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IS THE AUDIENCE DEAD TOO? TEXTUALLY CONSTRUCTED AUDIENCES AND DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

In his *Perambulauit Iudas* (written before 1235), Robert Grosseteste, the accomplished and influential Bishop of Lincoln, approaches the concept of audience with what seems to be casual disregard. He claims in the prologue that he has written his text at the urging of a friend, a religious adviser to a group of ‘simpler brothers’ (*simpliciores fratres*), for use in their religious community.¹ The guidebook that follows explains to a penitent how to confess sins to a priest. But this guidebook, supposedly addressed to religious novices, stresses the importance of confessing any failings in instructing a wife, a son, or a daughter.² It is hard to imagine such advice being useful to the ‘simpler brothers’ themselves, even if we take into account the editors’ suggestion that Grosseteste wanted to cover ‘all the sins committed both in the cloister and in the world’.³ While the brothers may have been interested in this information for other reasons, it would not have been useful for their own confessional preparation. In other words, there is an apparent rift here in the work’s constructed audiences. The audience to which the text is explicitly dedicated—the one which, using Ruth Evans’s model of audience function, can be termed the ‘intended audience’—is apparently at odds with the one suggested by the content of the work—which can be termed the ‘implied audience’.⁴

Perhaps an apparent rift such as this one should not be cause for alarm. Literary studies, as a field, has come to accept that textually constructed audiences—both the intended and implied audiences of a text—are not a record of actual readers in any straightforward way, but an authorial projection. They are, in Walter Ong’s famous words, ‘always a fiction’.⁵ Within this framework, textually constructed audiences are not bound by the same rules of stability and consistency as particular actual audiences tend to be, and

¹ For the date and intended audience of the text, see Joseph Goering and F. A. C. Mantello, “‘The Perambulauit Iudas . . .’ (*Speculum Confessionis*) Attributed to Robert Grosseteste”, *Revue Bénédictine*, 96 (1986), 125–68 (pp. 125, 132).

² ‘Maritus uxorem tuam non sufficienter exhibuisti nec pro posse tuo instruxisti. Prolem debito affectu non educaſti’; Latin from the edition in Goering and Mantello, pp. 148–68 (here p. 162, ll. 463–64).

³ Goering and Mantello, p. 125.

⁴ Ruth Evans, ‘Readers/Audiences/Texts’, in *The Idea of the Vernacular*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and others (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), pp. 107–25 (pp. 115–16).

⁵ Walter J. Ong, ‘The Author’s Audience is Always a Fiction’, *PMLA*, 90 (1975), 9–21 (p. 17).

inconsistencies among a text's constructed audiences should perhaps be expected as elements of literary play and creative energy.

Yet in spite of an awareness that constructed audiences are always to some extent a fiction and therefore not bound by the same rules as actual ones, studies of medieval England's literature often assume that constructed audiences in a text will be consistent. This expectation can be seen in the desire among editors and literary scholars to gather and collate pieces of evidence from a given work to make claims about its audience. It is seen, too, in a tendency to interpret variations among a text's constructed audiences as either the residue of a poorly executed adaptation for an actual audience or, where they could not realistically have emerged from such a process of adaptation, as an indication that a medieval author or compiler made some other mistake, or imperfectly compiled his text from multiple single-audience sources.⁶

In the context of contemporary English writing, in which rhetorical control tends to be marked by matching tone, content, and diction to one single audience—real or imagined—it is typical and perhaps fair to assume that shifts in a text's constructed audiences are indeed failings or else correspond to shifts in actual audiences.⁷ But it cannot be taken for granted that medieval authors and readers approached audiences in the same way, and given the ubiquity of

⁶ Examples are too numerous to list exhaustively; those provided here, taken from influential scholarly works, are intended to highlight a general tendency and are in no way suggestive of mistakes or of individual failings. These examples include the claim that the *Speculum Inclusorum* was 'clumsily adapted for a female or mixed audience' into the early fifteenth-century text known as *The Myrour of Recluses* (Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Medieval Anchoritisms: Gender, Space and the Solitary Life* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2011), p. 57). Describing Part v of *Ancrene Wisse*, which contains fewer direct addresses to an audience of anchorites than the rest of the manual and includes material that would not have been useful to them, John Hubert Gray writes that 'except for the concluding passage when the author makes what must seem to us a rather clumsy attempt—though he may have intended merely to be tactful—to adapt his matter to the anchoresses, there are no terms of direct address in the whole of Part Five' ('The Influence of Confessional Literature on the Composition of the *Ancrene Riwle*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, King's College London, 1961), p. 82 (*ProQuest*, DAI-C 70/55, Dissertation Abstracts International, thesis number U270759, identifier (UMI)AAIU270759) [accessed 10 December 2019]). The editor of the Longleat manuscript of Richard Rolle's *Ego Dormio* notices that in one manuscript, CUL Dd.v.64, the text seems to have been adapted for a more general audience in a few, but not all, places, and concludes that the reviser set out to adapt all of these but gave up: 'it must soon have become apparent that, short of rewriting the entire text, it was necessary to adhere to the particular' (S. J. Ogilvie-Thomson, *Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse, Edited from MS Longleat 29 and Related Manuscripts*, Early English Text Society (EETS), o.s. 293 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. lxviii). Others notice different textually constructed audiences and, without calling them mistakes, assume they reflect a departure—temporary or sustained—from an original, distinct audience; so the *Pater Noster* of Richard Ermyte is said to begin 'with an elaborate address to the putative female religious reader of the text' but 'appears to dissociate itself systematically from this female reader after the introductory passage, instead employing traditionally male vocational images and literary conventions to ground its concepts' (Kathryn Vulić, 'Pater Noster of Richard Ermyte and the Topos of the Female Audience', *Mystics Quarterly*, 34.3–4 (2008), 1–43 (p. 1)).

⁷ For an example of the current emphasis on aiming tone, content, and diction at one single audience see Denise Johnson, *Reading, Writing, and Literacy 2.0: Teaching with Online Texts, Tools, and Resources, K-8* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2014), p. 144.

such shifts in medieval texts, it is worth considering whether textually constructed audiences were simply approached with more flexibility in medieval literary contexts.⁸

With this aim at the fore, the present article explores how writers and actual audiences approached textually constructed audiences in medieval England. The question at hand is really twofold: did these writers and audiences care about matching textually constructed audiences to actual ones? And, how did they approach diversity among textually constructed audiences? This investigation seeks answers to these questions using three types of evidence: theorizations of audience written by medieval rhetoricians, comments about audience on the part of readers, and signs of adaptation undertaken by authors, correctors, and scribes. While the last are rare, they are particularly useful in this context because they represent deliberate interference with a textual tradition and therefore provide valuable, relatively unmediated insight into medieval hopes, attitudes, and desires.

It might be expected that a match between actual and constructed audiences mattered more in didactic works (such as sermons and religious guides) than in works designed primarily for entertainment. Since the former were more focused on real-world behaviour, such a match would have more real-world consequences. This investigation therefore explores the treatment of audience in didactic works first, before turning to romances and other less didactic works. It reveals that, within all rhetorical areas examined here, there is evidence that those who read and wrote medieval texts noticed differences among a text's constructed audiences. But when they responded to these differences, it was not to eliminate or reduce them—unless these differences could cause real-world problems. Rather, responses to differences among textually constructed

⁸ Aside from the texts already mentioned, a number of other medieval works have diverse and mutually exclusive constructed audiences. For confessional texts see e.g. items 23 and 42 in Philip Durkin, 'Examining One's Conscience: A Survey of Late Middle English Prose Forms of Confession', *Leeds Studies in English*, 28 (1997), 19–56. The late thirteenth-century *Manuel des péchés* has multivalent and apparently conflicting constructed audiences, as I have explored in 'The Readers of the *Manuel des péchés* Revisited', *Philological Quarterly*, 95 (2016), 161–200 (p. 162). Pierre D'Abernon of Fethem's *Lumere as lais* (1267) is a particularly interesting example since, as Alexandra Barratt has noted, it excludes children from its intended audience early on but then includes them explicitly in the conclusion ('Spiritual Writings and Religious Instruction', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, ed. by N. J. Morgan and R. M. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 340–66 (p. 352)). The *Femina Nova*, a compilation based on Bibbesworth's *Tretiz*, carries over some constructed audiences from its source texts but also adds some, and the intended and implied audiences are at times apparently at odds with each other; see W. Rothwell, 'Anglo-French and Middle English Vocabulary in *Femina Nova*', *Medium Ævum*, 69 (2000), 34–58 (p. 36, n. 22). Broad addresses can be found in miracle stories, such as the story of Odo, the abbot of Cluny, preserved in London, British Library, Royal 20 B XIV, which is addressed to 'seignurs [. . .] Belz jeofnes, bachelers, enfant, e tuz icels ke se sentent peccheür' ('Odo, Abbé de Cluny, et le Laron Converti', in *La Deuxième Collection anglo-normande des miracles de la Sainte Vierge*, ed. by Hilding Kjellman and others (Paris: Champion, 1922), pp. 19–23 (ll. 1–3)). Some romances also have a variety of constructed audiences; see the examples below in the section on 'Audience Differentiation and the *ars poetica*'.

audiences suggest that medieval authors and readers not only tolerated, but sometimes even invited dissonance among, and a diversity of, textually constructed audiences.

Audience Differentiation and the 'ars predicandi'

In the realm of rhetorical theory, the question of matching textually constructed audiences to actual ones—and the related question of consistency among textually constructed audiences—rose in importance in the medieval period. While the rhetorical manuals that have survived from the classical world have little to say on the issue of matching text to audience,⁹ the issue is taken up by Pope Gregory the Great in his *Pastoral Care* (c. 591), where Gregory claims to have been inspired by the fourth-century archbishop Gregory Nazianzen. Giving instructions to preachers, Gregory the Great insists that a sermon should be written in such a way as to make it applicable to a wide variety of listeners:

Ut enim longe ante nos reverendae memoriae Gregorius Nazianzenus edocuit, non una eademque cunctis exhortatio congruit, quia nec cunctos par morum qualitas astringit. [. . .] Pro qualitate igitur audientium formari debet sermo doctorum, ut et ad sua singulis congruat, et tamen a communis aedificationis arte nunquam recedat. [. . .] Unde et doctor quisque, ut in una cunctos virtute charitatis aedificet, ex una doctrina, non una eademque exhortatione tangere corda audientium debet.¹⁰

For, as long before us Gregory Nazianzen of reverend memory has taught, one and the same exhortation does not suit all, inasmuch as neither are all bound together by similarity of character. [. . .] Therefore according to the quality of hearers ought the discourse of teachers be fashioned, so as to suit all and each in their several needs, and yet never deviate from the art of common edification. [. . .] Whence every teacher also, that he may edify all in the one virtue of charity, ought to touch the hearts of his hearers out of one doctrine, but not with one and the same exhortation.¹¹

Gregory here acknowledges that people will respond differently to a message based on their own characters—an idea he shares with many modern reader response theorists.¹² For Gregory, the best way to edify a diverse—and poten-

⁹ The seminal study of medieval rhetoric is James Jerome Murphy's *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); on the tendency of older rhetorical tracts to approach audiences as 'homogeneous units' see p. 294.

¹⁰ Gregory the Great, *Regulae pastoralis liber*, ed. by Bruno Judic and others (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1992), pp. 258–60.

¹¹ Translation from Murphy, p. 293.

¹² Feminist reader response theorists, for example, note that gender can have a significant impact on how one reads a text; see the essays and introduction in *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts*, ed. by Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocinio P. Schweickart (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986). Paul Strohm has remarked on the parallels between medieval expectations that different audiences will respond differently to a given text and modern reader response theory, in *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 49.

tially dispassionate—actual audience is to use a diversity of declarations and, concomitantly, of implied audiences.

Gregory sees distinct benefits in varying constructed audiences when treating matters concerning confession: ‘the speech is to be tempered with such art that the vices of the hearers being diverse, it may be found suitable to them severally and yet not diverse from itself’.¹³ Gregory gives an extensive list of groups with contrasting characteristics that might need evocations shaped for them in particular, which includes ‘Those who succeed’, ‘Those who don’t’, and ‘Those who use food intemperately’.¹⁴ Gregory then offers brief examples of how to shape a single sermon so that it will appeal to a number of these specific subsets of a larger audience. The ideal, then, for Gregory is that a text is constructed in such a way that it achieves broad appeal through highly specific—and diverse—moments of address. This rhetorical strategy—making a text applicable to a diverse actual audience through diversity in constructed audiences—will be referred to here as audience differentiation.

Writing in the twelfth century, Guibert of Nogent shares with Gregory an interest in the value of audience differentiation; in his *Book about the Way a Sermon Ought to be Given* (*Liber quo ordine sermo fieri debeat*), Guibert insists that a single sermon should include a mixture of simple material for the unlearned and complex for the learned.¹⁵ And Gregory’s advice had a direct and powerful influence on later writers, including Alexander of Ashby, who repeats it in his *On the Mode of Preaching* (*De modo praedicandi*) (c. 1205–15).¹⁶ It is perhaps not surprising that Gregory’s calls for audience differentiation seem to have exerted a particular influence on guides to sermon writing; sermons, designed for public recitation, would often have been performed before diverse actual audiences, and the goal of medieval sermons—to spur individuals to virtuous behaviour—would undoubtedly have made the engagement and identification of an actual audience particularly desirable.

Gregory’s strategy of audience differentiation lies behind the *ad status* collections—anthologies of sermon material that emerged in the late twelfth century and were aimed at people of different social ranks. In one of these, the *Art of Preaching*, Alan de Lille makes explicit the logic behind matching content (and constructed audiences) to actual ones:

Minoribus autem decet in parabolis loqui, maioribus revelare mysteria regni Dei. Parvuli liquido cibo sunt nutriendi, adulti solido corroborandi; ne parvulus enecetur per solidum, et aduitus abominetur liquidum, ut sic singula quaeque locum teneant sortita decenter.¹⁷

It is proper to speak to children in parables, and to show to adults the mysteries of the

¹³ Murphy, p. 294.

¹⁴ Edited in Murphy, p. 295.

¹⁵ Murphy, p. 302.

¹⁶ Murphy, p. 313. For Gregory’s influence on later writers see Murphy, p. 293.

¹⁷ Edited in P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, CCX (Paris: Garnier, 1855), ch. 39 [§ 107], col. 184c; further references are given as chapter [section], column.

kingdom of God. The very young must be nourished on liquid food, adults invigorated with solid food, lest the child be stunted by solids, and the adult detest liquids. Thus they should each receive the kind of thing befitting their condition.¹⁸

Alan, drawing here on the imagery of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (3. 2), holds that both approach and subject matter should match the needs of one's actual audience.¹⁹ Alan, like Gregory, holds that if the audience is varied, so too should be the pronouncements. He gives a number of subjects that should be treated for individual members of a larger audience; so, 'If virgins are present, let them be commended for the cleanliness of their body and the purity of their mind, through which one can surpass human nature, rising above the flesh and putting on the semblance of angels.'²⁰

Material aimed at helping preachers tailor their sermons to particular groups of people shows up in several preaching manuals and collections of sample sermons. Alan's falls among the most notable of these, alongside those of Gilbert of Tournai, Humbert de Romans, Honorius Augustodunensis, and Jacques de Vitry. This last writer, drawing directly from Gregory the Great, explains the importance of matching one's subject matter to the nature of one's audience, while stating that everyone responds differently to different content; after all, 'light whistling soothes horses but stirs up little pups'.²¹ The *ad status* collections of these writers reflect a growing interest in the individual's estate and reveal that Alan and his contemporaries saw an implicit connection between their actual audiences and the audiences implied by a sermon through its content.

It is worth stressing that the emphasis that *ad status* collections place on harmony between matching an implied audience to an actual one does not suggest that the authors of *ad status* collections shared with present-day critics a distaste for divergence within textually constructed audiences. There is nothing in the major *ad status* collections to suggest that sections of these collections were meant to be used on their own for homogeneous audiences composed of one estate alone. Indeed, the highly specific addresses in these collections seem to be designed to allow a preacher to single out members within a diverse audience in the same way that, according to Alan de Lille, virgins should be singled out if they are present during a sermon to a broader

¹⁸ Translation from Rita Copeland, *Pedagogy, Intellectuals, and Dissent in the Later Middle Ages: Lollardy and Ideas of Learning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 99.

¹⁹ Likewise, Guillaume Durandus, writing in the late thirteenth century, insists on the importance of pitching one's sermon to a diverse audience; see Siegfried Wenzel, *Latin Sermon Collections from Later Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 237.

²⁰ 'Si virginibus, commendatur a munditia corporis, a puritate mentis, per quam homo sit supra hominem, superans carnem, et angelorum gerens similitudinem' (ch. 39 [§ 108], col. 185D); my translation.

²¹ Carolyn Muessig, *Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), p. 265.

audience. As Christoph T. Maier observes while analysing crusading propaganda in sermon literature, Jacques de Vitry's and Gilbert of Tournai's collections of sermon material are not aimed at exclusive homogeneous audiences; rather, they act as open-ended models from which a preacher could draw based on the various needs of those present.²² Humbert de Romans's *ad status* work, known as *De eruditione Praedicatorum*, opens with advice for how to preach to all people ('ad omnes homines'). When it then gives advice on how to address people according to their estate, it envisions these estates as subdivisions of a larger, more diverse listening audience; thus, if pilgrims are present, the preacher is instructed to 'add some salutary words for them for their instruction'.²³

Likewise, Honorius Augustodunensis's collection of *ad status* material, with exhortations to eight specific groups—including members of the clergy, soldiers, poor folk, rich folk, and others—is nested within a *Sermo generalis*—the implication being that the preacher was to address these specific groups in turn as parts of a larger, diverse audience.²⁴ Another contemporary sermon-writing guide gives a list of virtues that should be expounded for commoners (*vulgarium*), and then states that 'if lords [*domini*] are present, you could treat of their estate, and commend justice and right judgement and disparage pride, avarice, plunder, and lion-like tyranny'.²⁵ The effective preacher matched his stratified audience with stratified content—and, concomitantly, a diversity of textually constructed audiences. Medieval sermons, in other words, aimed at what modern educational theorists call differentiated learning—learning that is aimed at educating a broad diversity of learners through highly individualized content.

Audience Differentiation and Religious Guides

It has become evident that audience differentiation was considered a powerful rhetorical technique for sermons, which were aimed at large and often

²² Christoph T. Maier, *Crusade Propaganda and Ideology: Model Sermons for the Preaching of the Cross* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 30.

²³ 'Quando Peregrini, qui quandoque uadunt insimul, in multitudine inueniuntur in uia, uel in Ecclesiis, uel alibi, pium est apponere eis uerbum salutare aliquod ad eorum instructionem, et consolationem'; the Latin is from Tommaso Martino's revised edition of Humbert de Romans, *De eruditione religiosorum Predicatorum*, ed. by Margarinus de la Bigne, vol. xxv (Lyon: Bibliotheca Maxima Veterum Patrum, 1677), available at <http://sermones.net/thesaurus/document.php?id=hdr_1.089> [accessed 15 November 2019]; my translation.

²⁴ For Honorius Augustodunensis's collection of *ad status* material see Muessig, p. 260. The idea that *ad status* collections were not intended for exclusive recitation to isolated estates is suggested by Fiona Somerset, who writes that '[t]ypically an *ad status* address invokes the public good and advises representative groups at all levels of society about how they should behave in order to maintain it, whether by discussing members of the three estates in turn or by anatomizing society' (*Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 113).

²⁵ Edited and translated in Wenzel, p. 105.

highly disparate actual audiences. It cannot be assumed that the same rhetorical technique was valued in works with narrower actual audiences. It is therefore worth investigating the construction of audience in religious guidebooks, since these tend to address audiences in very specific circumstances, and since the writers behind these guidebooks, including their authors and scribes, sometimes left traces in their work of their ideas about textually constructed audiences.

A remarkable example of a religious guide with diverse implied audiences is Robert de Sorbon's *Qui vult vere confiteri* (c. 1260–74), which, while written in France, had currency in England through its adaptation into the widely influential *Somme le roi*. Robert's guide is effectively a long list of sins that a penitent may have committed, aimed at helping the penitent to identify any previously committed sins and thereby perform a full and complete confession. It is addressed to '[him] who truly wishes to confess his sins for the salvation of his eternal soul', but despite the seemingly broad intended audience in this opening address, Robert repeatedly creates highly specific implied audiences.

The specificity of these audiences is most obvious here, as in other guides, when they are mutually exclusive. Thus, at times Robert is troubled by the kinds of abuses committed by the laity: in the section on avarice, for example, he includes a model confessional statement that, in its emphasis on paying tithes, was clearly intended for recitation by members of the laity, for whom this would have been a familiar imposition. Elsewhere, he departs from this implied lay audience by fixating on exclusively clerical sins: 'avarice', he insists, is also the buying and selling of clerical benefices—a sin which he says is particular to the clergy and other religious.²⁶ Like the sermons anticipated by the *ad status* collections, the work thus has diverse and, at times, mutually exclusive textually constructed audiences.

Many confessional guides exhibit a similar flexibility regarding constructed audiences.²⁷ The late fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century *Clensyng of Mannes Sowle* often addresses a penitent; among other topics, it 'tellith to whom þou schalt make thy confessioun', and its motivation is purportedly to educate the 'many men & women þere ben, not lettred and of simple

²⁶ 'Qui vult vere confiteri peccata sua ad salutem anime sue'; the Latin section on abuses includes: 'Unde sic debet dicere penitens: Domine, in omnibus istis peccatis peccavi, et male solvi decimas' ('And the penitent should say thus: "Lord, I have sinned in all of these sins, and badly paid tithes"'). Regarding the clergy, Robert writes: 'Septimus ramus avaricie est symonia, quando venduntur vel emuntur sacramenta vel prebende [vel aliquid] ecclesiasticum vel religionis. Sed tale peccatum pertinet ad clericos et religiosos' ('The seventh branch of avarice is simony, when sacraments, or prebends, or anything ecclesiastical or religious, is sold or bought. This particular sin pertains to clerics and other religious'). Edited in F. N. M. Diekstra, 'Robert de Sorbon's *Qui vult vere confiteri* (ca. 1260–74) and its French Versions', *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales*, 60 (1993), 215–72 (pp. 216, 250–51); my translations.

²⁷ For further examples see the *Perambulavit Iudas* and n. 8 above.

knowynge'.²⁸ Yet Lee Patterson, while examining the work, noticed 'material relevant not to the penitent but to the confessor, such as *Clensyng*'s discussion of various canonical issues'.²⁹ Taken together, these apparently mutually exclusive constructed audiences—one 'of simple knowynge' and one equipped for high theology—suggest that the work, like Robert's, adopts the kinds of audience differentiation methods that were considered ideal for sermons. Yet unlike sermons, the *Clensyng* and Robert's guide both contain material for use in confessional preparation. This process, which was usually done alone or with a priest, would typically involve less diverse actual audiences than a sermon.

These two confessional guides show that a diversity of constructed audiences could appear even in texts designed for more exclusive reading situations. But we cannot conclude from these examples alone that medieval writers and audiences were comfortable with such diversity; after all, the apparently mutually conflicting constructed audiences in these texts could be mistakes, as scholars often assume. *Ancrene Wisse*, a guide for solitary and enclosed religious life, is worth considering in this light. This guide underwent a series of adaptations—so many that Bella Millett has taken it as exemplary of the process of *mouvance*. These adaptations, which involved deliberate interference with the work's constructed audiences, provide some insight into their revisers' attitudes towards textually constructed audiences.³⁰

It is widely accepted that the original intended audience of the work is the three 'leoue sustren' ('dear sisters') addressed explicitly in the text preserved in British Library, MS Cotton Nero A. xiv.³¹ This intended audience of enclosed religious, which is also implied by much of the advice that appears in *Ancrene Wisse*, once meant that Part v of the early thirteenth-century guide presented a puzzle to readers and critics of the work, since this part has different implied audiences. Part v includes, for example, confessional statements from the point of view of a wife and a nun, which would seem to be out of place in a guide for women whose position excluded them from being

²⁸ Mark H. Liddell, 'A New Source of the Parson's Tale', in *An English Miscellany Presented to Dr. Furnivall*, ed. by W. P. Ker and others (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), pp. 255–78 (p. 260).

²⁹ Lee Patterson, 'The "Parson's Tale" and the Quitting of the "Canterbury Tales"', *Traditio*, 34 (1978), 331–80 (p. 340).

³⁰ Bella Millett, 'Mouvance and the Medieval Author: Re-editing *Ancrene Wisse*', in *Late-Medieval Religious Texts and their Transmission: Essays in Honour of A. I. Doyle*, ed. by A. J. Minnis (Cambridge: Brewer, 1994), pp. 9–20 (p. 13).

³¹ Bella Millett, 'Introduction', in *'Ancrene Wisse': A Guide for anchoresses. A Translation Based on Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402*, ed. and trans. by Bella Millett (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009), pp. ix–l (p. xlv). The theory is not universally accepted, however; Yoko Wada writes that 'One should treat this passage with caution because there is no evidence that all the references to these sisters in the Nero text were inherited from the original text which no longer exists' ('What is *Ancrene Wisse*?', in *A Companion to the 'Ancrene Wisse'*, ed. by Yoko Wada (Rochester, NY: Brewer, 2003), pp. 1–284 (p. 4)).

either. These passages cannot be explained away as references to an anchoritic reader's former status, since the utterances are made for the audience to voice during confession and are written in the present tense: 'Ich am an ancre; a nunne; a wif iweddet' ('I am an anchoress; a nun; a married woman').³²

The shift in Part v away from the intended and implied audience of anchorites and towards other implied audiences once led scholars to suggest that Part v was found or written separately and then added to the manual belatedly. But it is now generally accepted that this part is linked to the rest of the manual both thematically and structurally. The manual itself both acknowledges the shift in implied audiences and exhibits a level of rhetorical control over it by noting, at the end of Part v, that the preceding advice in this part 'limpeð to alle men iliche' ('is suitable for all men alike'), and by supplying a list of sins that would be more suitable to an anchoritic audience.³³

From the perspective of a contemporary understanding of rhetorical mastery, the shift feels awkward and its explanation belated—an attempt at retrospective justification of a decision that most likely stemmed from laziness and the materials at hand—but it is worth noting that the writer of the guide demonstrates both an awareness of the shift of constructed audiences and a degree of comfort with it, since he makes no attempt to explain it away or erase it. *Ancrene Wisse*, then, seems to be aimed at the same kind of differentiated instruction as the *sermo generalis*, and given its indebtedness to this tradition, this should perhaps not be surprising.³⁴

More can be gleaned about medieval attitudes towards audience from the changes that were made to the work's main intended audience during the process of adaptation. Where the version of the text found in the Nero manuscript addresses three sisters, the version in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402 addresses twenty or more.³⁵ Other particularities of the Corpus text imply that as the network of anchorites grew, so too did the financial and administrative concerns associated with them. The Corpus text's broader intended audience is matched by what Millett considers a change in the 'rigour' of the anchorite's guidelines and a new reference to their broad geographical distribution—two features that mark a new implied audience for the text.³⁶ While cautioning that all references to audience in medieval works must be approached carefully, Millett notes that the adaptation of what I have

³² 'Ancrene Wisse': A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402, with Variants from Other Manuscripts, ed. by Bella Millett, EETS, o.s. 325–26, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 120; translation from 'Ancrene Wisse': A Guide, p. 120.

³³ *Ancrene Wisse*, p. 129; translation from 'Ancrene Wisse': A Guide, p. 129.

³⁴ For an in-depth exploration of the text's relationship to sermon literature see Cate Gunn, 'Ancrene Wisse': From Pastoral Literature to Vernacular Spirituality (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008).

³⁵ Millett, 'Introduction', p. xlv.

³⁶ See *ibid.*, p. xliii.

been referring to as the work's original intended audience 'suggests that it was understood as fact'—in other words, that one reviser at least considered the original three sisters to be real people and not just a rhetorical or literary device.³⁷

These deliberate changes then, reflect a fundamental awareness of the original text's constructed audiences, and they may suggest that the reviser saw a correspondence between one of these constructed audiences—the three sisters—and an actual audience. Yet while the reviser modified the work to introduce a new intended audience—perhaps, though we cannot be certain, in order to address an actual audience—the reviser did not reduce in any way the diversity of implied audiences within the text, and the apparently conflicting implied audiences of Part v remain in the revised Corpus text. For the hand behind the Corpus revisions, then, audience mattered, but a diversity of implied audiences in itself posed little problem.

Other changes in the *Ancrene Wisse's* adaptation history show at once an acute awareness of textually constructed audiences and a willingness to embrace diversity among them. When the guide was translated into French in the second half of the thirteenth century for the sake of a manual for religious life entitled the *Compileison*, the original intended audience of anchorites was broadened; the new manual is addressed to 'tote genz mes especiaument e par deuant tuz autres a hommes e a femmes de religioun' ('all people, but especially—and above all others—to the men and women of religion'), and the text constructs several highly specific implied audiences.³⁸ The adaptation process behind the Latin translation preserved in British Library, MS Cotton Titus D. xviii, also seems to have been aimed at increasing the diversity of intended audiences, rather than decreasing it. The text has masculine pronouns in some places where the Middle English version has feminine forms, but the use of masculine pronouns in the Latin version is not consistent, and Millett notes that in some places the Latin text contains feminine pronouns not found in any of the prior copies. This complex use of pronouns may have resulted from one adaptation process or from multiple stages of adaptation not attested in the manuscript record. Either way, the result introduces greater diversity in the text's constructed audiences, rather than reducing or limiting them.³⁹

³⁷ Bella Millett, "He speaks to me as if I was a public meeting": Rhetoric and Audience in the Works of the *Ancrene Wisse* Group', in *Rhetoric of the Anchorhold: Space, Place and Body within Discourses of Enclosure*, ed. by Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), pp. 50–65 (p. 52).

³⁸ Trinity College Cambridge, MS R. 14.7, fol. 1^{rb}; my transcription and translation, undertaken with gratitude to the librarians of Trinity College for granting me access to this manuscript.

³⁹ Millett, 'Introduction', p. xlii, sees the changes as reflecting different stages of textual adaptation; she suggests that the extra feminine pronouns represent 'an apparent attempt to reverse' the prior introduction of masculine pronouns.

A similar decision to introduce a new constructed audience apparently lies behind the English translation of Henry Suso's *Horologium sapientiae*. While the Latin text refers to the audience with masculine pronouns, the English translation oscillates between masculine and feminine pronouns.⁴⁰ Sometimes the addition of greater diversity in implied audiences happened during the process of adaptation. Thus, British Library, Harley MS 2383, contains a list of sample confessional statements written in the voice of a sinner—a type of text known as the form of confession—but while its likely source is focused on clerical sins, this copy adds several references to specifically lay sins.⁴¹

New intended audiences could also be added to a religious guide after it had been copied. One copy of the *Pater Noster* tract ascribed to Adam of Exeter was initially addressed to a woman. After it was copied, some, though not all, of its tender evocations to 'ma (tres) chere mere' ('my (very) dear mother') and 'ma doce mere' ('my sweet mother') were erased and replaced with evocations to a 'cher frere' ('dear brother').⁴² As Daniel Wakelin has shown with regard to corrections more generally, such changes—which are, by their nature, deliberate—provide us with precious insight into the views and goals of a corrector.⁴³ In the case of Adam's guide, the changes suggest an attempt to introduce a new audience into the text, and, in the absence of other evidence, it seems possible that this new textually constructed audience was introduced for the sake of an actual audience. Yet even so, the original textually constructed audience was not effaced during this process.

Deliberate changes made after copying sometimes targeted implied audiences; in one fifteenth-century confessional text the scribe copied, among the sins of avarice, an excess of thrift on the part of the sinner and her 'husbonde', then crossed out 'husbonde' and wrote 'househalde' beside it. The deleted word could have been an error, but as Philip Durkin points out, the scribe may have been consciously modifying his copy text in an effort to suit the specific circumstances of a patron.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Rebecca Selman, 'Spirituality and Sex Change: *Horologium sapientiae* and *Speculum devotum*', in *Writing Religious Women: Female Spiritual and Textual Practices in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Denis Renevy and Christiania Whitehead (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), pp. 61–79.

⁴¹ See Durkin, p. 23. For another example of the modification of an implied audience see item 24 in Durkin, p. 30.

⁴² The phrase 'cher frere' appears in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Manuscrits fr. 19525, fol. 72^v. See Tony Hunt, 'An Anglo-Norman Treatise on Female Religious', *Medium Ævum*, 64 (1995), 205–31 (p. 207). The text is edited in 'Cher alme': *Texts of Anglo-Norman Piety*, ed. by Tony Hunt, intro. by Henrietta Leyser, trans. by Jane Bliss, The French of England Translation Series (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2010), pp. 71–77.

⁴³ Daniel Wakelin, 'Editing and Correcting', in *Probable Truth: Editing Medieval Texts from Britain in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Vincent Gillespie and Anne Hudson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 241–59 (p. 251).

⁴⁴ Yale, University Library, Beinecke MS 317. The sinner 'sparyd to spande whan nede & worschyp requyred. bothe of my silf. my husbonde househalde' (fol. 46^v). Durkin notes that this

The practice of introducing new constructed audiences into a copied text could also be carried out in a systematic manner for an entire collection. The scribe of a fifteenth-century miscellany of religious texts, Leeds Brotherton BC MS 501, copied a vast number of devotional treatises in his manuscript, many with disparate implied audiences.⁴⁵ But the same scribe, perhaps, as Oliver S. Pickering suggests, with a specific religious community in mind, added marginal comments and rubrics to many of the texts that refer to the audience using 'fratres' and the plural pronoun 'ye'.⁴⁶ A fifteenth-century text about how to confess to a priest contains, according to Durkin, primarily lay sins, and is addressed in an opening rubric to a 'brothyr þat art yong of age, qwiche kanst not confesse thiself onto thy gostly [i.e. spiritual] fadyr'. But throughout the text, 'frater' and 'fratres' were added as forms of address, suggesting an attempt to adapt the text for use within a male religious community.⁴⁷ While this interventionist scribe clearly considered intended audiences important, he apparently did not aim to create greater consistency between them.

Some religious guides, then, show traces of a writer having consciously modified intended or implied audiences. Crucially, all the instances I have been able to identify seem to be aimed at introducing a new textually constructed audience into a text or at modifying an existing textually constructed audience, perhaps—though we cannot be certain—in response to the needs of an actual audience who might need to use the rules of the guidebook. None of them seems to have been made with the aim of bringing greater consistency to the implied and intended audiences of a work, and indeed, in the adaptations to the *Pater Noster* tract ascribed to Adam of Exeter and the multiple adaptations to *Ancrene Wisse*, the modifications actually introduce greater inconsistency and an even greater degree of diversity.

Very occasionally we find real readers commenting on problems with the textually constructed audiences of a religious guide. Thus, Heloise complains to Abelard that the Rule of Saint Benedict is not written for a community of religious women like hers at the Oratory of the Paraclete; she writes that, among other differences from men, women are not able to obey the same rules, given their cycle of menstruation, and she implores her former companion to create a rule intended specifically for women, for use in her convent.⁴⁸ Given the

strikerthrough could have been done at any stage, but the syntax of the sentence makes it unlikely that both 'husbonde' and 'househalde' were intended (p. 35).

⁴⁵ Durkin, p. 38.

⁴⁶ Oliver S. Pickering, 'Brotherton Collection MS 501: A Middle English Anthology Reconsidered', *Leeds Studies in English*, 21 (1990), 141–65 (p. 160). 'Ye' here could of course be a formal address rather than an address to a plural audience, but either way it signifies an audience distinct from the text's original one.

⁴⁷ Durkin, pp. 38–39 (quotation at p. 38).

⁴⁸ *The Letter Collection of Peter Abelard and Heloise*, ed. and rev. by David Luscombe, trans. by Betty Radice (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2013), pp. 220–21.

tenor of her previous letters, Heloise's request for guidance may have been part of a strategy aimed at getting Abelard to write back to her—one that he, endlessly willing to display his learning, would perhaps have found difficult to resist. But even if it were part of a strategy, her complaint suggests an awareness of a disjoint between the implied audience of Benedict's Rule and the actual audience in her own community. While undoubtedly formulaic, the insistence by both Aelred of Rievaulx and the author of *Ancrene Wisse* that they are writing guides at the request of women with whom they are familiar likewise indicates that some importance was attached to a match between textually constructed and real audiences.⁴⁹ But these examples all concern guidebooks, and given that the implied audience in these works functions by describing specific behaviours—rather than merely reader positions—to be emulated, it would not be surprising if guidebooks required a closer match between actual and implied audiences than other types of writing.

A match between actual and textually constructed audiences does seem to have mattered, then, in some texts that give guidelines about specific behaviours to follow. But it is worth noting that while these examples suggest that actual audiences wanted to see themselves represented in a text in some way, none of the examples points to a sense of discomfort with texts containing diverse or mutually exclusive audiences. Modifications to works and manuscripts show that audiences mattered, but they do not indicate that medieval readers felt uncomfortable with divergent implied audiences. Indeed, several of the modifications explored above actually introduce greater diversity into a text's constructed audiences. On the whole, then, religious guides, like sermons, seem comfortable with diverse and even mutually exclusive textually constructed audiences. These diverse audiences, aside from making guides applicable to individuals in a variety of specific circumstances, may also have served a didactic function by giving examples of behaviour to follow or avoid. It has been remarked, for instance, that the non-anchoritic audiences addressed in *Ancrene Wisse* may have served to spur the text's anchoritic audience to greater virtue.⁵⁰

Religious guides are helpful for exploring medieval attitudes towards audience because they contain explicit addresses to their audiences, but it should perhaps not surprise us if they exhibit some of the same rhetorical techniques as sermon writing, which heavily influenced them—so much so that Katherine Little has argued that the distinction between confessional texts and sermons

⁴⁹ *Ancrene Wisse*: A Guide, p. 1; Aelred of Rievaulx's *De institutione inclusarum*: Two Middle English Versions, ed. by J. Ayo and A. Barratt, EETS, o.s. 287 (London: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. xi.

⁵⁰ Millett writes that while the author expected his text to reach real non-anchoritic readers, his addresses to that group also served a rhetorical function, namely to emphasize the anchoritic audience's superior virtue ("He speaks", p. 56).

is often an arbitrary one.⁵¹ Many religious guides were greatly indebted to the medieval sermon tradition and many were intended to be delivered in circumstances that resembled those of sermon delivery.⁵² It cannot be assumed that their approach to differentiated audiences can be taken as representative of the approach adopted in medieval writing as a whole, and it remains to be seen if the same attitude towards audiences is present in romances and other more traditionally 'literary' works.

Audience Differentiation and the 'ars poetica'

The influential guides for composing quality poetry known as the *ars poetica*, including those of Matthew of Vendôme (c. 1175) and Geoffrey de Vinsauf (c. 1210), are surprisingly silent on the question of consistency between, and among, actual and textually constructed audiences.⁵³ But on the Continent, a letter that Petrarch addressed to Boccaccio offers a glimpse of how literary writers thought about audience. Petrarch there describes his response to reading Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and remarks on the range of styles in Boccaccio's work: 'Your audience makes all the difference: the range of their conduct pardons the stylistic diversity.'⁵⁴ Petrarch's comment, a remarkable example of a medieval writer theorizing about literary craft, reflects the same attitude to audience that we have seen in guides to sermon writing: different audiences have different needs, and these can be served through diversity of content or style within a single text.

Much like sermons, romances and other more secular texts do, on the whole, exhibit a propensity for diversity among intended and implied

⁵¹ Katherine C. Little, *Confession and Resistance: Defining the Self in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), p. 58.

⁵² Philip Durkin remarks that several forms of confession show signs of having been produced for recitation to large groups (p. 23). H. G. Pfander reflects on the number of devotional guides, such as Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne* (c. 1303) and Robert Grosseteste's *Templum Dei* (c. 1220–30), that are structured in such a way that sections could be delivered as sermons ('Some Medieval Manuals of Religious Instruction in England and Observations on Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 35 (1936), 243–58 (p. 244)). Devotional guides including *Ancrene Wisse* (c. 1220–30) and the *Manuel des péchés* (c. 1260), were regularly mined for sermon material: see Gunn, *Ancrene Wisse*, and on the *Manuel des péchés* Murchison, 'Readers', p. 188.

⁵³ See Matthew of Vendôme's 'Ars versificatoria', in *Mathei Vindocinensis opera*, ed. by Franco Munari, vol. III (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1988), and Geoffrey de Vinsauf's *Poetria Nova*, in *Les Arts poétiques du XII^e et du XIII^e siècle*, ed. by Edmond Faral (Paris: Champion, 1924), pp. 194–262.

⁵⁴ 'Refert enim largiter quibus scribas, morumque varietate stili varietas excusatur'; edited and translated in 'Historia Griseldis: Petrarch's *Epistolae seniles* xvii. 3', trans. and ed. by Thomas J. Farrell, in *Sources and Analogues of 'The Canterbury Tales'*, ed. by Robert M. Correale, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2002), pp. 108–29 (pp. 108–09). The letter is discussed with respect to Chaucer's audience by Paul Strohm in *Social Chaucer*, p. 48.

audiences.⁵⁵ Even *chansons de geste*, which characteristically address *seigneurs*, sometimes exhibit diversity among intended audiences; the *Vie de saint Alexis* thus opens with an address to both 'Signours et dames'.⁵⁶ Occasionally these texts exhibit the same kinds of audience differentiation as the *ad status* collections. Roberta Krueger observes that across the Channel, Heldris de Cornuälle, in his *Roman de Silence*, briefly singles out the women in his audience to request their forgiveness for the narrative action, and in so doing creates multilayered and dynamic intended audiences.⁵⁷

As with religious guides, secular literature occasionally displays traces of a writer homing in on, and modifying, a textually constructed audience. Gower's *Confessio Amantis* is one of the best-known examples. Gower's first version of the poem was written for King Richard II, and the king's presence in the text is quite extensive. Gower was with Richard on his royal barge, according to the poet, when the king requested the poem. The version thus produced, known as the first recension, contains explicit references to Richard in both the prologue and the conclusion, although it also has other, broader implied audiences.⁵⁸

Around 1392, Gower—perhaps due to changing allegiances—altered the intended audience of his poem from Richard to Henry of Lancaster, who would later become Henry IV.⁵⁹ The sections that mention Richard in both the prologue and epilogue of the first recension are replaced by lines that dedicate the poem to Henry.⁶⁰ A deliberate act of adaptation such as this one suggests that writers of more secular texts, much like the writers of sermons, were attuned to the importance of audiences. But it is worth noting

⁵⁵ Thus, for example, 'Le dit des femmes', the anti-feminist diatribe in British Library, Harley MS 2253, fol. 110, opens with an address to 'Seignours e dames'; see Arthur Langfors, *Les Incipit des poèmes français antérieurs au XVI^e siècle*, vol. 1 (Paris: Champion, 1917), p. 369, as well as the examples that follow.

⁵⁶ Alison Goddard Elliott, *The 'Vie de Saint Alexis' in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries: An Edition and Commentary* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), p. 38.

⁵⁷ Roberta L. Krueger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 27.

⁵⁸ Richard's commissioning of the poem occurs at ll. 24–92 of the 'first recension', in John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ed. by Russel A. Peck, vol. 1 (Kalamazoo, MI: Teaching Association for Medieval Studies (TEAMS), 2006). The narrator states that he has written the book for Richard at ll. 3151 and 3071 of the first recension's epilogue in Book VIII (ll. 2941–3114). Richard is also praised in the Latin insertion at l. 2970 in the same epilogue. For the argument that the *Confessio* has a broader public as an implied audience see e.g. T. Matthew N. McCabe, *Gower's Vulgar Tongue: Ovid, Lay Religion, and English Poetry in the 'Confessio Amantis'* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2011), pp. 73–74.

⁵⁹ For the possibility that this shift of intended audiences was due to changing allegiances see e.g. Russel A. Peck's 'The Politics and Psychology of Governance in Gower: Ideas of Kingship and Real Kings', in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. by Siân Echard (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 215–38 (pp. 224–38).

⁶⁰ In this third recension the poem is dedicated to Henry in the prologue at ll. 81–92; Henry is also praised in the Latin explicit at the end of the third recension.

that despite changing the intended audience of the *Confessio Amantis* for the sake of this version, Gower makes no attempt to reduce or contain the work's other implied audiences; indeed, the lines introduced into the epilogue of the third recension contain, aside from the reference to Henry, a broader implied audience of those who have learning: 'And that my bok be nought refusid | Of lered men, whanne thei it se, | For lak of curiosité' (ll. 3112–14: 'and that my book will not be refused by learned people, when they see it, due to a lack of clever learning'). Gower, then, much like the writers of religious guides discussed above, was clearly aware of the importance of textually constructed audiences, and his modification of the poem may suggest a politically motivated need to match one constructed audience to a new actual one. But even when he was deliberately manipulating his textually constructed audiences in this way, Gower did not feel the need to reduce or contain the diversity among them.

A correspondence between actual and constructed audiences was apparently not the norm. Catherine Innes-Parker examined 237 manuscripts of works from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries addressed to female readers and discovered the somewhat startling fact that nearly 'twice as many men as women' are recorded as owners of these texts.⁶¹ There are of course many reasons why we might have more evidence for men's ownership than women's, and codicological evidence provides limited insight into the actual readers and audiences of texts, but Innes-Parker's findings show, at the very least, that a disparity between intended and actual audience was not a deterrent to manuscript acquisition and ownership.

Even when Joan Tateshal, a member of the Lincolnshire aristocracy in the thirteenth century, commissioned for her own use a manuscript containing devotional guides and prayers, she did not request that the scribe change the texts' constructed audiences. Thus, one guide to confession in the manuscript, the *Manuel des péchés*, includes such apparently clerically oriented passages as the injunction that clerks should not participate in mass while in a state of sin: 'Ne clerc ne dait ministerer | Tant cum est en peche al auter' ('No cleric should administer at the altar if he is in sin'). This was in spite of an impulse for personalization that shines through in other respects; the first illuminated initial depicts Tateshal directly overseeing her scribe's work.⁶² Thus, even when commissioning a new manuscript, Joan does not seem to have been

⁶¹ Catherine Innes-Parker, 'The "Gender Gap" Reconsidered: Manuscripts and Readers in Late-Medieval England', *Anglica Posnaniensia*, 38 (2002), 239–70 (p. 243).

⁶² Princeton University Library, MS Taylor Medieval 1, fol. 79^r. For Joan Tateshal's involvement in the production of this manuscript see Adelaide Bennett, 'A Book Designed for a Noblewoman: An Illustrated "Manuel des Péchés" of the Thirteenth Century', in *Medieval Book Production: Assessing the Evidence. Proceedings of the Second Conference of the Seminar in the History of the Book to 1500, Oxford, July 1988*, ed. by Linda L. Brownrigg (Palo Alto, CA: Anderson-Lovelace, 1990), pp. 163–81 (p. 178).

bothered by a disconnection between constructed and actual audiences, nor by discrepancies between textually constructed audiences.

Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* provides one final but crucial piece of insight into the function of audience in medieval literary culture, since the work constructs not just implied and intended audiences but also a fictional audience responding to the ideas and stories told by the tales' characters. This fictional audience of travelling pilgrims—which, returning to Evans's model of audience function, can be termed an 'inscribed audience'—is famously diverse. Although the inclusive social vision it represents may, as is often suggested, reflect an ungrounded optimism about real-world class and social struggles, this diverse inscribed audience nevertheless offers a valuable dramatization of how a disparate audience might react to a tale's constructed audiences.⁶³

As Paul Strohm and others have remarked, the depiction of the inscribed audience in the tales seems to offer powerful support for Gregory's view that different audience members will react differently to material in accordance with their social position or estate.⁶⁴ This idea is alluded to in the Miller's Prologue, when no pilgrim 'yong ne oold' disapproves of the Knight's narrative; all are able to derive a lesson from it, '[a]nd namely the gentils everichon' (ll. 3109–12: 'and especially the noble people, every one').⁶⁵ The passage reflects an awareness that one's experience of a tale can be determined by one's estate or social status.

The Knight's Tale does not exhibit any audience differentiation, but the Canon's Yeoman's Tale does. The Yeoman addresses two different intended audiences within one larger narrative framework. He insists that his tale, despite its criticism of particular canons, should not be understood as a reproach to all canons. He then addresses the virtuous canons in the audience to explain that the tale's criticism is not intended for them, since 'This tale was nat oonly toold for yow | But eek for othere mo' (VIII. 1000–01: 'This tale was not told for you exclusively, but also for many others'). These virtuous canons are asked to derive a different moral from the tale from that derived by the corrupt canons: 'By yow I seye the same, | Save oonly this, if ye wol herkne me: | If any Judas in youre covent be, | Remoeveth hym bitymes' (VIII.

⁶³ For a discussion of the General Prologue's 'utopian' attitude towards class struggle see David Carlson, *Chaucer's Jobs* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), p. 130, n. 75. As Carlson notes, Paul Strohm writes that 'Chaucer's commonwealth is implicitly utopian in its accommodation of varied socially and vocationally defined voices and points of view' (*Social Chaucer*, p. 182). For a broader overview of those who regard Chaucer's Prologue as an optimistic and socially conservative attempt to smooth over real-world social conflict see S. H. Rigby, *Chaucer in Context: Society, Allegory and Gender* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 27.

⁶⁴ Strohm, for example, finds in the depiction of the inscribed audience's reactions 'Chaucer's insistence on the divisive impact of social position and role on literary taste' (*Social Chaucer*, p. 69).

⁶⁵ Line numbers from the *Canterbury Tales* refer to *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Boston: Houghton, 1987), 3–328.

1005–08: ‘To you I say the same thing—except for this, if you would listen to me: if there is a Judas in your midst, remove him at once’). Here, the Yeoman recognizes that his tale may not be suitable for all audiences equally, and he addresses different audiences directly to accommodate this fact.

The *Canterbury Tales*, then, depicts narrators grappling with an awareness that members of a diverse audience will have diverse interests and needs, and Chaucer’s narrative is deeply invested in exploring the relationship between social status and literary taste. But it is worth noting that while characters like the Yeoman struggle to accommodate the diversity in a listening audience through diverse constructed audiences, no character expresses discomfort with diversity among a narrative’s constructed audiences. For Chaucer’s fictional audience of pilgrims, at least, divergent textually constructed audiences pose little threat to narrative coherence.

It is worth noting that aside from the audiences constructed in the individual tales, the frame narrative also constructs audiences, and these point outside the narrative. Thus, the Prologue to the Miller’s Tale famously enjoins ‘every gentil wight’: ‘whoso list it nat yheere | turne over the leef and chese another tale’ (ll. 3171, 3176–77). The address here has to be to an intended audience outside of the narrative, since it describes the physical and auditory experience of reading a story from a manuscript. If it is taken at face value, the aside suggests that literary taste is determined by social status; a ‘gentil wight’ may not appreciate a narrative told by a miller. Like the Yeoman’s pronouncement, then, it indicates an awareness that different audiences will require different content.

On the surface, the passage may seem to run counter to the rest of the evidence presented here. It could be argued that, in telling gentlefolk to choose another tale, Chaucer is suggesting that there must be a constant correspondence between the actual audience of a tale and the audience implied by its content. Yet, as others have noted, the passage is tantalizingly complex; its apparent self-censure must have served as an enticement to many a ‘gentil wight’, and there is perhaps no better evidence for the fact that Chaucer thought the Miller’s Tale fitting for an aristocratic audience than his decision to include it in his narrative in the first place.⁶⁶

The *Canterbury Tales*, then, is deeply invested in the question of how different audiences might respond to a given text. But rather than emphasize the importance of matching a narrative’s constructed audience to one homogeneous actual audience, the *Canterbury Tales*, through the Yeoman, dramatizes how a narrator might add different content in a narrative to accommodate the differing needs of its audience members. The work, then, celebrates

⁶⁶ For the suggestion that the warning may have served as an invitation see e.g. the explanatory notes to the *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 842, nn. 3170–86.

diversity among implied, intended, and—through the pilgrims—inscribed audiences.

Is the Audience Dead?

The evidence presented here suggests that medieval audiences and writers tolerated the apparently diverse constructed audiences of major literary and religious works. While several of the texts examined here—including both *Ancrene Wisse* and the *Confessio Amantis*—were revised to include new textually constructed audiences (possibly to accommodate actual ones), the adaptors who added these new textually constructed audiences did nothing to reduce the diversity of audiences they found in their source texts. Indeed, the evidence powerfully suggests that Gregory's advice about the value of addressing many specific audiences within a single text, though aimed at writers of the *ars predicandi*, had an equally powerful influence on other spheres of writing.

Why, then, do we continue to wonder at the multiple and diverse textually constructed audiences of medieval works? And why do we project an expectation of audience coherence onto a body of texts that resists it so firmly? Answering these questions requires us to confront the motives behind any investigation into audience, which often lie in a search for clues about either the text's function in medieval society or the way in which it should be interpreted.

It is now generally recognized that the historical circumstance behind the production of a text is not its final arbiter of meaning—that, in Roland Barthes's terms, the 'author is dead', and that any attempt to understand a text 'as the author intended' is both impossible and misguided. But this recognition has been met in some quarters with an attempt to deflect the locus of interpretation onto the text's original audience, thereby keeping the locus of interpretation in the historical past.⁶⁷ The once prevalent line of author-based interpretative questioning ('Why does Chaucer depict the Monk as disobedient to his rule?') has in many cases been replaced with an audience-based one ('How would Chaucer's [upper-class, orthodox, cultured] audience have responded to the portrait of the Monk?'; or, 'What effect would it have had on Chaucer's audience?'). Stratified and multivalent constructed audiences, in this context, present new and at times seemingly insurmountable challenges to interpretation—issues that we are not always willing to confront.

⁶⁷ Paul Strohm describes the tendency towards this use of audience investigations and its problems: 'Finally, we must concede that our painstakingly constructed profile of the implied reader or our assertions about that reader's responses are likely to be no less subjective than our formalistic readings of a decade ago. Thus, whatever the conceptual advantages of the construct of the implied reader, we should not expect it to serve as a "shortcut" in the interpretative process' ('Chaucer's Audience(s): Fictional, Implied, Intended, Actual', *Chaucer Review*, 18 (1983), 137–64 (p. 140)).

But I would argue that the roots of our commitment to audience consistency lie to an even greater extent in current modes of English textual engagement. Popular conceptualizations of literacy prioritize silent, sustained, and fundamentally individual engagement with the text on the page. When governments and stakeholders worry about improving English literacy rates, they are referring to a population's ability to make meaning out of the text on a page and without assistance. We have come to expect constructed audiences to be singular—and therefore uniform—because we expect the same of actual audiences.

This model, familiar as it is to us, has been shown to be irreconcilable with medieval England. Few now accept wholesale Paul Saenger's thesis that a widespread adoption of silent, and necessarily individual, reading was the end result of developments in word separation that did not stabilize until the thirteenth century;⁶⁸ but it is widely acknowledged that reading in this period, when manuscripts were often prohibitively expensive and the ability to make meaning from letter forms still a highly restricted skill, was more often a social or communal activity than it is now.⁶⁹ Understanding medieval constructed audiences requires a sustained recognition of this fundamental difference between actual medieval and present-day audiences.

This is, of course, not a call for reading or interpreting medieval texts as their medieval readers would have experienced them; such an endeavour would never be completely possible even if it were desirable. But at the very least, if we are to understand both the actual and constructed audiences of medieval texts, we must look beyond present-day ideals of rhetorical mastery, grounded as they are in the assumption that audiences are experiencing the text on primarily uniform and individual terms. In short, this is a call to listen more closely to the diverse, multivalent, and often conflicting audiences of medieval texts.

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⁶⁸ Paul Saenger, *Space between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 256.

⁶⁹ See Karl Reichl, 'Plotting the Map of Medieval Oral Literature', in *Medieval Oral Literature*, ed. by Karl Reichl (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), pp. 1–70 (p. 20).