his mother and brothers are waiting to speak to him:

And he holdynge forth his hond in to his disciples, seide, Loo!
My modir and my bretheren; treuly whoeuer doth the wil of my
fadir that is in heuenes, he is my brother, suster, and modir
(Matthew 12:49-50).²⁴

Christ effects the shift from the physical to the spiritual family by reference to his father in heaven: for him, the idea of a family's obedience to the father who is its head and a disciple's obedience to God are not analogous but identical. Allusion to this verse at the opening of the treatise immediately introduces a necessary connection between familial duty and Christian obedience: the reference to 'Father' and 'wille' also suggest the Paternoster which follows: 'Oure Fader [. . .] þi wille be fulfilled in vs' (1/5-6). But there is an immediate confusion of voices in this opening to the treatise, exacerbated by the punctuation in the modern edition. Throughout the modern edition of *Book to a Mother*, the colon is used to introduce direct quotation, so 'Crist seȝþ: he þat dop [. . .]' (1/1-3) would appear to reflect Christ's actual words. In MS Laud Misc 210 (fol. 20^r) the punctuation might likewise suggest Christ's actual words: 'for Crist seȝþ . he þat dop [. . .]', an impression reinforced by the fact that it is Christ who is named as source, and not the Gospel writer who reports his words. But the reading of 'his fader wille' is ambiguous in comparison with Christ's 'my fader wille'—'he þat dop his [own] fader wille', or he that does his [Christ's] father's?—and the omission of the location of the father 'in heaven' facilitates the ambiguity. Evidently Christ's words are actually being reported in the third person, but the lack of clarity in this matter creates an ambiguity as to whether the obedience Christ is enjoining is to God or to the reader's own parents—to a spiritual or physical parent.

That the Paternoster follows without comment extends the ventriloquism by which the compiler can 'speak' Christ's words in such a way as to guide his reader's interpretation: it may appear that the compiler is the ventriloquist's puppet, mouthing Christ's words, but the truth may be more that a puppet Christ is presented as speaking while the compiler controls what is said. The Paternoster is, of course, a direct citation of Christ as presented in the gospels, addressing his father in heaven, but one which Christ instructs us to appropriate. MS Laud Misc

210 begins the prayer on a new line with an illuminated four-line capital (fol. 20^r): this *mise-en-page* may encourage the sense of the prayer as independent from the preceding words, identified as Christ's, and free it for use by the compiler and the reader. The prayer concludes 'so mote it be par charite', and then the Ave follows the Paternoster, again without any introductory comment though with a blue capital, and concluding 'So mote it be', presumably a translation of 'Amen'. The Ave, of course, becomes a prayer when the believer appropriates the words, reported by the gospel writers, in which the Angel Gabriel addresses Mary.

When the reader appropriates the *Book's* prayers for personal use there is an active engagement with the text which perhaps partly explains the *Book's* image of the reading mother as also a writer. Furthermore, as Watson has observed, a cluster of imagery makes the reading mother also the book, 'imaged as parchment' onto which virtues must be 'write within and without' by herself.²⁵ That the book is an image as well as a concrete reality encourages the reader's understanding of the availability for personal appropriation of its contents.

In *Book to a Mother*, the book is first a physical entity: it is the book which the compiler has chosen to write to his mother because it teaches how to follow Christ, and as such draws the reader's attention, early in the treatise, to the physical codex which is in her hands. The compiler seeks to honour his mother by presenting a book to her: 'before alle oþer bokes oon I chese þat techeþ euery man and womman þat wol do after him to be Cristes broþer, sister and moder' (17/21-3). But immediately thereafter the concrete nature of the image is disrupted by the compiler's comment that 'a man may bigge and lerne' the book 'with a litel cold water' (18/3-4). This echo of Matthew 10:42 may allude not only to works of charity but also to baptism, but it is nonsense if the book is still the codex which the compiler has written: clearly the book has already been spiritualised. The book is the physical entity which the son writes to his mother in which any number of instructions and abstractions may be contained. The book is the Bible, in which the commandments are set down, and in which also the life of Christ is set down. Christ is the ultimate book. His deeds exemplify the way of life set down in the book; his words appear in the book; more than this, he is himself the book as all truth is contained in him, and we must learn to 'read' him.

This sophisticated and highly reflexive theology provides a unifying rationale for the three seemingly rather discrete sections of the *Book*—scriptural passages, Christ as book, and syllabus material. Syllabus items supply pattern and rhythm throughout. The treatment of the ten commandments is an example of

this: the necessity of keeping God's 'hestes' becomes almost a refrain in the treatise, although many of the allusions to the commandments are very brief.²⁶ Thus syllabus lists and biblical citations which appear physically and textually separate, at the beginning and end of the treatise, are, by allusion and by doctrine, drawn into the central body of text to serve the image of Christ the book. The structure of the *Book* exemplifies the truth it contains, that Christ is the origin and fulfilment of, and the authority behind, divine law.

In elaborating his image of the book, the compiler takes a biblical passage and alters its central image to suit his theme:

And Crist in þe gospel likneþ þe kyngdom of heuen to a
merchaund þat fyndeþ þat, and goþ and selleþ al þat he hap and
bieþ þat boc (21/13-15).

Of course Christ actually talks of the merchant finding a pearl of great price, not a book at all, but the compiler seems to have no qualms about attributing to Christ his own image, and even claiming it as gospel. Possibly he expects his reader to know that Christ actually talked of a pearl, and so by allusion looks to draw 'pearl' implicitly into the matrix of associations around the book. This is further evidence of the spiritualising of the book, which here costs all that the merchant has, although it also reintroduces the image of the book as a physical commodity which can be bought by merchants. Paradoxically, by bringing the image 'back to earth', the compiler is able to emphasise the value of the book which might appear to have been undermined by the comment that it can be bought with a little cold water.

Extending the analogy of the book and learning to read, the compiler then draws on the primer, the 'ABC', as an image of the first steps of the ignorant into knowledge. In a particularly effective passage he recalls the child repeating noises as it learns to read:

And þus bigynne we to lerne oure a.b.c., eiþer of [vs] seyinge:
'Cros Crist me spede', and hauyng lamentaciouns for oure
synnes, and seyinge with þe prophete Ieremye: 'A, a, a; Lord, I
cannot speke [. . .]' Þus schul we best bigynne to [lerne] oure
forseide boke' (23/24-24/11).

Clearly, insight is here offered by exploration of one aspect of the book as a

physical image. The apocryphal book of Baruch is cited in support of this 'concrete' book: it is the book of God's commandments, and all who follow it shall live (24/12-14; compare Baruch 4. 1). In Baruch, however, the book is an image for the female personification of Wisdom; the compiler of the *Book to a Mother*, in accordance with the traditional association of the second person of the trinity with Wisdom, makes it Christ, and alters the gender accordingly: the book 'is oure God [. . .] And after þis he was seye in erpe, and with men he was conuersaunt' (24/15-18, compare Baruch 3. 38, 'lyued with men'). In Baruch, however, this passage is much less striking, as the figure of Wisdom is introduced first, and then is contained in the pages of the book: by reversing the order of the citations from Baruch, the *Book to a Mother* draws much greater attention to the book, which is the primary referent, and thus heightens the already striking effect of referring to Christ—a human being rather than the already abstract Wisdom—as a book.

The Text's Circling Structure

Two equally important sources for the *Book to a Mother's* central image are cited immediately after Baruch. The first is from the book of Revelation, in which the book is the scroll with seven seals, but also paradoxically the lamb who alone may open the book: '[þe] lomb þat is [on] þe Fader right hond, þat died for vs and boght vs with his blod to his Fader, wol opene þe boke with þe seuen seles to vs—þat is, himself' (25. 25-26. 2). The second is the call of the prophet Ezekiel, which takes the striking form of physical ingestion of a book:

an hond ysent to me in þe whiche was a boke iclosed; and he opened hit bfore me, and he was writen withinne and withoute, and in þe boke were writen lamentaciouns, songe and sorowe. And he seyde to me: 'Mannes sone, whatsoeuer þou fynde, ete; ete þis boke, and goynge þou schalt speke to þe children of Israel' (26. 10-15; Ezekiel 2. 9-3. 1).

The personification of the book which the compiler achieves simply by translating with the pronoun 'he' ('he was writen') ties this passage to the interpretation suggested by the *Book to a Mother*, that the book is Christ—although there is no real reason for understanding it in this way in its original context. The compiler thus opens the way, of course, to a eucharistic reading as

well as one based on the internalisation of God's wisdom.²⁷ This is the climax of an accumulation of images which have strikingly defamiliarised the book, and thus led the reader deeper into the mystery of Christ who is the book. The accumulation of images grows out of the accumulation of sources: it is a product of the text as compilation. A variety of sources has been compiled, so that a range of voices speak about the central image—the apocalyptic voice of Revelation, the authoritative voice of Wisdom literature, the voices of prophecy and lamentation of Ezekiel and Jeremiah. Each voice introduced may call the reader back to re-examine the central image, and it is the image, rather than the questioning and answering interlocutors, which controls the compilation's structure. Structurally, the text appears to be circling back to repeated images.

Within these circles of text argument is developed, as exemplified by the discussion of the seven deadly sins in the *Book to a Mother*. Adam encompassed all seven sins in his original sin. The seven sins infect the stable into which Christ is born—the physical nativity and the spiritual nativity of Christ in the heart of the believer. The seven sins are encompassed by the three sins which the devil used to tempt Christ: Christ overcame them with three virtues relating to religious vows.²⁸ these vows may relate to a physical religious life, but this may be infected with sins, and they may also be lived in the spiritual religious life which does not require entry into a convent. Clearly, where the sins are discussed practically, in connection with the mother who is to read the treatise, those which seem most relevant to her are drawn upon: where the sins are discussed theologically, they are considered in sum and as a whole. The structuring of discussion of the sins allows significant theological ideas to be explored—the implicit connection between Christ and Adam, for example—as well as important devotional images such as the heart as stable from which the dung of sins must be swept. The exegetical and the devotional voices speak in turn.

The allusion to the seven deadly sins in the account of the first commandment, cited above, is exemplary of this compiler's technique. By planting brief references throughout his treatise to anticipate and then, later, recall themes discussed, the compiler creates pattern. The seven deadly sins are first fully listed well into the central 'book' section (43/21-44/3) but by the time the reader reaches this point a number of aspects of the sins have already been revealed—in the case of the first-commandment allusion, that they are a form of idolatry. The seven are also referred to, in the opening section of the treatise, in the account of the seven works of mercy: "I was in prisoun and 3e come to me". Pat is, when any of myne was bounde with a seuenefold bonde of þe seuene

dedely synnes, and so lay in a depe derk prisoun' (6/16-18): thus the seven deadly sins are, in passing, revealed to have binding power. (The passage also spiritualises the works of mercy and glosses in the voice of God—'any of myne'—as observed in the *Book to a Mother's* opening lines).

When the seven deadly sins are listed in full it is in connection with original sin, and the sinful act of Adam in taking the apple is explicitly held to contain all the seven sins within it. Two authorities are evinced: firstly, James; secondly, Augustine:²⁹

For Seint Iame seiþ: 'Who offendit in o dedli synne, he is gulti in alle.' As Seint Austin scheweþ how Adam sinnede in alle þe seuene dedli synnes in etinge of þe appel: furst he was proud, for he was inobedient to God; wroþ, for he hatede himself, a[s] Dauid seiþ, in as muche as he louede wickednesse; glotoun, for he et more þan him nedide; lechour, for he brak wedlok of God and his soule; slouful, in þat he wolde not do as God bad him; enuiouse for he slou himself; coueitouse, for he coueitede more þan him nedede (43/19-44/3).

The citation from James is manipulated in this context to lend apparent biblical authority to the listing of the seven deadly sins which is in fact not biblical but traditional. The verse from James 2:10 —'forsothe who euer shal kepe al the lawe, sotheli offende in oon, he is maad gilty of alle'—is actually referring to the Decalogue (see James 2:11). Conversely, the biblical reference, to Adam's eating of the apple, is quoted in connection with Augustine. It is striking that the compiler, following Augustine, has chosen to present the seven deadly sins in connection with Adam, as a number of the sins do not seem most obviously exemplified in Adam's act. In *Book to a Mother*, however, the seven deadly sins are never listed in the abstract, and a consideration of the other occasions on which they are discussed reveals the schematic sense in this first connection with Adam.

There is a brief reference to the seven deadly sins in the account of the nativity, which is a meditation in which the mother is to observe the humility of Christ at his birth, and to see herself as the stable in which Christ may be born.³⁰ Here, the seven deadly sins are like wild beasts which foul the stable; they are not itemised: 'þenk hou ofte þou hast receiued þi God and leid him in a foul, comyne stabele to alle þe seuene dedli synnes. For wilde bestis hauen ofte mad þi soule

fouler stinkinge tofore God' (50/11-14). The next occasion on which they are discussed at some length is in the account of Christ's temptation, which is prefaced, as in the discussion of Adam's sin, by a biblical authority emphasising that in one sin are contained all:

For alle maner sinnes, as Seint Iohn seiþ, þe Euaungelist,³¹ ben undurstonde in þulke þre þat he tempteð Crist inne. Furst in glotenie, whanne he bad Crist þe stones were mad bred. þus þe deuel fareþ wiþ men and wommen [. . .] (55/20-23).

Having emphasised the inter-relationship of all the seven deadly sins, the *Book to a Mother* interprets the devil's temptations of Christ as relating to three of the seven: gluttony (55/22-58/23), which includes greed for worldly riches; pride (58/24-59/7), which includes pride in worldly riches; and covetousness (59/8-12). The selection of these three sins is very significant, as they are related to the three virtues—poverty, chastity and humility—which the author is keen to encourage in his mother. They are the three virtues by which Christ overcame the sins of Adam:

þis bok is Crist, Godis Sone of heuene, wiþ his conuersacioun þre and þrytti wyntur, iwrite wiþinne and wiþoute with humilite to hele Adames pride and oures, wiþ wilful pouerte to hele þe synne of proprete, wiþ chastite to hele fleshlich lustis (31/3-7).

They are also, of course, the three vows of the religious, and immediately after this Christ is declared to be 'þe best rule' (31/9).³² Since the concern of the compiler is to guide his reader to an understanding of Christian living as itself a vocation, one which does not necessarily require membership of an order, it is unsurprising to find that the compiler's discussion of Christ's temptation in terms of gluttony includes an attack on the worldly greed of 'men of Holi Chirche' and 'wommen of religioun' (56/15, 19). But later he exhorts: 'þerfore modir, ches þou Crist to þin Abbot (124/6) and 'þerfore make þi professioun to him [. . .]' (124/23): the image of the religious life is not dismissed but re-interpreted.

Compilation as a literary device

In *Book to a Mother* images are not replaced with interpretation and then

discarded; they are kept before the reader and develop new significances throughout the compilation, contributing to a joined-up theology of Christ as the origin, fulfilment and content of 'the book' which is scripture. Extracts from different sources reveal different aspects of the whole teaching, but the presentation of those extracts obscures the diversity of their origins and voices, even of their 'original' intentions. The reader may not be aware of a linear progression in the text but rather of a truth being gradually revealed through a series of circles, each compiled source at once progressing and returning to the fixed point of a significant image.

The reader is invited to reflect on this experience of the text because the development of the treatise as a whole is the development of the images of reader-mother and book.³³ New significances for these images are constantly offered in the text, never excluding each other but often stretching the abstract imagination, as when the book and the mother meet in the person of the Virgin Mary. The compiler exhorts his reader to an imaginative deployment of the experience of motherhood which she shares with Mary:

[. . .] þenk hou Crist com into þis world to be conceyued, and
how þis Bok was closid nyne monþe in a litel place of a maide
[. . .] þou maist conceyue þe same Crist and bere him not onlich
nine monþes but wiþoute ende (44/20-24).

Warren discusses this passage as fundamentally repressive: 'In a move that goes to striking lengths to repress the material process of childbearing [. . .] the author replaces the fetus in the womb with a text [. . .] inscription, a process coded masculine [. . .] replaces the Incarnation which took place in a woman's body'.³⁴ But vitally, it is not just a text but a book which the mother must bear: it is a physical, 'incarnate' reality which cannot be replaced by inscription, the process of its creation. The striking juxtaposition of the book and the maternal womb exemplifies the creative effects of the process of compilation at various levels: incongruent images from various sources are placed side by side and thus defamiliarised in such a way as to demand fresh attention; different *auctores* are contained within one book, and held by one reader who may become a fruitful mother as she meditates upon them. Whatever the compiler includes in the physical book which the reader holds must also have a place in the reader's understanding of the figurative book—a compilation book—which is his medium and his subject.

NOTES

¹ This argument is developed by Nicholas Watson in 'Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409', *Speculum*, 70 (1995), 822-64, and summarised in his essay 'The Middle English Mystics', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. by David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 539-65.

² For a summary of the development of this concern, particularly as it related to biblical translation, see Annie Sutherland, 'Biblical citation and its affective contextualisation in some English mystical texts of the fourteenth century' (unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1999), chapter 2.

³ *Book to a Mother* has been dated on the basis of internal evidence to 1370-80: see *Book to a Mother: An Edition with Commentary*, ed. by Adrian James McCarthy (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1981) pp. xxx-xxxiv. Citations from the text are from this edition by page and line number, unless manuscript folios are cited. Two of the manuscripts in which the text is preserved are fourteenth-century, and two fifteenth-century. For full descriptions of the manuscripts containing the *Book*, see Elisabeth Dutton, 'Textual Disunities and Ambiguities of *mise-en-page* in the Manuscripts Containing *Book to a Mother*', *Journal of the Early Book Society*, 6 (2003), 149-59.

⁴ Nancy Bradley Warren, *Spiritual Economies: Female Monasticism in Later Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), pp. 77-92 (p. 77).

⁵ Nicholas Watson, 'Fashioning the Puritan Gentry-Woman: Devotion and Dissent in *Book to a Mother*', in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 169-84 (pp. 170-71).

⁶ Nicole Rice, '*Book to a Mother: Imitatio Christi* and *imitatio clerici*', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 35 (2005), forthcoming. Rice throughout uses the term 'author'; I shall generally refer to the 'compiler' of the *Book*.

⁷ Rice, '*Book to a Mother*': 'knowledge not only of confession, but also marriage and baptism, imply the experience of a parish priest rather than that of the friar, who would be canonically limited, except in special circumstances, to preaching, confession and burial'.

⁸ Watson, 'Fashioning the Puritan Gentry-Woman', p. 182.

⁹ Rice, '*Imitatio Christi*'.

¹⁰ The image of writing has been cited above: images of gestation and ingestion will be discussed below. Warren notes 'not uncommon' late-medieval references to Christ as a written text, for example in the *Charters of Christ*: see Warren, *Spiritual Economies*, p. 216 n.54.

¹¹ The manuscripts of the *Book* witness to the strength of these sectional divisions: see Dutton, 'Textual Disunities'.

¹² This list expands the original six-article programme of religious instruction outlined by Archbishop Pecham in 1281. Pecham's syllabus, which was to be preached in the vernacular to the laity four times a year, was perhaps the most influential of many episcopal decrees stemming from the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, which sought to address problems of clerical ignorance and education of the laity.

¹³ 'Pat is' echoes the phrase '*id est*' with which medieval commentators on the Bible introduced their glosses: the English phrase thus reflects the standard practice of biblical commentary in, for example, the *Glossa Ordinaria*. However, it would not be standard commentary practice to gloss as if in the divine voice.

¹⁴ It is probable that this is not always the case. The fourth commandment gloss, 'Worschipe þi fader and þi moder þat is boþe bodily and gostly', occurs also in *Speculum Christiani*, ed. by Gustaf Holmstedt, EETS o.s. 182 (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 22/17-18. There is, however, no need to posit direct influence of *Book to a Mother* on the *Speculum* – the comment is a catechetical commonplace in episcopal decrees.

¹⁵ *Book to a Mother*, p. 209 (note to 10/22-13/6).

¹⁶ That this movement is not conclusively from the literal to the spiritual perhaps qualifies Warren's interesting argument that '[b]y displacing female monasticism into the "ghostly" realm, where as metaphor or figure it is applicable to men as well as women, these texts repeat the gendered movement of exegesis which passes from the literal (associated with the fleshly and feminine) to the figurative (associated with the spiritual and masculine)': Warren, *Spiritual Economies*, p. 80.

¹⁷ For McCarthy's summary see *Book to a Mother*, pp. xxvi-xxviii.

¹⁸ This is a related but slightly different speculation to that by McCarthy, who suggests that the mother was considering entering a religious community and that the son wrote for this reason: McCarthy cites Power's observation of the frequency with which widows did enter community. See *Book to a Mother*, p. xxviii. Watson notes that twenty marks would not have been a large dowry for a man entering religious life, and that this may suggest that the treatise was created by a member of the lower rather than middle or upper gentry: 'Fashioning the Puritan Gentry-Woman', p. 174.

¹⁹ Rice, '*Imitatio Christi*'.

²⁰ Warren, *Spiritual Economies*, p. 80.

²¹ Such a shift of emphasis may recall Christ's own teaching in relation to the Decalogue: he internalises the external by asserting that murder is not only the physical act of killing but also the internal act of anger (Matthew 5.21-2) adultery not only a physical sexual act but an internal act of desire (Matthew 5.27-8).

²² See, for example, the arrangement of Decalogue material in *Pe Lyf of Soule: An Edition with Commentary*, ed. by Helen M. Moon (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1978), 27/11-65/9.

²³ Material is here blended from the accounts in Matthew 19 and Luke 18, and possibly also from Mark's gospel. The connection of these two passages might suggest that the compiler was working with some form of thematically arranged reference work, looking up 'mother'.

²⁴ Scriptural citation throughout this paper is from the early Wycliffite Version, c.1380, in *Wycliffite Versions of the Bible*, ed. by J. Forshall and F. Madden, 4 vols (Oxford, 1850).

²⁵ See 'Fashioning the Puritan Gentry-Woman', p. 177.

²⁶ E.g. 6/12-13, 58/1, 64/10, 79/8, 80/1, 82/4.

²⁷ Warren discusses the vitally significant fact that, in medieval eucharistic teaching, the host is not metabolised into the human body, but rather that the human being who receives the host thereby becomes part of the body of Christ: Warren, *Spiritual Economies*, p. 92.

²⁸ This focus on the three vows as overcoming the seven deadly sins may lie behind the compiler's omission of the expected identification between the sins and the seven devils which were cast out of Mary Magdalene. At the point in the text where Mary Magdalene's devils are mentioned (28/3), the focus is on the ten-stringed harp, figure of the commandments: it is obedience to the commandments which here casts out the devils, and not the apostolic virtues. The commandments are, in the passage on the temptations, simply tools for resisting gluttony (58/12-23).

²⁹ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, ch. xlv, PL 40: 254.

³⁰ This meditation on the nativity is found at 48/15-50/18.

³¹ McCarthy suggests as the source I John 1.16, a verse which does not exist, and gives the Latin 'concupiscentia carnis . . . concupiscentia oculorum, et superbia vitae' which may correspond to I John 2.16. If this is indeed the source verse then the *Book to a Mother* is using the verse in a context very different from its original context, which is not related at all to Christ's temptation: it is clear, however, how the compiler could come to interpret this triad as relating to lechery/gluttony, covetousness and pride.

³² Watson discusses the *Book to a Mother* as subverting the genre of the monastic rule: see 'Fashioning the Puritan Gentry-Woman', pp. 180-2.

³³ My discussion here agrees with Watson in noting the importance of imagery and the figure of Christ in patterning the treatise, but differs somewhat from his interpretation of these observations: Watson finds the treatise 'disorderly' and 'rambling' ('Fashioning the Puritan Gentry-Woman', p. 175). The conclusion he draws from this, however, resonates with my argument here: 'the work's lack of tight organization is systematic, expressions of a belief [. . .] in the corrupting potential of all external forms, including literary ones. Such a belief is obvious in the author's suspicion of clerics, nuns, and others with pretensions to holiness [. . .] But the fear

that the outer sign is always on the point of perverting itself into a simulacrum of the inner reality it represents—perhaps the most important attitude late medieval affectivity shares with Lollardy—has also found its way into the work's account of its genre and purpose, and even into its presentation of the status of its own words as vehicles for conveying truth' (p. 176).

³⁴ Warren, *Spiritual Economies*, p. 90.