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**'Wher ioye is ay lastyng':
John Lydgate's *Contemptus Mundi* in British Library MS
Harley 2255¹**

Joseph L. Grossi, Jr.

Scholars of Middle English verse are acknowledging with ever-increasing frequency the significance of John Lydgate, Benedictine monk and sometime resident of the great abbey at Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk.² While not a repository of his 'major' works such as *The Fall of Princes* or the *Troy Book*, London, British Library, MS Harley 2255 is nevertheless an important fifteenth-century 'anthology' of some 45 mostly moralistic and didactic shorter poems.³ Its contents are as follows:⁴

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|---------------------------------------|---|
| fols 1 ^r -3 ^r | 1. ' <i>Consulo quisquis eris</i> ' |
| fols 3 ^v -5 ^v | 2. 'As a Mydsomer Rose' |
| fols 6 ^r -7 ^r | 3. 'Horns Away' |
| fols 7 ^v -11 ^v | 4. 'Look in thy merour, and deeme noon othir wight' |
| fols 12 ^r -14 ^r | 5. 'A Song of Vertu' |
| fols 14 ^r -17 ^r | 6. 'A Pageant of Knowledge, another version of the last part' |
| fols 17 ^r -21 ^r | 7. ' <i>Misericordias Domini in eternum cantabo</i> ' |
| fols 21 ^r -24 ^r | 8. 'A Praise of Peace' ⁵ |
| fols 24 ^r -32 ^v | 9. 'The Legend of St Austin at Compton' |
| fols 32 ^v -39 ^v | 10. 'An Exposition of the Pater Noster' |
| fols 40 ^r -43 ^v | 11. 'On <i>De profundis</i> ' |
| fols 43 ^v -45 ^v | 12. ' <i>Te Deum laudamus</i> ' |
| fols 45 ^v -47 ^r | 13. 'The Letter to Gloucester' |
| fols 47 ^r -66 ^v | 14. <i>The Testament of Dan John Lydgate</i> |
| fols 66 ^v -69 ^v | 15. ' <i>Quis dabit meo capiti fontem lacrimarum?</i> ' |
| fols 70 ^r -71 ^v | 16. 'Prayers to Ten Saints' |
| fols 72 ^r -88 ^r | 17. ' <i>Fabula duorum mercatorum</i> ' |
| fols 88 ^r -93 ^v | 18. 'The Fifteen Joys and Sorrows of Mary' |
| fols 93 ^v -95 ^v | 19. Stanzas from <i>The Fall of Princes</i> , books V and VI |

fols 95 ^v -103 ^r	20. 'The Legend of Seynt Gyle'
fols 103 ^r -103 ^v	21. ' <i>Stella celi extirpauit</i> (I)'
fols 104 ^r -110 ^v	22. 'The Fifteen Ooes of Christ'
fols 111 ^r -111 ^v	23. 'A Prayer upon the Cross'
fols 111 ^v -113 ^r	24. 'To Mary, the Queen of Heaven'
fols 113 ^v -114 ^r	25. 'On <i>Verbum caro factum est</i> ' (part III)
fol. 114 ^r -115 ^r	26. 'A Prayer to St Leonard'
fols 115 ^r -115 ^v	27. 'To St Katherine, St Margaret, and St Mary Magdalene'
fol. 116 ^r	28. 'To St Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins'
fol. 116 ^v	29. 'To St Ositha'
fols 117 ^r -118 ^v	30. 'The fifteene toknys a forn the doom'
fols 118 ^v -119 ^v	31. 'They That No While Endure (First Version)'
fols 120 ^r -126 ^r	32. ' <i>Letabundus</i> '
fols 126 ^v -128 ^v	33. 'The World Is Variable'
fols 128 ^v -131 ^r	34. ' <i>Timor mortis conturbat me</i> '
fols 131 ^v -135 ^r	35. 'The cok hath lowe shoone'
fols 135 ^r -139 ^v	36. ' <i>Gloriosa dicta sunt de Te</i> '
fols 140 ^r -141 ^v	37. ' <i>Ave, Jesse virgula!</i> '
fols 142 ^r -143 ^r	38. ' <i>Benedictus Deus in donis suis</i> '
fols 143 ^v -146 ^v	39. 'Mesure is Tresour'
fols 146 ^v -148 ^r	40. ' <i>Deus in nomine tuo saluum me fac</i> '
fols 148 ^r -150 ^r	41. 'God is myn helpere'
fols 150 ^v -151 ^v	42. 'Undir a park full prudently pyght'
fols 152 ^r -153 ^r	43. 'To St Edmund' (incomplete; ll. 25-96 only, l. 96 marking the end of the poem)
fols 153 ^v -156 ^v	44. 'The Hood of Green'
fol. 157 ^r	45. 'Against Millers and Bakers'

Reflecting a growing tendency among fifteenth-century manuscripts to gather together the works of a single author, Harley 2255 is one of 'a number of substantial collections of [Lydgate's] shorter poems which take his authorship as an organising principle'.⁶ Lydgate's authorship is even taken for granted in some cases: although 'The Hood of Green' (fols 153^v-6^v),⁷ for example, has come under suspicion, it is nevertheless ascribed to Lydgate in this codex. An only slightly less obvious 'organising principle' than Lydgate's presumed authorship is his religious didacticism: the Monk of Bury wrote in many genres and for many kinds of reader, but students of Harley 2255 might well agree

with Derek Pearsall's observation that 'The contents, even allowing for the inclusion of a satirical poem like *Horns Away* [fols 6^r-7^r], are selected for their appropriateness to the cloister'.⁸ Eleanor Hammond was the first to suggest that Harley 2255 was produced in c. 1430-50 at the abbey of Bury, perhaps as a gift for William Curteys, Lydgate's abbot from 1429-46; and most subsequent scholars, like Pearsall, have concurred with this supposition.⁹

In a forthcoming article, however, Stephen Reimer and Pamela Farvolden challenge the traditional dating and circumstances of the manuscript's composition.¹⁰ Although they agree that Harley 2255 is of Bury provenance, they persuasively argue that it was compiled sometime after 1460 and suggest (without being dogmatic, it should be noted) that it may be the work of Kathleen Scott's 'Edmund-Fremund Scribe', the copyist of, *inter alia*, Lydgate's *Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund* in British Library, MS Yates Thompson 47 and in the Arundel Castle manuscript.¹¹ In the present essay I accept Farvolden's and Reimer's conclusions, though to avoid poaching on their territory—they describe the script, *ordinatio* and decoration of the manuscript in great depth—I confine myself here largely to some consideration of the contents of Harley 2255 which, to the best of my knowledge, have attracted little sustained interest since the early nineteenth century.¹² The purpose of the present study, then, is mainly to shed light both on the manuscript's dominant 'theme'—that Christian transcendence confers higher, eternal power on those who aspire to it—and on the persona who articulates it, a world-weary Lydgate who renounces the active life of a courtly writer in favour of the contemplative retirement of the Benedictine cloister. Rather than as the 'poet-propagandist to the Lancastrian dynasty', in Derek Pearsall's well-known phrase,¹³ Lydgate emerges from Harley 2255 primarily in the role of a monkish moralist who rejects courtly life and literature. Harley 2255 places in the foreground Lydgate's very orthodox monastic piety; yet far from being bland and abstract, that piety abjures the mutable world by equating its mutability with the pagan heroic glories celebrated in classical literature. By implication the manuscript casts off the same courtly career which had brought Lydgate into sustained contact with that literature.

It is true that Lydgate is sceptical of the Greco-Roman pagan heritage throughout his works. Whether or not his long 'courtly' *Troy Book*, *Siege of Thebes* and *Fall of Princes* betray 'humanist' leanings,¹⁴ they do reveal the Black Monk's ability to question the achievements of ancient Greece and Rome while simultaneously enjoying or aspiring to Lancastrian patronage.¹⁵ Harley 2255 reveals his doubts more consistently, however. If *The Fall of*

Princes, for example, implicitly embraces a literary tradition stretching from Homer to Ovid to Chaucer and 'skips across the tradition the Vernon Manuscript preserves',¹⁶ Harley 2255 barely concedes the prestige of classical *auctores*. Instead, it deploys hagiography and monastic didacticism to align its intended audience with the devotional temperament of fifteenth-century England and, if we accept the manuscript's traditionally accepted provenance, of East Anglia especially.¹⁷ While it is by no means clear that Harley 2255 represents a conscious effort by its scribe to 'decommission' the poetic influence of Chaucer himself,¹⁸ it does gesture beyond the authority of secular poets and their patrons to grasp at a holiness which strives to efface its own socio-political contexts. The overarching theme of Christian transcendence frames individual poems like '*Misericordias Domini in eternum cantabo*' (fols 17^r-21^r), 'A Praise of Peace' (fols 21^r-4^r), 'They That No While Endure (First Version)' (fols 118^v-119^v), '*Gloriosa dicta sunt de Te*' (fols 135^r-9^v) and 'Measure is Tresour' (fols 143^v-6^v), to cite but a few. As conventional as these poems may be in voicing Lydgate's *contemptus mundi*, they also show the Monk of Bury renouncing the prestige of Greece, Rome, Troy and Thebes, whose epic stories he had formerly rendered into English for his Lancastrian patrons.¹⁹ Lydgate here pursues, and evidently wishes his reader to pursue, salvation in the Eternal Jerusalem, where, according to the phrasing of a version of 'A Pageant of Knowledge' preserved in Harley 2255, alone is to be found the one 'lyf wher ioye is ay lastyng' (fol. 17^r, l. 144). This manuscript confirms how thoroughly adaptable Lydgate's verse was to prevailing fifteenth-century tastes in devotional manuscripts.²⁰ Moreover, it also shows how thorough a compiler could be if he sought, as I claim he did, to de-politicise the Monk of Bury, to present the poet primarily as a monastic moraliser who infers lessons about humility from the Crucifixion and the lives of the saints, rather than as a historian keen to derive universal lessons on statecraft from the downfalls of potentates and of whole civilisations.

The religious quality of this codex extends, by the way, to its charitable perspective on Lydgate's patrons. While secular life and, I believe, secular courts come under its textual scrutiny, the manuscript subjects none of the poet's patrons to overt criticism. On the contrary, in 'Prayers to Ten Saints' (fols 70^r-1^v) Lydgate asks St George to pray for Henry VI and 'al this regioun' for victory over specifically worldly rather than spiritual enemies. The 'Letter to Gloucester', present in Harley 2255 (fols 45^v-7^r) and in other manuscripts, and excerpts from Lydgate's long *Fall of Princes* (fols 93^v-5^v) likewise link the poet explicitly to Lancastrian patronage. The 'Letter' and the

stanzas from the *Fall*, however, depict power and patronage in an ambivalent light,²¹ while the concern shown on Henry VI's behalf in 'Prayers to Ten Saints' takes up but a single line of verse out of the many hundreds in the manuscript. It is Christ rather than the Lancastrian monarch who establishes the true model of kingship; and Lydgate's praise of the former rings out in poems like the 'The Fifteen Ooes' (fols 104^r-10^v), which describes the Lord as 'Above all kyngis kyng of most puissaunce' (fol. 107^v, l. 170) despite His 'meek passioun' (fol. 106^v, l. 144). Even if Lydgate's version of the 'Fifteen Ooes' resembles other fifteenth-century versions of this poem in rendering Christ as a more passive Saviour than He had been in earlier versions,²² it still acknowledges the Lord alone as supreme king. This notion would hardly have shocked anyone at the time, whether Lancastrian king or Yorkist usurper; but it is precisely this use of Christian transcendence which enables the scribe to elide, almost completely, the social and historical conditions both of his own labours and of Lydgate's Lancastrian commissions, the latter merely hinted at in 'The Letter to Gloucester' and the excerpts from the *Fall*.

The first item in Harley 2255, '*Consulo quisquis eris*' (fols 1^r-3^r) translates and expands a Latin couplet which the scribe has included as a prefacing rubric: '*Consulo quisquis eris, qui pacis federa queris, consonus esto lupis, cum quibus esse cupis*' [I counsel whoever you may be who seek treaties of peace to be agreeable towards wolves, with whom you desire to be]. Commentators disagree on the poem's merits: one finds its message 'pestilent' while another attacks its 'pointless absurdity'.²³ What they do agree on is that in its proverbial wisdom it approximates to 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do'²⁴ and, at least on the surface, offers deeply contradictory advice. The first eight stanzas counsel readers to conform themselves to prevailing morality, or rather to the lack thereof; the second half of the poem, also comprising eight stanzas, implicitly repudiates this specious advice by appealing to higher, absolute standards of conduct. Recalling the theme of Chaucer's lyric 'Truth'²⁵ though with an even more explicitly religious thrust, the second part of '*Consulo*' urges love of God above all else, though there is nothing in the opening lines of the poem which prepares the reader for the speaker's later abrupt volte-face:

I conseyl what so euyr thou be
Off policye foresight and prudence:
Yiff thou wilt lyve in pees and vnite
Conforme thy sylff and thynk on this sentence:
Wher so evere thou hoold residence,

Among woluyss be woluyssh of corage,
Leoun with leouns, a lamb for innocence.
Lyke the audience, so vtir thy language.

The vnycorn is cauth with maydenys song
By dispocicioun, record of scripture;
With cornerawntys make thy nekke long;
In pondys deepe thy prayes to recure;
Among ffoxis be ffoxissh of nature;
Mong ravynours thynk for avantage.
With empty hand men may noon haukys lure;
And lyke the audience, so vtir thy language. (fol. 1^r, ll. 1-16)

The first letter of the poem, 'I', incorporates a heraldic emblem, 'azure three crowns or (arms of the Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds)',²⁶ which thus trumpets monastic authority as a prelude to the text it announces. For this reason the '*Consulo*' seems a decidedly baffling poem, at least in its first stanzas. The opening text of a manuscript whose contents were, it has been said, 'selected for their appropriateness to the cloister' counsels not transcendent piety but opportunism: 'Mong ravynours thynk for avantage. / With empty hand men may noon haukys lure'. The advice 'Conforme thy sylff' better befits life outside the cloister, indeed life at court;²⁷ and Alexandra Gillespie has argued that '[t]his sort of instability may be linked to anxiety about the definition of the court itself, its boundaries disrupted by the verbal, rather than real "felaship" ([fol. 1^v] l. 29) between a king and his flattering courtiers, its hierarchies overturned by the difficulty of maintaining a consistent rhetoric of authority, given the insistent relativity of language'.²⁸ Gillespie further argues that the poem's speaker resolves this apparent 'verbal anarchy' by suggesting that princes ought to practice the virtue counselled by philosophical advisers.²⁹ Strictly speaking, Gillespie is concerned primarily to shed light on the relationship between the poem as it appears in Wynkyn de Worde's c. 1510 quarto edition of *The prouerbes of Lydgate* and the climate surrounding the accession of Henry VIII, an event which presented new opportunities for would-be courtiers. Even so, her argument usefully illuminates the unstable vicissitudes of courtly life at any time, vicissitudes obscured by '*Consulo*' in the fifteenth-century manuscript context of Harley 2255 as well as in de Worde's early printed edition.

The topical elusiveness of this poem seems to have been a matter of conscious choice on Lydgate's part. In the first half of the text, the speaker indirectly warns of the Placebos who plague the world at all times, not only in his own lifetime; and, in the second half, he aspires to equal universality when he advises all spiritual pilgrims in this world to reflect on the lasting order of God's transcendence. While conceding the real purpose of Lydgate's generalities, however, I share Gillespie's assumption that political and historicist readings of '*Consulo*' can serve to amplify the implicit critique of court life which those generalities tactically muffle. Not only in de Worde's imprint but also in Harley 2255 '*Consulo*' may well address life at court as well as life in the world. If this is the case, then the sharp contrast in tone between the first and second halves of the poem suggests, as we shall see, that there can be no middle way between life in time and life in eternity, or, to be somewhat less abstract, between self-compromise at the royal court and self-fulfillment through prayer within the monastic cloister. A former life needs to be rejected if a new one is to be fully embraced, and it is possible that the former life hinted at here is Lydgate's own career as a Lancastrian court poet.

As commentators on '*Consulo*' have pointed out, the second half of the poem clarifies its real meaning, urging the kind of complete loyalty to God and His directives which the speaker of the poem judges to be nobler than advancement in this world. Mere conformism in ethical matters diminishes one's humanity. What distinguishes the first from the second half of '*Consulo*' is that the former indirectly warns us that should we mindlessly adopt the world's standards we shall reap the whirlwind, while the latter explicitly exhorts us not to make that choice. Immediately before the section in which the speaker declares his own view of the matter in his role as translator of the proverb, he illustrates the dangers of adhering to convention; at this point, mock prescription (e.g. 'Among woluyss be woluyssh of corage') is left behind in favour of earnest if exasperated description:

This litel ditee concludith in menyng:
Who that cast hym this rewle for to kepe,
Mot conforme hym lyke in euery thyng,
Wher he shal byde, vnto the felashipe;
With wachmen wake; with sloggy folkes sleepe;
With woodmen wood; with frentyk folk savage;
Renne with beestys; with wilde wormys creepe;
And like the audience, vtir thy language. (fol. 2^r, ll. 49-56)

In lines 50-1, Lydgate no longer gives advice but rather asserts that private decisions will lead to public consequences ('Who that cast hym...Mot conforme hym...'): unlike St Benedict's own *Regula*, which was intended to restrain appetites and to lead monks heavenward, the *rewle* of ethical accommodation to the world endangers the spiritual integrity which ensures one's humanity. Pearsall finds the imagery ineffective and argues that the poem is 'awkward and fumbling',³⁰ but it is precisely those people who reject God whom Lydgate wants to depict as awkward and fumbling: the breathless pace of lines 53-5 suggests the poet's bewilderment at the inchoate condition into which those without principles hurl themselves. Such persons, in living like 'beestys' and 'wilde wormys', become hybrids of human will and bestial behaviour, more inwardly corrupt than even the prostitute of 'The Hood of Green' (fols 153^v-6^v) whose skin alone is likened to that of 'an howndfyssh or of an hake' (fol. 154^v, l. 58). Although the first part of '*Consulo*' conjures up a world in which human beings in effect must imitate wild animals if they would thrive in a climate hostile to ethical principle, the second part, prefaced with the rubric 'verba translatoris' (fol. 2^r), hints that this *translator* will have the last word by appealing to transcendent absolutes, in effect translating the 'conseyl' to a higher plane. Even the first stanza's laudable goal of 'pees and vnite' is qualified in the poem's second half by the exhortation 'In cheef love god, and with thy love ha dreded, / And be feerful ageyn hym to trespace' (fol. 2^r, ll. 59-60). Here is an early announcement of that theme of transcendence which pervades the entire anthology and calls to order the seemingly wayward 'counsels' of the first part of '*Consulo*'.

It is worth dwelling for a few moments on Lydgate's critical recontextualisation, in this poem and elsewhere in the manuscript, of otherwise perfectly sensible secular values which appear in his longer works in a more flattering light. '[P]olicye foresight and prudence', counselled in the poem's second line, are not necessarily bad in themselves: indeed, Lydgate elsewhere remarks on them neutrally or even extols them, as he does in *The Fall of Princes* and *The Siege of Thebes*.³¹ Nevertheless, practicing these same virtues to seek merely temporal ends may jeopardise one's soul, at least according to the logic of the '*Consulo*', because doing so enables one to thrive amidst the rapacious. Even 'pees and vnite' (fol. 1^r, l. 3) can lead to moral decay if they result in one's self-accommodation to surrounding evils. Justified elsewhere as part of a Lancastrian effort towards dynastic self-legitimation,³² and defended even in 'A Praise of Peace' (fols 21^r-4^r),³³ which will be discussed in a moment, earthly peace and unity finally matter

less to the Black Monk than salvation in Heaven. To pursue this, one must, in the wording of the aforementioned poem, 'Live in quyete fro sclandre and diffame; / Our Lord Ihesus he muste love and drede' (fol. 22^r, ll. 58-9). Although 'A Praise of Peace' can be described as a pro-Lancastrian poem in that it defends Henry V ('The ffifte herry preevyd a good knyht [. . .]' (fol. 24^v, l. 177)), even it indicates that the work needed to bring about lasting concord must always be a work-in-progress. Rather than ending with the realisation of earthly goals by earthly kings, sincere efforts at peace must begin with an otherworldly, spiritual impulse unburdened by political aspirations. '*Consulo*' expresses a similar idea in somewhat different terms: while it offers no explicit praise for the ruling dynasty, it makes essentially the same point that 'A Praise of Peace' does, that supernatural rewards outweigh temporal successes because the former prove more substantial than the latter. This theme recurs in the poem 'The World is Variable' (fols 126^v-8^v), a fourteen-stanza poem apparently unique to Harley 2255 and very loosely organised around the theme of the untrustworthiness of earthly conditions. Warning in an Aesopian vein that antagonists in the animal kingdom neither get on well with one another nor observe treaties of peace (fol. 127^r, ll. 41-8), the poem suggests that there is such a thing as specious concord, 'Colowryd tetry' (fol. 127^r, l. 47), the result of dishonest arrangements which harm everyone. The speaker of 'The World Is Variable' never criticises specific kings or policies; he merely complains that those who are 'contrarye' to order in the state 'destroyeth the body political' (fol. 128^r, l. 79). '*Consulo*' and 'A Praise of Peace' are similarly general in implying that the bonds of society are but an evanescent afterglow of an enduring, higher power.

This generalised emphasis on disembodied sanctity appears in many poems in the manuscript, but 'A Praise of Peace' (fols 21^r-4^v) merits further consideration because its ostensible subject is secular rather than sacred harmony, and because it appears to lavish praise on a temporal ruler, Henry V. As we have already seen, while this poem concedes that

The ffifte herry preevyd a good knyht
By his prowesse and noble chivalrye,
Sparyd nat to pursue his riht,
His tittle of Fraunce and of Normandye (fol. 24^v, ll. 177-80),

it also points out that the same king 'Deyed in his conquest, and we shall alle dye' (fol. 24^v, l. 181). Supernatural concord is needed. Indeed Lydgate prays that 'God [will] graunt vs alle now aftir his discees / To sende vs grace', which will allow France and England 'to live in parfihit pees' (fols 24^v-4^r (*sic* in the manuscript; the proper numbering should be fol. 25^r), ll. 183-5). By contrast, however, 'Criste cam with pees at his Natiuite' (fol. 24^r (for 25^r), l. 185): although Lydgate is silent on the matter, the pairing of these figures impresses upon one the difference between king and Saviour. Christ ushered peace into the world immediately He entered it, while lasting peace would elude Henry V and, from the poem's perspective, continues to elude the two realms of France and England. All Lydgate can do is to pray that after we have ended our lives, we too shall 'come to evir lastyng pees' (fol. 24^r (i.e. 25^r), l. 192). Familiar enough with politics, Lydgate understood why the late Henry V had sought the throne of France; but in 'A Praise of Peace' he aspires, and asks his readers to aspire, to a transcendent peace that passeth understanding. Again we find a theme which has been anticipated in '*Consulo*': although that poem's monastic author warns us that we shall have to assume extremes of guises to conform to and succeed by the world's standards, he also prays that Christ will 'gouverne our wordly pilgrimage', preserve the distinction 'Tween vice and vertu' from the tendency to confuse them, and speak through human beings: 'to vtren our language' (fol. 3^r, ll. 118-19). Lydgate evidently hopes that what his readers 'utter' as a result of Christ's grace will be more coherent than what they hear around them.

While '*Consulo*' anticipates connections with texts which are distant from it within Harley 2255, it admits of more suggestive links with its near neighbours. The second poem in the manuscript, entitled by MacCracken 'As a Mydsomer Rose' (fols 3^v-5^v), shares with '*Consulo*' a scepticism about purely human ability while praising Christ as the source of all higher virtues—'Counsayl, confort, discrecioun, and prudence,/ Prouisioun, foresight, and providence' (fol. 3^v, ll. 4-5). That the last four can be read as synonyms for one another reflects either Lydgate's trademark rhetorical redundancy or his desire to drive home his point so that none will fail to grasp it. The first virtue in this list being 'Counsayl', the scribe of Harley 2255 echoes the declamatory first line of the preceding poem. The verbal link must have been exploited consciously, for the truly transcendent counsel of the second half of '*Consulo*' finds an immediate parallel in 'As a Mydsomer Rose'. Having evoked animal behaviour purposefully in the first poem, Lydgate imagines an Aesopian parliament in the second in order to underscore folly in the

world of politics (fols 3^v-4^r, ll. 25-39). Lee Patterson has argued that in *The Siege of Thebes* Lydgate tacitly admits 'that poetry and power can never be brought to a perfect identity of purpose',³⁴ and it is a point which 'Rose' makes with abundant clarity in its refrain 'Al stant on chaung, lyk a mydsomer roose' (fol. 4^r, l. 40 and *passim*). Neither the illustrious personages of biblical Israel nor the heroic figures of antiquity can withstand the mutability of time, especially when they enjoy power or privilege in this life. The former comprise David, Solomon, Absalom and Jonathan (fol. 4^v, ll. 65-72); while the Greco-Roman tradition is represented by Julius Caesar, Pyrrhus, Alexander the Great, Cicero, Homer and Seneca (fol. 5^r, ll. 73-88). Recalling Lydgate's longer productions, the references to 'Troian knyhtis, grettest of alliaunce' (fol. 5^r, l. 93) and 'The Theban legioun, example of cheularye' (fol. 5^v, l. 99) are especially important. All of these pale in comparison to Christ the eternal Rose:

It was the Roose of the bloody feeld,
Roose of Iericho that greuh in Beedlem:
The five Roosys portrayed in the sheeld,
Splayned in the baneer at Ierusalem.
The sonne was clips and dirk in euery rem
Whan Crist Ihesu five wellys lyst vncloose
Toward Paradys, callyd the rede strem,
Off whos five woundys prent in your hert a Roose.
(fol. 5^v, ll. 113-20)

The turn to Christ decisively abandons the pagan heroism of the pre-Christian past and signals a major preoccupation of Harley 2255 as a whole: Lydgate's self-distancing, or the scribe's distancing of Lydgate, from the subjects of his Lancastrian commissions. In the poet's view, the glory of Christ's wounds outlasts that of the heroes who suffered at Troy, Thebes and elsewhere, partly because of the redemptive power of the Crucifixion *in se*, and partly because of the role worshippers are expected to play in perpetually remembering that redemptive event. The importance of recalling the significance of Christ's blood is acknowledged in this poem and in others in the codex, e.g. in 'The Fifteen Ooes of Christ' (fols 104^r-10^v):

Fro thy ffive woundis so large a flood
Thoruh al the world the streamys did sprede
To wassh our surfetis with thy precious blood.

(fol. 109^r, ll. 246-8)

Although not especially 'mystical' poems, 'The Fifteen Ooes of Christ' and 'As a Mydsomer Rose' ably capture the increasing emphasis on the physicality of Christ which had come to characterise lay devotion in fifteenth-century East Anglia and throughout England.³⁵ In this manuscript, that piety becomes a vehicle which enables the Lydgatean speaker to renounce courtly aspirations.

His moralisation always reveals Lydgate to be a teacher or spiritual adviser, but the nature and meaning of that moralisation in part depend on its manuscript contexts. Seth Lerer intriguingly claims that the verse collected in Huntington Library MS 140, for example, 'becomes progressively less exemplary and more explicitly pedagogic' as the reader proceeds from Lydgate's *Life of St Albon and St Amphibalus* and Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* to several Lydgatean lyrics found also in Harley 2255, like 'As a Mydsomer Rose', 'A Song of Vertu' (fols 12^r-14^r), 'A Prayer upon the Cross' (fols 111^r-111^v), and the verse *Testament* (fols 47^r-66^v).³⁶ According to Lerer, Huntington MS 140 constructs Lydgate's own paternal literary authority at the expense of its readers' autonomy: 'As its tone becomes more pedagogic, its audience becomes, in effect, more childish: more in need of direct instruction, but also more pointedly inscribed through the child-figures of the texts'.³⁷ Might not a poem like 'As a Mydsomer Rose' or 'Consulo' have affected or been intended to affect its readers in a similar way in Harley 2255? To some extent the latter codex does presuppose its readers' willingness to become children again, but insofar as it envisions a Gospel model for that return to childlike innocence, which I think it does (compare, for example, Luke 9. 46-8, 10. 21; 18. 15-17), Harley 2255 finally has different aims from those of Huntington MS 140. The latter, according to Lerer, 'codifies a kind of literary servitude to the example of Lydgatean authority with which it had begun and to which each of its poems has done homage'.³⁸ Instead, the Harley codex removes Lydgate from an exclusively 'literary' environment (if by 'literary' is meant something like 'relating to a secular poetic tradition inaugurated or reified by the master Chaucer') and restores him to the cloister. We might not suppose these two Lydgatean roles—courtly and cloistered—to be mutually exclusive, but medieval

scribes may have had their own reasons to keep them distinct from each other. More needs to be said about the intended audience of Harley 2255 than is possible in the present essay; whether they were monks (as I suspect)³⁹ or members of a lay confraternity associated with St Edmunds Abbey, the readers of this codex were intended to submit (willingly) to catechesis rather than to undergo 'infantilisation'.⁴⁰ Recalling the humane and self-critical protagonist of *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, the monkish narrator of the poems of Harley 2255 receives as well as imparts counsel, accrues authority even as he confesses his occasional blunders in life, and seeks to soar above the plane of either royal or literary politics. Just as the Christian dispensation eclipsed the glories of Thebes and Troy, so too Lydgate's strategic meditation on Christ and the Eternal Jerusalem at the very end of 'As a Mydsomer Rose' suppresses the naming of those earlier mighty cities and indeed his own earlier contribution to their afterlives. The last lines of that poem, quoted above, reflect the tone of much of the manuscript as a whole.

The devotional tenor of Harley 2255 drowns out the pomp and circumstance of Troy, Thebes and other epic matters wherever they appear in the codex. Individual poems which specifically recall those storied cities do so merely to announce their irrelevance save as cautionary tales; the short poems only hint at their histories rather than enlarging upon them in the manner of the longer 'courtly' works. 'Mesure Is Tresour' (fols 143^v-6^v), for example, recommends moderation and virtue to a wide range of contemporary social classes from popes and prelates (fol. 143^v, l. 11) all the way down to plowmen and ditch-diggers (fol. 145^v, ll. 105-6); the classical past is evoked, but only because its illustrious pagan civilisations yield a wealth of grim object lessons. The excesses of Alexander the Great had cost him dearly in the end, 'For which, ye lordys, lefft vp your eyen blynde' (fol. 144^r, l. 37), but indeed all the heroic achievements of Greece and Rome are swept away by Lydgate's categorical denunciation:

Knyghthood in Grece and Troye the Cite
Took hys principlys and next in Rome toun,
And in Cartage, a famous greet cuntre,
Recoord of Hanybal and wourthy Scipioun.
The greete debaatys and the devisioun
Among these kyngdammys by marcial labour,

Fynal cause of ther destruccioun,
Was fawte of vertu and lakkyng of mesure.

(fol. 144^r, ll. 41-8)

'Measure Is Tresour' and other short poems in Harley 2255 undermine the prestige of the ancient world more decisively than do Lydgate's longer translations such as *The Siege of Thebes*, the *Troy Book* and *The Fall of Princes*, which, while condemning certain of its aspects, also implicitly pay tribute to it in the course of their lavishly detailed and amplified sprawl. The tone of the short poems considered here is more straightforwardly anti-classical. Even so, it should be conceded that the impression made by any one of these texts depends in part on the company it keeps, as I have suggested above. Read in isolation, 'As a Mydsomer Rose' or 'Measure Is Tresour' might not seem especially critical of classical Greece, Rome and Troy; but when read as a constituent part of a manuscript like Harley 2255, each one intimates a theme which can be seen to govern the book as a whole.

Another poem in this manuscript, 'A Song of Vertu' (fols 12^r-14^r), may be read either as a commentary on secular poetic apprenticeship or as an expression of monastic piety, depending, perhaps, on the kind of codex in which the text appears. Lerer sees it in the former light: in his view, its presence in Huntington MS 140 'reaffirms the relationship of virtuous practice and ethical instruction'; and Lerer infers lay 'ethical instruction' from the poet's command to 'Reede in bookys of antiquyte, / Of oold stooryes beglad good thyng to heere'.⁴¹ I suspect that, regardless of the manuscript context of this particular poem, the phrase 'bookys of antiquyte' refers to the Benedictine *lectio divina*. The scribe who compiled Huntington MS 140 may well have had an agenda of his own and heard in 'A Song of Vertu' Lydgate's praise of profane as well as sacred literature. As a component text of Harley 2255, however, the poem clearly connects the reading of old books to monastic or perhaps lay religious 'virtuous practice'. This topic is not broached right away: rather, the poem first considers knights, merchants, mariners and messengers as instances of vocations which, like so many others, function in ways appropriate to their natures (fol. 13^r, ll. 57-62). In general terms, the undifferentiated, unspecified audience is counselled to 'Love hooly chirche' (fol. 13^r, l. 65), 'no pooreman oppresse' (fol. 13^r, l. 68), and 'In aduersite be pacient with meeknesse' (fol. 13^r, l. 71). In the tenth stanza, however, Lydgate finally addresses readers who lead a

specific kind of life well known to him, a life best enhanced by the reading of edifying books:

Touchyng also thyn occupacioun,
Depart thy tyme prudently on thre:
First in prayer and in orisoun.
Trauayl among is profitable to the.
Reede in bookys of antiquyte:
Of oold stooryes beglad good thyng to heere,
And it shal tourne to gret comodite.
Sewe aftir vertu and vertu thu shalt leere. (fol. 13^v, ll. 73-80)

These are highly evocative verses. Dividing his readers' day into times for 'prayer and [. . .] orisoun', 'Trauayl' and the reading of 'bookys of antiquyte' for the sake of hearing 'good thyng', Lydgate echoes St Benedict's exhortations to 'holy reading', 'prayer' and 'manual labour'.⁴² The 'bookys of antiquyte' or 'oold stooryes' recommended as part of this regimen are more likely to have been sacred than profane. If Lydgate had anything specific in mind, it could have been Scripture, John Cassian's *Conferences* or *Institutes*, Athanasius' *Life of St Antony*, or even the Benedictine *Rule* itself.⁴³ Whether cloistered or lay, the audience that Lydgate imagines are being asked to conform their lives to a monastic model. This seems to be the form of life commended in 'A Praise of Peace' as well, in which Lydgate moves from a consideration of the philosophical serenity in poverty shown by Diogenes (fol. 21^v, ll. 25-32) to a reflection upon the life of the Benedictine monk and priest:

Ther is also a pees contemplatif
Of parfiht men in ther professioun
As som that leede a solitary lif
In fastyng, prayng and devout orisoun,
Visite the poore and, of compassioun,
Nakyd and needy and hungry, socourlees
And poore in spirit, which shal haue ther guerdoun
With Crist to regne in his eternal pees. (fol. 21^v, ll. 33-40)

The lines praising solitude, fasting, praying and the singing of the divine office call to mind the monastic life proper, while the verses on ministering

to the needy remind us that long before Lydgate's time it had become common for Benedictine monks to be ordained as priests.⁴⁴

In 'A Song of Vertu', the stress in the line 'Touchyng also thyn occupacioun' (l. 73) should be laid, I think, on the possessive adjective *thyn*, for placed there the emphasis would serve to draw readers' attention away from the various kinds of *vita activa* mentioned earlier and to remind them of their own form of *vita contemplativa*. The moralistic speaker in the eleventh stanza urges one to 'Be no sluggard, fle from ydilness' (fol. 13^v, l. 81), the Benedictine's bugbear, and 'With vertuous lyff [to] take heed of this mateere' (fol. 13^v, l. 86). This counsel is explained in the next stanza when Lydgate encourages his reader, 'wrouht to be celestial' (fol. 13^v, l. 89), to rein in lustful desire ('flesshly and bestial' [fol. 13^v, l. 91]) as well as vanity (fol. 13^v, l. 92). Finally, the thirteenth stanza concludes the poem by urging the audience to recall their sins and show the 'contricioun' which makes possible 'Shriff, and hosyl and hooly repentaunce' (fol. 14^r, ll. 98-9). In its use of these specific words, 'A Song of Vertu' anticipates the ending of the next poem in the manuscript, 'A Pageant of Knowledge' (fols 14^r-17^r), even as it harks back to the final stanza of the earlier 'As a Mydsomer Rose' by exhorting penitents to confess their sins

With a cleer mynde of crystes passioun,
His.V.wonndys and blood that railleth down;
Vpon the cros he bouht the so deere,
Cleyme of his mercy to haue possessioun,
With hym to dwelle above the sterrys cleere.

(fol.14^r, ll. 100-4)

In light of the poem's gesture beyond the physical world towards unification with Christ in Heaven, it seems even more likely that the 'bookys of antiquyte' earlier thrust upon the reader (fol. 13^v, l. 77) are intended not to praise the classical tradition but to bury it. For their part, readers who heed Lydgate will 'Sewe afir vertu' (fol. 13^v, l. 80, and *passim*) until they have left Greece and Rome behind and arrived at the place where time itself no longer has meaning.

Transcendence is a clear *leitmotif* of Harley 2255, and one which the scribe sought to keep in his readers' minds by grouping together poems with similar topics and diction. Frequently remarked upon in the manuscript, the inadequacies of all that is 'chaungable' occupy Lydgate in the poem

immediately following 'A Song of Vertu' in the anthology, which MacCracken described as a variant of 'A Pageant of Knowledge' (fols 14^r-17^r). Contrasting 'The world so wyd' to 'The celyman so litel of stature' (fol. 14^r, ll. 1-2), this poem dwells on the merely 'mutable' (fol. 14^r, l. 3) nature of the earth itself. If readers but study closely their always changing surroundings, they will correctly judge 'this lyff a pilgrimage / In which ther is no stedfast abydyng' (fol. 16^v, ll. 135-6). Having disabused them of any exaggerated reckonings of the world's value, Lydgate then commands his audience to turn their gaze heavenward to pray to an utterly transcendent God,

the lord which is Eternal
That sitt so ferre above the sterrys sevene
In his Paleys moost Imperyal[.] (fol. 17^r, ll. 138-40)

For a moment the poem's readers may find themselves poised awkwardly between two worlds, one fickle but solid and just beneath their feet, the other eternal but 'ferre above' not only their grasp but also the celestial spheres themselves. Lydgate is there to bridge the abyss between creation and Creator. Echoing the end of 'A Song of Vertu' and sounding a theme suffused throughout the codex, this poem directs the faithful to ask God specifically for the grace which will enable 'Contricioun, shrift, [and] hoosyl' and carry them 'Toward that lyf wher ioye is ay lastyng' (fol. 17^r, ll. 142, 144).

As if to furnish the reader with additional means of arriving at 'that lyf', the seventh poem in the manuscript, '*Misericordias Domini in eternum cantabo*' (fols 17^r-21^r),⁴⁵ specifically praises divine mercy and mortal humility as sources of power in the monk's own struggles against pride. Bearing in mind Derek Pearsall's sensible caution against inferring Lydgate's personal feelings from his highly conventional expressions of piety,⁴⁶ we should still note that '*Misericordias*' urges a form of renunciation appropriate to this particular poet's courtly career. Lydgate acknowledges his awareness of 'songis' which celebrate heroic feats in the temporal realm, but he also indicates that he has abandoned them:

Ther be Canticulis of Conquest and victorye
That be songe at feestis marcial,
And ther be songis of palmys transitorye [i.e. 'transitory
triumphs']
With corious meetrys that be poetical;

Laureat tryvmphes, proud and Imperial
With boosty blowe in charys cleer shynyng.
Al this left off with voys memoryal,
Eternally thy Mercies I shal syng. (fol. 17^v, ll. 33-40)

The Black Monk implicitly renounces the 'Laureat tryvmphes' which had long occupied him. The 'Bildyng of Ylioun in many stoorly told' and the 'Getyng of Troye by the brasen hors' (fol. 18^r, ll. 58-9) interest him little now: of this achievement 'Gret boost is maad but as for me no fors' (fol. 18^r, l. 57). Similar apathy is now aroused by 'Thebes the Cite [which] was reysed and maad strong' (fol. 18^v, l. 75). From Statius and other classical poets who commemorated antique civilisations Lydgate takes pains to distance himself, asserting that

what so evir they wroot in ther feynyng,
Our lord Ihesu to preise and magneffye
Eternally his Mercies I shal syng. (fol. 18^v, ll. 78-80)

Among the great poets of history, Chaucer too is evoked: Lydgate's line 'Al this left off with voys memoryal' (fol. 17^v, l. 39) echoes the famous appeal to Polyhymnia 'Singest with vois memorial in the shade' in *Anelida and Arcite* (l. 18). It is unclear, however, whether by this intertextual link the Monk of Bury is genuinely paying tribute to his literary forebear or implicitly casting him off as well in order to turn completely to God. That Lydgate lifts the line from a Chaucerian poem partly indebted to Statius's *Thebaid* and places it in a poem renouncing Thebes, Statius and other classical *auctores* makes the latter interpretation plausible. At the end of the poem Lydgate enumerates the various categories of the blessed 'in the *heuenly* cristal toures / Wher evir is ioye and brihtnesse ay lastyng' (fol. 20^v, ll. 181-2, italics mine; note the echo in l. 182 of 'A Pageant of Knowledge', fol. 17^r, l. 144). He furthermore prays that Jesus may grant all of his readers the power to sing His mercies 'out of al mortal shoures' (fol. 20^v, l. 183), that is, beyond temporality itself. While the classical literary tradition doubtless mattered to Lydgate at all stages of his long career, Harley 2255 represents his attachment to the glories of ancient Greek and Roman culture as but a 'phase', as something that he has evolved beyond.

This 'evolution' is fully evident where Lydgate abandons the 'Bildyng of Ylioun' and the 'reys[ing]' of Thebes to turn instead to 'Patriarkys and

prophetis alle, / Apostlys, Martirs, bisshopis, confessoures' (fol. 20^v, '*Misericordias Domini*', ll. 177-78). Depending on their own places in biblical and Church history, these figures either typologically or literally praised Jesus. The sentiment is repeated later in the manuscript, in Lydgate's Englishing of '*Gloriosa dicta sunt de Te*' (fols 135^r-9^v).⁴⁷ Mary is the poem's subject; David typologically sang her splendours and figured her as the holiest city of all, easily eclipsing literal cities commemorated by poets of old:

Auctors sumtyme gaf a prys to Troye,
Laude and honour and comendacioun
In Remembraunce of hire old Ioye
That sumtyme was vsyd in that toun;
And eeke of Rome for domynacioun,
Citees that tyme of mooste souereynte.
But al hire boost may now be leyd a doun;
So gloryous thinges be songe and seid of the.

(fol. 135^v, ll. 25-32)

Praise of Troy and Rome should be 'leyd a doun' as if it were a book, like the heroic canticles, poems, songs and 'Laureat tryvmphes' which will be 'left off' by the monk who vows *Misericordias Domini in eternum cantabo* (fol. 17^v, ll. 33-40). Are we meant to recall the *Siege of Thebes*, *Troy Book* and *Fall of Princes*, through which Lydgate had perpetuated the 'boost' of pagan cultures even while tracing their demises? Recalling the wording of '*Misericordias Domini*' (fol. 20^v, ll. 177-78), Lydgate in the '*Gloriosa dicta sunt*' writes that Mary is

Of Patryarkys the honour and the glorye,
And of prophetys chief fundacioun,
To the apostelys laude of ther victorye,
And to martirs her laureat Renoun,
Of confessours the consolacioun. (fol. 139^v, ll. 217-21)

These poems and others, such as 'A Praise of Peace' (esp. fol. 24^r-24^v, ll. 153-68) and 'Mesure is Tresour' (fol. 144^r, ll. 41-8, discussed above), represent the supersession of Judeo-Christian over pagan themes as linear historical progress, even as the scribe of Harley 2255, in organising materials under the seal of St Edmund's Abbey, figures it as a spatial displacement. That is to

say, certain of the poems and the coat of arms on fol. 1^r of Harley 2255 relegate the court to the background of Lydgate's career while evoking the monastery as an immediately present physical place, one where a monk can retire to the contemplative life after enduring trials and tribulations in the world. Monastic life is hinted at or explicitly described in 'A Praise of Peace', 'A Song of Vertu', *The Testament of Dan John Lydgate*, 'The Legend of Seynt Gyle', and 'To St Edmund'; and within this textual space, the matters of Troy, Thebes and Rome cease to matter at all. 'Laureat tryvmphes' yield pride of place to the 'laureat Renoun' of Mary ('*Gloriosa dicta sunt*', fol. 139^v, l. 220) and to the enduring example of the saintly East Anglian monarch himself, the 'laureat marter stable as a stoon wall' ('To St Edmund', fol. 152^v, l. 63). Lydgate may have come gradually to renounce courtly life and courtly tastes and to favour the use of the term 'laureate' in hagiographical rather than purely secular poetic contexts. This is the impression given by Harley 2255, despite the conventionality of the *Testament*, '*Deus in nomine tuo saluum me fac*' (fols 146^v-8^r), 'God is myn helpere' (fols 148^r-150^r) and other poems cited already.⁴⁸

A natural objection to my hypothesis here is that Lydgate's authorial roles cannot be so neatly divided into worldly courtier and retiring monk, and the objection is well taken, for these roles overlap in the poet's work. Moreover, although Harley 2255 extols Christlike humility, it bears the sign of power. If the codex is connected with the Benedictine abbey of Bury St Edmunds, 'one of the half-dozen richest abbeys in England',⁴⁹ then its orbit around the prestige and largesse associated with Lancastrian royal favour does matter. Arresting the reader's attention on the very first page of the manuscript, St Edmund's coat of arms proclaims monastic privilege even as it emblematises monastic transcendence. As Gail McMurray Gibson has observed, however, 'if the cloister wall came less and less to stand for the physical reality of contemplative withdrawal in the busy world of a monastic center like Bury St. Edmunds, it still remained a cogent and powerful *symbol* of the mental aspiration toward heaven that defined the ideal spiritual life'.⁵⁰ Bury's accommodation to worldly power diminished neither Lydgate's earnestness in calling for the renunciation of that power, nor the sincerity with which this textual appeal was copied in Harley 2255. The scribe, consciously or otherwise, has elevated Lydgate above the trend of what Christopher Cannon has tactfully described as the later medieval 'variation' from St Benedict's own early ideals.⁵¹ In doing so, he has selected texts which amplify Lydgate's concern for the spiritual welfare of his audience.

Poems like 'The Letter to Gloucester' (fols 45^v-7^r), *The Testament of Dan John Lydgate* (fols 47^r-66^v), the lengthened version of '*Deus in nomine tuo saluum me fac*' preserved here (fols 146^v-8^r), and 'God is myn helpere' (fols 148^r-50^r) stand out in their attempt to render convincingly the figure of an elderly monk who, while preparing to depart this life, is keen to offer advice relevant not only to himself but to his readers as well.

A few additional cautions are appropriate, however. Scholars would agree that Lydgate's advisory voice is a conscious response to the conventional piety of fifteenth-century England. As Rosemary Woolf has pointed out, the piety of the medieval lyric often springs less from the unique feelings of its author than from his or her sources and, ultimately, from devotional tradition.⁵² Derek Pearsall situates himself firmly in Woolf's camp by downplaying hints of autobiography in conventional-sounding poems like the *Testament*.⁵³ But much can be made of even the illusion of Lydgate's 'personality' in this and in other poems, an illusion heightened by the scribe of Harley 2255. Whoever he was, this person sought to elicit from readers a sympathetic response to a person named John Lydgate who wished to write for an audience; a poet who would appear to be more than a mere author-figure or a disembodied voice parroting bland, institutionally approved moralisation. Commenting on the 'notional' poet laureateship emerging from the speaking voices of texts like the *Troy Book*, Robert Meyer-Lee writes that '[i]n the pose of a laureate, Lydgate is at once idealized and historically concrete; his poetic "I" signifies a specific, flesh-and-blood person who at the same time is a personification of literary and moral authority'.⁵⁴ This authority clearly emerges in a different work like the *Testament*, despite, or rather in part because of, its revelation of the monk's earlier bad behaviour as a novice; in fact, this seemingly confessional quality enhances rather than diminishes one's sense of Lydgate as a real person.⁵⁵

In this anthology Lydgate's range of literary topics and public stances has been consciously narrowed, the poet himself presented as a primarily monastic rather than courtly or even 'occasional' versifier, and one with an almost tangible commitment to his pastoral vocation. This persona may be a fiction, a 'voice' articulated by the text as opposed to an actual 'presence';⁵⁶ and even the manuscript's intended audience of like-minded devout Catholics ready to accompany Lydgate on a textual pilgrimage of faith may amount to nothing more than an 'imagined community', their ostensible orthodoxy a hoped-for, fanciful construct of both the poet and the scribe.⁵⁷ Certainly the manuscript 'fashions' its audience by appealing to the orthodox faithful; all

but ignored are dissenters like the Lollards, who remained active in Norfolk and Suffolk well into the fifteenth century.⁵⁸ On occasion, these become the poet's explicit target: in 'Mesure Is Tresour', Lydgate explains that the duty of ecclesiastics, 'Spiritual heerdys' (fol. 146^r, l. 123), is to guard Christ's flock against

wolvys fell rygour,
That heretikys quenche nat the lyght
Of Crystes feith nor of iust mesour. (fol. 146^r, ll. 126-8).

Such references are rare, however. If one attempted to generalise about East Anglian religious attitudes on the basis of this manuscript alone, filled as it is with its reverence for the institutional Church, its indulgences and its saints, one would mistakenly suppose that the region had scarcely scented a whiff of heresy. Yet while the intended audience of this codex was limited and select, its exclusivity does not necessarily make that readership a fiction. Lydgate and the compiler of Harley 2255 may have had specific readers in mind; they certainly trusted what their own instincts told them about prevailing literary and devotional tastes; and they were sufficiently attuned to orthodox East Anglian piety to accommodate those tastes.

What I hope I am showing, even in an incomplete survey of the manuscript's contents like this, is that the 'compiling presence' behind Harley 2255—to borrow Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards' useful term⁵⁹—consciously seeks to depict Lydgate as a poet whose real treasures had been laid up first in Heaven, next in Bury St Edmunds, and last and least in Westminster. Lydgate's poems need not be 'given the last word' on the matter of their interpretation in all circumstances, but the 'first word', so to speak, needs to be heeded with an especially attentive ear.⁶⁰ As readers of this manuscript with purposes far removed from those of its original audience, we do well at least to acknowledge the social realities of its composition, the process whereby author, scribe and illustrator sought to preserve for posterity a Benedictine monk's reflections on the divine end of human life.⁶¹ John Lydgate wore many masks, however, and the Harley short poem anthology which we have been considering here favours one role out of the many which he assumed in his long life. In a valuable recent article in *PMLA*, Seth Lerer explores the idiosyncrasy and fragmentariness of medieval writing when recovered in its original manuscript contexts. 'The idea of the anthology', he observes, 'controls much of the English medieval notion of the literary'.⁶²

This insight applies as well to the anthology of Lydgateana considered here as to any other codex, for its scribe sought to control contemporary notions of an author whose vast output encouraged selective compilation. Building upon Ralph Hanna's remarks on manuscript circulation in his book *Pursuing History*, Lerer points out that anthologies and miscellanies 'represent "private, individual canons" rather than global ideas of canonicity or literariness'.⁶³ The Lydgate of Harley 2255 is, if not quite a fiction, at least a collaborative creation by a scribe who sought to intensify the devotional impulse already present in Lydgate's works. The author who emerges from this codex is something of a 'private, individual' Lydgate, a Benedictine monk rather than 'poet-propagandist to the Lancastrian dynasty', a moral counsellor well suited for a readership comprising either monks or, perhaps, male and female members of the lay confraternity of St Edmund's Abbey.⁶⁴ Although in Harley 2255 Lydgate seems to soar beyond the constraints of patronage in order to alight at the monastery, represented as the last stop before the Celestial Jerusalem, even this anthology does not define the poet for all time. Rather, it selects from a range of didactic, hagiographic, satiric and courtly roles which fifteenth-century scribes and readers understood to be simultaneously representative of Lydgate, commensurate with the prestige and sanctity of St Edmund's Abbey, and only somewhat less 'variable' than the world in which the Monk of Bury himself had had to live.

NOTES

¹ This essay originated with research undertaken at the British Library in the summers of 2002-04 and papers based on it presented at the International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, in July 2003; at Canisius College in Buffalo, New York in November of the same year; and at the 'Text and Contexts' conference at Ohio State University in October, 2004. For helpful suggestions and encouragement at various stages of this project, I wish to thank the participants in those conferences as well as Frank Coulson, the conference organiser at Ohio State; A. S. G. Edwards; Alfred Hiatt; George Keiser; Stephen Reimer; Paul Thomas, the session organizer at Leeds; Andrew Wawn; and the anonymous reader for *Leeds Studies in English*. Any injudicious arguments are mine alone. Thanks also are due to my friends and English hosts Kevin Rea and Jennifer Rhoads; to my colleagues at Canisius College who supported this project, especially by means of a Summer Research Grant awarded me in 2004 by the Dean's Office; and to the staff of the British Library Manuscripts Room for permission to consult MS Harley 2255.

² For general studies and bibliography, see especially Walter Schirmer, *John Lydgate: A Study in the Culture of the XVth Century*, translated by Ann E. Keep (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961); Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970); Alain Renoir and C. David Benson, 'John Lydgate', in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500*, vol. 6 (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1980), pp. 1809-1920, 2071-2175; and Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate (1371-1449): A Bio-bibliography* (Victoria: University of Victoria Press, 1997).

³ On the Middle English 'anthology', see Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards, 'Literary Texts', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Volume III: 1400-1557*, ed. by Lotte Hellinga and J. B. Trapp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 555-75; and Seth Lerer, 'Medieval English Literature and the Idea of the Anthology', *PMLA*, 118 (2003), 1251-67, especially pp. 1255 and 1265, n. 8. Two other manuscripts of Lydgate's religious verse are related to MS Harley 2255: Jesus College, Cambridge MS 56 and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud misc. 683. These have been discussed by Eleanor Prescott Hammond, 'Two British Museum Manuscripts (Harley 2251 and Adds. 34360): A Contribution to the Bibliography of John Lydgate', *Anglia*, 28 (1905), 1-28 (pp. 24-5); Julia Boffey, 'Short Texts in Manuscript Anthologies: The Minor Poems of John Lydgate in Two Fifteenth-Century Collections', in *The Whole Book: Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany*, ed. by Stephen G. Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 69-82 (pp. 71-2 and n. 17); and A. S. G. Edwards, 'Fifteenth-Century Middle English Verse Author Collections', in *The English Medieval Book: Studies in Memory of Jeremy Griffiths*, ed. by A. S. G. Edwards, Vincent

Gillespie and Ralph Hanna (London: The British Library, 2000), pp. 101-12 (p. 104). These two manuscripts and the comments on them by Boffey and Hammond are cited also by Stephen Reimer and Pamela Farvolden, 'Arms and the Manuscript: The Date and Provenance of Harley 2255', forthcoming in *The Journal of the Early Book Society*, 8 (2005).

⁴ When citing Lydgate's poems, I use for the sake of convenience the titles supplied by Henry Noble MacCracken in *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate, Part 1: Religious Poems*, EETS, e.s. 107 (London: Oxford University Press, 1911 (for 1910)); *Part 2: Secular Poems*, EETS, o.s. 192 (London: Oxford University Press, 1934 (for 1933); repr. 1997). When quoting them, I provide first the folio number from Harley 2255 and then line numbers as they appear in the corresponding printed texts in MacCracken. In general I have followed MacCracken's capitalisation, removal of caesural virgules, and expansion of scribal abbreviations. In the present study such abbreviations are expanded silently, however (differently from MacCracken's use of italicised letters, e.g. 'dispoecioun'); and I depart from MacCracken's use of boldface type to indicate underscoring of words in the manuscript. The light modern punctuation is my own, but parallel indentation of lines within stanzas is as found in the manuscript.

⁵ The last lines of 'A Praise of Peace' appear on what should be fol. 25^r but in fact has been erroneously numbered fol. 24^r by a modern paginator. To avoid confusion I have followed the erroneous pagination, which continues throughout the codex.

⁶ Boffey and Edwards, 'Literary Texts', pp. 558-9. Boffey and Edwards remark on an increasingly widespread form of manuscript production after c. 1400, that of the 'coherent collection [which] parallels the vogue for the single-work codex by amalgamating the works of a single author': 'Literary Texts', p. 558. Compare Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 375-76; Julia Boffey and John J. Thompson, 'Anthologies and Miscellanies: Production and Choice of Texts', in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375-1475*, ed. by Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 279-315, especially pp. 279-80; and Linne Mooney, 'Professional Scribes? Identifying English Scribes Who Had a Hand in More Than One Manuscript', in *New Directions in Later Medieval Manuscript Studies: Essays from the 1998 Harvard Conference*, ed. by Derek Pearsall (York: York Medieval Press / Boydell Press, 2000), pp. 131-41, especially pp. 138-9.

⁷ See also *The Index of Middle English Verse*, ed. by Carleton Brown and Rossell Hope Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), no. 2237. The *Index* will be cited hereafter as *IMEV*. For the debate about this poem, see especially Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, pp. 77-8, where he takes issue with MacCracken's rejection of it from the Lydgate canon in *Minor Poems*, I xxxi.

⁸ *John Lydgate*, p. 77. Regarding Harley 2255, A. S. G. Edwards writes that it 'is seemingly in some way connected with Lydgate's own monastery there [at Bury St Edmunds]': 'Fifteenth-Century Middle English Verse Author Collections', p. 104. See also note 39, below.

⁹ Hammond first speculated on a connection between Curteys and Harley 2255 in 'Two British Museum Manuscripts', pp. 24-25. According to Derek Pearsall, Harley 2255 'is an old MS., a very good one, with texts of excellent authority, and it was probably prepared under Lydgate's direction as an anthology of his own religious and didactic verse, as a personal present for his abbot' (*John Lydgate*, p. 77), a view echoed later in the same author's *Bio-bibliography*, p. 82. As he indicates in his book-length study (*John Lydgate*, p. 82, note 65), this theory was advanced also by Samuel Moore, 'Patrons of Letters in Norfolk and Suffolk, c. 1450', *PMLA*, 27 (1912), 188-207 (p. 207); and by Hammond, *English Verse between Chaucer and Surrey* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1927; repr. New York: Octagon Press, 1965), p. 79.

¹⁰ 'Arms and the Manuscript'. This study takes issue with Hammond's speculation about the coat of arms in the manuscript (fol. 1^v) in 'Two British Museum Manuscripts', pp. 24-25. Edwards, 'Fifteenth-Century [. . .] Author Collections', agrees with Reimer that '[t]he earlier view that the opening initial contains Curteys's arms seems incorrect' (p. 111, n. 29). I wish to thank Professors Reimer and Farvolden for showing me their essay, with its very full description of the manuscript, prior to its publication.

¹¹ See also Kathleen Scott's remarks about Harley 2255 in 'Lydgate's Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund: A Newly-Located Manuscript in Arundel Castle', *Viator*, 13 (1982), 335-66 (p. 343, n. 33). I assume that one scribe rather than two compiled Harley 2255, but the matter is far from settled: see Scott, 'Lydgate's Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund', p. 343, n. 33; and Reimer and Farvolden, 'Arms and the Manuscript'.

¹² See the summary of the manuscript's contents in *A Catalogue of the Harleian Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 3 vols (1808; repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olm, 1973), II 592-4.

¹³ *John Lydgate*, p. 169. For a pertinent study of the monastic narrator of Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*, see Scott-Morgan Straker, 'Deference and Difference: Lydgate, Chaucer, and the *Siege of Thebes*', *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 52 (2001), 1-21. I am grateful to Alfred Hiatt for directing me to Straker's article.

¹⁴ The progress of this continuing debate cannot be evaluated here. James Simpson and Alessandra Petrina have independently challenged Pearsall's well-known refutation (in *John Lydgate*, pp. 14-16) of earlier arguments for a humanist Lydgate advanced by Walter Schirmer and Alain Renoir. See Simpson's *Oxford English Literary History: Volume 2: 1350-1545: Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 52 *et seq.*; and Petrina's *Cultural Politics in Fifteenth-Century England: The*

Case of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester (Leiden: Brill, 2004), especially pp. 282-4. For postscripts by both Pearsall and Simpson, see the former's 'Apotheosis of John Lydgate', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 35 (2005), 25-38; and Simpson's response in 'Not the Last Word', in the same issue of *JMEMS*, pp. 111-19.

¹⁵ An ability noted by Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, pp. 15, 131, 141-3; and A. J. Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1982), pp. 137-9. See also Lee Patterson, 'Making Identities in Fifteenth-Century England: Henry V and John Lydgate', in *New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Texts, Representing History*, ed. by Jeffrey Cox and Larry J. Reynolds (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 69-107 (especially pp. 96-7). For a perspicacious reading of Lydgate's complex attitudes towards Julius Caesar in his lone prose tract, see Maura Nolan, 'The Art of History Writing: Lydgate's *Serpent of Division*', *Speculum*, 78 (2003), 99-127. These penetrating studies show that while Lydgate may have objected to the violence and paganism of Greece and Rome, he did not do so unthinkingly but rather explored those cultures with sophisticated agendas of his own.

¹⁶ Christopher Cannon, 'Monastic Productions', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. by David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 316-48 (p. 341).

¹⁷ Recent pertinent studies of East Anglian piety include Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Victor I. Scherb, *Staging Faith: East Anglian Drama in the Later Middle Ages* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001); Theresa Coletti, *Mary Magdalene and the Drama of Saints: Theater, Gender, and Religion in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), esp. chapter 2, 'Some East Anglian Magdalenes', pp. 50-99.

¹⁸ On the impulse in Lydgate and Hoccleve towards the simultaneous memorialisation and 'decommissioning' of Chaucer's poetry, see John J. Thompson, 'After Chaucer: Resituating Middle English Poetry in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Period', in *New Directions in Later Medieval Manuscript Studies*, ed. by Pearsall, pp. 183-99.

¹⁹ No textual evidence proves a Lancastrian commission for the *Siege of Thebes* (or, to use James Simpson's preferred title, *The Destruction of Thebes*), though scholars have long noted that the work speaks to Henry V's French ambitions. See, for example, Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, p. 156; Patterson, 'Making Identities', pp. 74-5, 93-7; Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, pp. 105-06. Simpson puts forth his case for the renaming of *The Siege of Thebes* in "'Dysemol daies and fatal houres": Lydgate's *Destruction of Thebes* and Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*', in *The Long Fifteenth Century: Essays for Douglas Gray*, ed. by Helen Cooper and Sally Mapstone (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), pp. 15-33.

²⁰ For an intriguing study of the relationship between Lydgate's reputation and post-medieval *print* culture, see Joseph A. Dane and Irene Basey Beesemyer, 'The Denigration of John Lydgate: Implications of Printing History', *English Studies*, 81 (2000), 117-26.

²¹ Space limitations prevent me from developing this point here, but even a casual perusal of the 'Letter' and of the enormous *Fall of Princes* reveals this ambivalence.

²² Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-1580* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 248-53.

²³ '[T]he Advice is pestilent enough', according to the early nineteenth-century compiler of the contents of the manuscript in *A Catalogue of the Harleian Manuscripts*, p. 592, column 1. Derek Pearsall has called Lydgate's poem 'a peculiar piece of work' whose 'multiplication of instances [of conformism] leads him into [. . .] pointless absurdity'; '[t]he whole poem is awkward and fumbling: the limited applicability of the original proverb leaves Lydgate with no clear directive, and he gropes forward as if every breath will be his last' (*John Lydgate*, p. 209).

²⁴ Noted by several commentators: MacCracken, *Minor Poems*, II 750; Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, p. 209; Alexandra Gillespie, "'These proverbes yet do last": Lydgate, the Fifth Earl of Northumberland, and Tudor Miscellanies from Print to Manuscript', *Yearbook of English Studies*, 33 (2003), 215-32 (p. 223).

²⁵ E.g. 'Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth, beste, out of thy stal! / Know thy contree, look up, thank God of al' (ll. 18-19); the poem is printed in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn, general editor Larry Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), p. 653. Subsequent references to Chaucer's works will be to this edition.

²⁶ Kathleen Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts 1390-1490*, 2 vols (London: Harvey Miller, 1996), II 225 and 307, with specific reference to the arms as they appear in British Library MSS Harley 2278 and Yates Thompson 47, respectively.

²⁷ Despite their different contexts, the first part of the poem is also reminiscent of Arcite's far blunter advice to Palamon in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*: 'And therefore, at the kynge's court, my brother, / Ech man for hymself, ther is noon oother' (*Canterbury Tales*, frag. I, ll. 1181-2).

²⁸ "'These proverbes yet do last'", p. 223.

²⁹ "'These proverbes yet do last'", pp. 223-4.

³⁰ See above, note 23.

³¹ In *The Fall of Princes*, ed. by Henry Bergen, 4 vols, EETS, e.s. 121-4 (London: Oxford University Press, 1924-27), see I, ll. 5510-12; V, l. 1174. In *The Siege of Thebes*, ed. by Axel Erdmann and Eilert Ekwall, 2 vols, EETS, e.s. 108 and 125 (London: Oxford University Press, 1911-1930), see l. 682.

³² See *The Siege of Thebes*, ll. 4698-4703. For exhortations to peace and unity in short poems addressed to Henry VI, see e.g. 'The Title and Pedigree of Henry VI', ll. 76

and 156; 'Ballade to King Henry VI', ll. 126 and 140; 'Henry VI's Triumphal Entry into London', l. 448 (*Minor Poems*, II 615, 617, 629, 630 and 645, respectively).

³³ In this poem Lydgate asserts that striving for earthly peace can effectively preserve 'monarchies and famous regioun[s]' (fol. 22^r, l. 44) from strife.

³⁴ 'Making Identities', p. 93.

³⁵ The scholarship on late medieval English piety is vast, but see especially the works cited above in notes 17 and 22, and the following: Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992); and Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993). Rosemary Woolf notes Lydgate's poetic indebtedness, especially in the *Testament*, to contemporary Crucifixion iconography: *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages*, pp. 208-9.

³⁶ Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 100-8 (p. 106).

³⁷ *Chaucer and His Readers*, p. 108.

³⁸ *Chaucer and His Readers*, p. 114.

³⁹ This suspicion is hardly mine alone; Reimer and Farvolden ('Arms and the Manuscript') are the latest scholars to argue that Harley 2255 was produced for St Edmund's Abbey, and their reasons are the most convincing of all that have been adduced since Eleanor Hammond's time.

⁴⁰ Miri Rubin's analysis of Lydgate's 'Exposition of the *Pater Noster*' is especially useful in situating this poem and, by extension, others like it in their contemporary lay catechetical context: *Corpus Christi*, pp. 100-1. The whole chapter 'Beyond Design: Teaching and Reception of the Eucharist' (pp. 83-163) is especially rich.

⁴¹ *Chaucer and His Readers*, p. 107, though I print the text of the poem as it appears in Harley 2255 (fol. 13^v, ll. 77-8), including MS 'beglad' for 'be glad'.

⁴² 'Lectiones sanctas libenter audire, orationi frequenter incumbere'; 'Otiositas inimica est animae, et ideo certis temporibus occupari debent fratres in labore manuum, certis iterum horis in lectione divina': *The Rule of St Benedict, in Latin and English with Notes*, general editor Timothy Fry, OSB (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1981), chapters IV, ll. 55-6 and XLVIII, l. 1. This edition will be cited hereafter as *RSB*.

⁴³ On St Benedict's own programme of recommended readings for monks, see *RSB* chapter LXXIII, ll. 3-5 and the explanatory notes on p. 297.

⁴⁴ Dom Cuthbert Butler, *Benedictine Monachism: Studies in Benedictine Life and Rule*, 2nd edn (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1961), pp. 293-5.

⁴⁵ The refrain echoes Psalm 88, as noted by Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, p. 260.

⁴⁶ For example, in *John Lydgate*, pp. 5 and 17.

⁴⁷ Adapted from Psalm 87 (Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, p. 275).

⁴⁸ A number of seemingly unique poems appear in this manuscript, most but not all of which in the last thirty folia or so. While space prevents me from considering all of them here, they include 'The World is Variable', 'Mesure Is Tresoure', the final three seemingly autobiographical stanzas of '*Deus in nomine tuo saluum me fac*' (a poem extant in three other manuscripts without those stanzas), 'God Is Myn Helpere', 'Undir a park full prudently pyght' (IMEV 3821; the poem may not be Lydgate's), 'The Hood of Green', and 'Against Millers and Bakers'. Did this scribe have special access to a cache of Lydgatean verse available only at Bury? According to John J. Thompson, 'What is clear is that some of the religious houses of the day were not only important centres for the production and transmission of Middle English religious literature but also provided copyists with privileged access to the resources upon which sophisticated editorial judgements could be based': 'Textual Instability and the Late Medieval Reputation of Some Middle English Religious Literature', *Text: Transactions of the Society for Textual Scholarship*, 5 (1991), 175-94 (pp. 177-8, building on the work of A. I. Doyle (cited in note 12, p. 189)).

⁴⁹ Pearsall, *John Lydgate: A Bio-bibliography*, p. 12. Other studies of the Abbey include J. C. Cox, 'Houses of Benedictine Monks', in *The Victoria History of the County of Suffolk*, II, edited by William Page (London: Constable, 1907), pp. 56-72; A. B. Whittington, *Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk* (1971; London: English Heritage handbook, 1992, repr. 1999), based on the same author's 'Bury St. Edmunds Abbey: The Plan, Design and Development of the Church and Monastic Buildings', from 'Report of the Summer Meeting of the Royal Archaeological Institute at Ipswich, 1951', *Archaeological Journal* 108 (1951), pp. 168-87; and Robert Gottfried, *Bury St Edmunds and the Urban Crisis: 1290-1539* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 73-84.

⁵⁰ *Theater of Devotion*, pp. 127-8; italics in original.

⁵¹ 'Monastic Productions', pp. 316, 318. For his part, Butler concedes that 'the medieval presentation of Benedictine life' did in fact witness 'a complete transformation of the manner of life planned by St Benedict at Monte Cassino'; but he also demonstrates that the process had begun at least as far back as the eighth century, and that previously even Benedict had departed from some of his own original ideals (*Benedictine Monachism*, pp. 293-303 (especially pp. 298-9)).

⁵² *English Religious Lyric*, pp. 5-6.

⁵³ *John Lydgate*, pp. 5 and 17. For a different view, see Sheila Delany, *Impolitic Bodies: Poetry, Saints, and Society in Fifteenth-Century England: The Work of Osbern Bokenham* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 6. Julia Boffey carefully reasons that '[s]everal manuscripts preserve it [the *Testament*] as part of the corpus of Lydgate's minor poems, sometimes giving it extra prominence as if to highlight its status

as an autobiographical document. . . . The copy in British Library, MS Harley 2255 draws attention to Lydgate's reputation with the heading "Testamentum Johannis lidgate nobilis poete" (fol. 47^v): 'Lydgate, Henryson, and the Literary Testament', *MLQ*, 53 (1992), 41-56 (pp. 49-50).

⁵⁴ 'Laureates and Beggars in Fifteenth-Century English Poetry: The Case of George Ashby', *Speculum*, 79 (2004), 688-726 (p. 696).

⁵⁵ For a wider discussion of the phenomenon of medieval poets simultaneously demonstrating their authority while conceding their human flaws, see A. J. Minnis, 'The Author's Two Bodies? Authority and Fallibility in Late-Medieval Textual Theory', in *Of the Making of Books: Medieval Manuscripts, Their Scribes and Readers: Essays Presented to M. B. Parkes*, ed. by Pamela R. Robinson and Rivkah Zim (Aldershot: Scolar, 1997), pp. 259-79.

⁵⁶ On the Derridean distinction between 'voice' and 'presence' in the pursuit of the Chaucerian narrator of the *Canterbury Tales*, see H. Marshall Leicester's introduction to *The Disenchanted Self* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 1-31, especially pp. 8-10.

⁵⁷ I am, of course, adapting and echoing an already oft-echoed concept of Benedict Anderson's. See his *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991, repr. 1996), especially the preliminary observations on such communities on pp. 6-7.

⁵⁸ *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428-1431*, ed. by Norman Tanner, Camden Society, 4th series, 20 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977). For stimulating discussion of the Lancastrian dynasty's manipulation of the Lollard threat, see Paul Strohm, *England's Empty Throne: Usurpation and the Language of Legitimation, 1399-1422* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 32-62.

⁵⁹ 'Literary Texts', p. 560.

⁶⁰ Here I echo and respond to the language of Strohm's statement of methodology in *England's Empty Throne*, p. xiii. The texts examined in his book do indeed disclose complex meanings which belie their surface 'enunciation[s]', and I find myself in agreement with some of the basic assumptions of Strohm's approach (e.g. that authorial intent does not circumscribe the total meaning of a text). As this essay suggests, however, I hesitate to assume that all texts may be 'potentially deceptive' (p. xiii).

⁶¹ Compare Lee Patterson, 'Chaucer's Pardoner on the Couch: Psyche and Clio in Medieval Literary Studies', *Speculum*, 76 (2001), 638-80, p. 679; and Nicholas Watson, 'Desire for the Past', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 21 (1999), 59-97 (p. 97).

⁶² Seth Lerer, 'Medieval English Literature and the Idea of the Anthology', p. 1253.

⁶³ 'Medieval English Literature and the Idea of the Anthology', p. 1253. Lerer quotes Ralph Hanna III, *Pursuing History: Middle English Manuscripts and Their Texts*

(Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 9. Hanna's remarks on that page deserve full quotation in their own right: 'Miscellaneous books testify to acts at least analogous to canon-formation as we understand it, but these are most normally private, individual canons. There was no general late-medieval vernacular literary public, only a range or spectrum of literary communities.'

⁶⁴ See Ralph Hanna III and A. S. G. Edwards, 'Rotheley, the De Vere Circle, and the Ellesmere Chaucer', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 58 (1996), 11-35, p. 18, n. 24 and 25 for bibliography on some of the fraternity's most illustrious members. Compare Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, p. 27 and note 16. I am grateful to Professor Edwards for providing me a copy of his co-authored article.