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# THE ENGLISH VERSIONS OF *ANCRENE WISSE* AND THE FRENCH VERSION PRESERVED IN THE *COMPILEISON* OR, WAS *ANCRENE WISSE* FIRST COMPOSED IN FRENCH?

KRISTA A. MILNE

THE GUIDE FOR religious recluses known as *Ancrene Wisse* (ca. 1220–1230) has become central to the study of medieval English. The guide appears in all the major anthologies of the field and it is often considered among the earliest works in Middle English. It stands out among these earliest works due to its medieval popularity. Unusually for a thirteenth-century vernacular work, it survives in many copies: nine English, four Latin, and four French (which represent two independent translations).<sup>1</sup> The typical explanation of the guide's origin story is that it was written in English first, and that its use of this vernacular for devotional purposes—which was relatively uncommon during the thirteenth century—was motivated by one of the work's specific audiences. This audience, which is mentioned in one copy that is thought to preserve some original readings, was three sisters who had forsaken lay life to become anchorites (religious recluses who lived in a fixed location). The use of the vernacular in *Ancrene Wisse* is thought to be for the benefit of these women, who would likely not have had access to Latin training.<sup>2</sup>

Despite extensive work on the *Ancrene Wisse* tradition, the complex relationships between the English and French versions of the work continue to present mysteries, and this article aims to shed more light on these relationships. More specifically, this article aims to establish more information about the relationship between the English versions of *Ancrene Wisse* and one particular French version. Since much scholarship

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<sup>1</sup> See Bella Millett's "Introduction," in *Ancrene Wisse: A Guide for anchoresses: A Translation Based on Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402*, ed. and trans. Bella Millett (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009), ix–l, at xxxvii. I want to express my sincere gratitude to the two reviewers of this article, and to Bella Millett, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, and Nicholas Watson for reading over a much earlier version of this article, and for sharing their extensive expertise. While in some cases my interpretation of the evidence differed from some of these readers' interpretations, their comments were in all cases very helpful while I was developing this article and exploring the relationships between these texts. The edition I cite here is *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402, with Variants from Other Manuscripts*, ed. Bella Millett, Early English Text Society, o.s. 325 and 326, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> On the manuscript in question, British Library, MS Cotton Nero A. xiv (N), see *Ancrene Wisse: A Guide for Anchoresses*, trans. Millett, xlv. On the guide's use of English and its audience, see Robert Hasenfratz, "Introduction," in *Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Robert Hasenfratz (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 2. It is worth remarking that while the women addressed likely did not have Latin training, they likely would have had at least some Latin literacy; on this question, see, e.g., Elizabeth Robertson's "'This Living Hand': Thirteenth-Century Female Literacy, Materialist Immanence, and the Reader of the *Ancrene Wisse*," *Speculum* 78, no. 1 (2003): 1–36.

has already been dedicated to exploring the relationship between the English versions and the French version of the work preserved in London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius F. vii (MS F), this version will be explored only briefly here.<sup>3</sup> Instead, this article will consider the other French version of the work, known as the *Vie de gent de religion*, which survives in three manuscript copies: Trinity College, Cambridge R.14.7; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 90; and Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 6276. This version of the work, which is typically described using the siglum S, was discovered relatively late in *Ancrene Wisse's* editorial history. As a result, the relationship between this French version and the broader *Ancrene Wisse* tradition has not been thoroughly explored or established.

The English version of *Ancrene Wisse* has been the site of significant scholarly interest since the nineteenth century (and arguably even earlier; there is evidence that Matthew Parker's inner circle took an interest in the work).<sup>4</sup> Yet for much of the modern age, the French version known as the *Vie de gent de religion* (henceforth the *Vie*) went unnoticed. The *Vie* was not brought to light until 1936, when it was discovered by Hope Emily Allen. After noticing the work's resemblance to *Ancrene Wisse*, Allen studied it in some detail for a 1940 article.<sup>5</sup> Its obscurity preceding Allen's discovery can be attributed in part to the nature of the *Vie*. In its three manuscript witnesses, it appears embedded in an Anglo-Norman (or, perhaps more accurately, Anglo-French) treatise on devotional themes known as the *Compileison*. The *Vie* seems to have had roughly the same structure as *Ancrene Wisse* initially, but it was rearranged at some point—probably for inclusion in the *Compileison*.<sup>6</sup>

While the dating of the *Compileison* is uncertain, Allen determined that a reference to the religious order known as the Friars of the Sack suggests that its known form likely

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**3** This French version has been edited in *The French Text of the Ancrene Riwe: Edited from British Museum MS. Cotton Vitellius F. vii.*, ed. J. A. Herbert, Early English Text Society, o.s. 219 (London: Oxford University Press, 1967). The relationship between the French version preserved in London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius F.vii and the English versions is summarized by Yoko Wada in "Introduction," in *"Temptations" from Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Yoko Wada (Suita, Osaka: Kansai University Press, 1994), xiii–cxii, at xxiv–xxv; the idea that the Vitellius French version preceded the English, first put forth by G. C. Macaulay in 1914, was rejected by M. L. Samuels in "Ancrene Riwe Studies," *Medium Aevum* 22 (1953): 1–9. Samuels cites as evidence the fact that the English version contains alliteration and linguistic games not found in the French text that is preserved in the Vitellius manuscript; see below for a discussion of this argument.

**4** On the link between Matthew Parker's circle and *Ancrene Wisse*, see, for instance, A. S. G. Edwards, "The Middle English Manuscripts and Early Readers of *Ancrene Wisse*," in *A Companion to Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Yoko Wada (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), 103–12, at 109.

**5** Hope Emily Allen, "Wynkyn de Worde and a Second French Compilation from the *Ancrene Riwe*, with a Description of the First (Trinity College Cambridge MS 883)," in *Essays and Studies in Honor of Carleton Brown* (New York: New York University Press, 1940), 182–219.

**6** See Marcel Thomas, "Une compilation anglo-normande de la fin du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle 'La vie de gent de religion,'" *Recueil de travaux offerts à M. Clovis Brunel par ses amis, collègues et élèves*, 2 vols. (Paris: Société de l'École des chartes, 1955), 2:586–98, at 587.

originates from after the arrival of this group in England in 1257.<sup>7</sup> The earliest manuscript containing the *Compileison*, Trinity College Cambridge MS R.14.7, has been dated between 1274 and 1322, with evidence favouring the earlier side of this date range.<sup>8</sup> The *Compileison* can thus be dated to ca. 1257–1274, but the *Vie* itself could easily precede these dates and probably does; most of the *Compileison* was drawn together from pre-existing sources. It is true that no earlier copy of the *Vie* survives, but this cannot tell us much about the work's date. Estimates of survival rates for manuscripts from medieval institutional libraries typically range from two percent to twenty-five percent, with evidence favouring the lower estimates, and there is evidence that French manuscripts had particularly low survival rates relative to English ones.<sup>9</sup> More precise dating of the *Vie* is challenging; since the work that has survived has been modified from its original copy in ways that we cannot determine, dating on either linguistic or contextual grounds is not particularly helpful.

The *Compileison* is lengthy—about twenty-nine thousand lines long, according to an estimate by Nicholas Watson and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne.<sup>10</sup> It is, on the whole, a guide for religious life with a focus on penance, and it is aimed primarily at the person confessing (rather than the priest hearing the confession). The *Vie* sections of this guide comprise all of the “standard” sections of *Ancrene Wisse*, in the sense that they represent almost all of the introduction and eight parts that appear in the most widely cited English copies. The only parts that are missing are part 1 (on anchoritic devotions), and much of part 8 (the “outer rule”). All other parts appear, though in a different order than in *Ancrene Wisse*. Yet the *Compileison* also contains far more than just *Ancrene Wisse* content. W. H. Trethewey, who edited only the *Ancrene Wisse* sections of the *Compileison* for the Early English Text Society, writes that the *Ancrene Wisse* material accounts for only about 42 percent of the work as a whole.<sup>11</sup>

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**7** Allen, “Wynkyn,” 199.

**8** See the discussion of the history of the manuscript in K. A. Milne [Murchison], “Piety, Community and Local History: *Le Livre de Reis de Engleterre* and its Context in Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R. 14.7,” in *The Prose Brut and Other Late Medieval Chronicles: Essays in Honour of Lister M. Matheson*, ed. Jaclyn Rajsic, Erik Kooper, and Dominique Hoche (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2016), 15–29, at 19–21.

**9** I take the survival rates here from those based on institutional library lists given by Michael Sargent, “What Do the Numbers Mean? Observations on Some Patterns of Middle English Manuscript Transmission,” in *Design and Distribution of Late Medieval Manuscripts in England*, ed. Margaret Connolly and Linne R. Mooney (Cambridge: Brewer, 2008), 205–44, at 211. I explore the question of the survival of French manuscripts in my forthcoming book, *The Destruction of Medieval Manuscripts in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024); there I find that the lower ranges of estimated survival rates tend to be the most accurate.

**10** Nicholas Watson and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, “The French of England: The *Compileison*, *Ancrene Wisse*, and the Idea of Anglo-Norman,” *Journal of Romance Studies* 4, no. 3 (2004): 35–59, at 42.

**11** W. H. Trethewey, “Introduction,” in *The French Text of the Ancrene Riwe: Edited from Trinity College, Cambridge MS. R. 14.7, with Variants from Bibliotheque Nationale MS. F. fr. 6276 and MS. Bodley 90*, ed. W. H. Trethewey, Early English Text Society, o.s. 240 (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), ix–xxxiii, at xxxiii.

Although the *Vie* sections of the *Compileison* contain most of the same material as *Ancrene Wisse*, the work is directed at a markedly different audience. The *Compileison* is often addressed to “hommes e femmes de religion” (“men and women of religion”).<sup>12</sup> Cate Gunn, drawing on the work of Millett, finds that the term “gent de religion” in this work is used for those “living a dedicated religious life, but the term is not limited to a specific order.”<sup>13</sup> But the author also addresses a broader audience beyond these “gent de religion.” This approach is laid out at the start of the work, where the author introduces a section that finds an analogue in *Ancrene Wisse*:

ceo est co[n]quilli en sensible. des set pechez / morteus. e de lur es spesces. sicome nus / les auom t[r]ouue en seinte esc[ri]pture p[our] apre[n]- / dre les leaume[n]t e sanz feintise a tote genz / mes especiaume[n]t e par deuant tuz autres / a ho[m]mes e a fe[m]mes de religioun.

This [work] was [lit. is] gathered together of the seven deadly sins and their species, as we have found them in sacred scripture, in order to teach them reliably and without deceit to everyone, but especially, and before all others, to the men and women of religion.<sup>14</sup>

Here, religious folk are cast as the work’s primary audience, and all others as the work’s secondary one.

The *Compileison* is divided into five sections—each rather confusingly also called a *compileison*—with material shared with *Ancrene Wisse* interwoven throughout most of it. The last section, which probably came first in the original version of the *Vie*, shares its title.<sup>15</sup> The sections, as enumerated by Wogan-Browne and Watson, are as follows:

- 1) the *Compileison de set morteus pecches*
- 2) the *Compileison de seinte penance*
- 3) the *Compileison des peines de purgatorie* (no *Ancrene Wisse/Vie* material)
- 4) the *Compileison des dis commandements* (no *Ancrene Wisse/Vie* material)
- 5) the *Vie de gent de religion*.

The first two sections draw heavily on three guides for priests or their close analogues: Guilelmus Peraldus’ *Summa de vitiis*, his *Summa de virtutibus* (both ca. 1236), and Raymond de Pennaforte’s *Summa de casibus poenitentiae* (ca. 1225).<sup>16</sup> Aside from these

<sup>12</sup> *The French Text*, ed. Trethewey, 135, l. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Cate Gunn, “Reading Edmund of Abingdon’s *Speculum* as Pastoral Literature,” in *Texts and Traditions of Medieval Pastoral Care: Essays in Honour of Bella Millett*, ed. Cate Gunn and Catherine Innes-Parker (Cambridge: Brewer, 2009), 100–14, at 105.

<sup>14</sup> The section is not in Trethewey’s edition, so I have transcribed it from Trinity College Cambridge MS R. 14. 7, fol. 1b. I am grateful to the librarians and staff of Trinity College’s Wren Library for supporting my use of their collections many years ago to prepare this and other transcriptions. The translation is mine.

<sup>15</sup> For the order of the tracts see Watson and Wogan-Browne, “The French of England,” 56–59.

<sup>16</sup> Germaine Dempster, “The Parson’s Tale,” in *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer’s Canterbury*

sources, the work contains (in the second section) an almost complete, and remarkably faithful, French translation of Robert Grosseteste's *Perambulauit Iudas* (before ca. 1235) and a long section on almsgiving.<sup>17</sup>

The third and fourth *compileisons* are shorter than the first two and contain no *Ancrene Wisse* material. The third is a sober meditation on the pains that await unrepentant sinners and the punishments of judgment day. This section also circulated independently, in both French and Latin. The editor of the *Vie* material supposes that the Latin version came first, but Nicholas Watson and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, who have explored the development of the *Compileison* in detail, find that it is just as likely that this tract was written in French first.<sup>18</sup> The fourth section contains a meditation on the Ten Commandments and other fundamentals of the faith, including the five degrees of chastity, the six things to be feared, and the six things that make a person saintly. The fifth and final section—the lengthy *Compileison de la vie de gent de religion*—shares almost all of its content with *Ancrene Wisse* and represents the most substantial cohesive section of *Ancrene Wisse* material.<sup>19</sup>

### The Stemma of *Ancrene Wisse*

The relationships between the nine English manuscripts of *Ancrene Wisse* have been studied in depth. Much of the groundwork for establishing these relationships was laid by E. J. Dobson. Dobson took as a given that the English version of *Ancrene Wisse* preceded all its translations (an assumption that has been followed by subsequent editors). Working primarily on the basis of style and content, Dobson argued that a set of annotations and revisions found on the copy of *Ancrene Wisse* preserved in British Library, MS Cotton Cleopatra C. vi (MS C) were authorial. The text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402 (MS A), he argued, incorporates these annotations and revisions.<sup>20</sup> Based on this analysis and other evidence, Dobson constructed (and subsequently updated) a stemma of the various copies of *Ancrene Wisse* that was based on two main branches: 1) MS A and its lost ancestor copy, and 2) all other surviving copies and their ancestors.<sup>21</sup>

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Tales, ed. W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), 723–60, at 727.

**17** For the dating of the *Perambulauit Iudas*, see Joseph Goering, and F. A. C. Mantello, “‘The *Perambulauit Iudas*...’ (*Speculum Confessionis*) Attributed to Robert Grosseteste,” *Revue Bénédictine* 96 (1986): 125–68, at 132.

**18** Watson and Wogan-Browne, “The French of England,” 43.

**19** Trethewey, “Introduction,” xxj; xxv–xxvi.

**20** See E. J. Dobson, *Origins of Ancrene Wisse* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 7–11, 287–90; see also Dobson’s article “The Affiliations of the Manuscripts of *Ancrene Wisse*,” in *English and Medieval Studies: Presented to J. R. R. Tolkien on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Norman Davis and C. L. Wrenn (London: Allen and Unwin, 1962), 128–63.

**21** See Dobson, *Origins*, 287–90. See also Millett, “Textual Introduction,” in *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:xxviii.

Dobson began but never finished an edition of the text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402 and the notes for this material supplied the starting point for Bella Millett's magisterial edition and study of *Ancrene Wisse*. Millett posited a new stemma for the work—one with three branches derived from the authorial holograph rather than two.<sup>22</sup> In this stemma, the Corpus manuscript (A) represents its own line of descent from the original (as in Dobson's stemma); a second line of descent is represented by manuscripts C and F, and all other copies (including the French version under discussion here) are part of a third line of descent.<sup>23</sup> Millett notes that the relationships between the various copies are often complex, and that the relationships between the non-English copies remain uncertain.<sup>24</sup> As far as I can determine, there has never been a full collation of the *Vie* against the other copies of *Ancrene Wisse*; its relationship to these copies has never been firmly established and its place on existing stemmata is at this stage conjectural.<sup>25</sup> While many (myself included) have proceeded until now under the assumption that the relationships between all surviving versions of the work have been established, the reality is that the issue continues to be murky, and the goal at hand is to shed light on this issue.

Before examining the relationships between the *Vie* and the English versions of *Ancrene Wisse*, it is worth examining the process through which authorial readings are usually identified, including the typical decisions that are made when establishing a *stemma codicum*. These diagrams are traditionally, in keeping with the approach that is associated with Karl Lachmann, established on the principle of common error.<sup>26</sup> The principle is founded on two key assumptions: first, that when two texts share an error or omission, they must be related to each other in some way; and second, that the more "authorial" or "original" texts (i.e., those with the least variation from the author's own copy) will contain the fewest errors. As Joseph Bédier famously pointed out, the application of this principle of common error is not without problems. It demands that the editor make evaluations about what constitutes an error—evaluations that are, in many cases, subjective.<sup>27</sup> Is a rhyme preserved in one copy but not in another evidence of an

**22** See Millett, "Textual Introduction," in *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:xxviii–xxix.

**23** Millett, "Textual Introduction," in *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:xxx

**24** Millett, "Textual Introduction," in *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:xxxiv, xxxii. On the complexities of establishing a reliable stemma for *Ancrene Wisse*, see 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. Alastair J. Minnis (Cambridge: Brewer, 1992), 9–20.

**25** The *Vie* has never been collated in full against the other copies. Millett's edition is the closest to a critical one of the text, but Millett writes that it is not a "critical edition" (xlvi). It gives many variant readings, although Millett notes that more variants readings are given from the English versions of the text than what she terms the "rewritten versions," including the *Vie*; see Millett, "Textual Introduction," in *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:lxiv.

**26** As Classen notes (drawing on the work of Sebastian Timpanaro), Lachmann was not the first to adopt this method, nor did he adopt it consistently; see Albrecht Classen, *Handbook of Medieval Studies: Terms—Methods—Trends* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 430. The discussion that follows in this paragraph draws in part on Classen's lucid discussion and analysis there.

**27** Joseph Bédier made the point in his well-known essay, "La tradition manuscrite du *Lai de*

error? Does a confusing (or opaque) passage preserved in one copy but not in another suggest an error?

Bella Millett, in her edition of *Ancrene Wisse*, notes that editors of medieval texts often treat any non-authorial reading as an error (including, for example, variation introduced by scribes), and she makes a strong argument for distinguishing between true error (in her words, “mechanical error and misunderstanding”) and textual variation of the sort that happened regularly in medieval texts as they evolved.<sup>28</sup> Yet even if we limit ourselves to the former category, it is not always easy to identify errors in medieval texts, since the spelling and usage rules of English were subject to pronounced regional and other forms of variation. Moreover, most of our information about how medieval writers perceived “correct” and “incorrect” spelling, connotation, and language use come from the texts themselves, and it is easy to fall into circular arguments under these circumstances. Given these and other difficulties, each perceived error needs to be considered carefully by an editor during the process of recension.

There is another difficulty with stemmatic recension based on the principle of common error. In its purest form, the method depends on the assumption that scribes can introduce errors but never correct them—indeed, this is the basis of the method.<sup>29</sup> This assumption is evidently not always correct. In light of these issues with the traditional ‘common error’ method of recension, alternative methods have been proposed—including the more statistical method adopted by Bédier—yet none of these has broken the firm hold of the ‘common error’ method.<sup>30</sup> This might sound troubling given the issues outlined above, but in most of its modern-day applications the ‘common error’ method is approached with a critical eye that evaluates each error within its context, and that recognizes that stemmatic recension depends on multiple layers of editorial evaluations.<sup>31</sup> Stemmatic recension, then, as it is usually carried out, is not an objective or easily automatable process, and it is important to keep this in mind when approaching textual traditions.

In the case of *Ancrene Wisse*, establishing “errors” is complicated by the high degree of variation among the guide’s multiple copies. To give a basic example, in the Nero copy (N), the text is addressed to three sisters who were related by birth, while in the Corpus copy (A), the text is addressed to an audience of twenty or more.<sup>32</sup> In some other copies—including, as we have seen, the *Vie*—it is addressed to a mixed audience. In light of variations such as these, establishing which texts share an original reading is difficult.

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*l’Ombre: Réflexions sur l’art d’éditer les anciens textes (premier article),* *Romania* 214 (1928): 161–96. See especially 180, where Bédier notes that the identification of errors relies in many cases on subjective judgments made by the editor.

**28** See *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:li–liiii.

**29** An excellent overview of the historical approaches to stemmatic recension—and their problems—is that in Albrecht Classen’s *Handbook*. Classen explains the principle of stemmatic recension on pages 429–32.

**30** See Bédier, “Tradition,” 181–87.

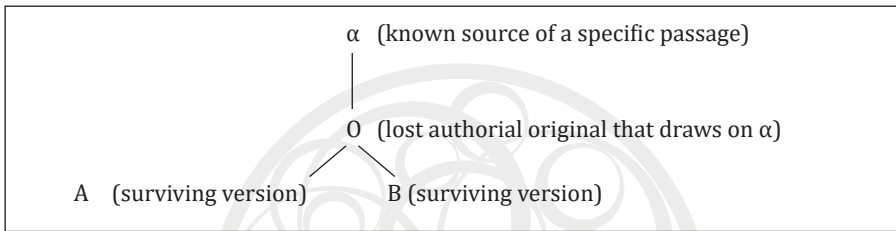
**31** See Classen, *Handbook*, 436.

**32** Millett, “Textual Introduction,” in *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:xlv; see also Millett, “*Mouvance*.”



One way to sidestep these issues is source analysis. Where the source or ultimate source of a specific passage is known, the identification of “original” (insofar as any medieval work can ever be described as the “original”) readings for that passage no longer requires the subjective determination of which variants are errors (or of which errors were introduced and which were corrected). In this way, source analysis provides different, and potentially more precise, insight into original readings, and the goal at hand is thus to consider this kind of source analysis evidence alongside other types of evidence to shed new light on the relationship between the *Vie* and the English versions of *Ancrene Wisse*.<sup>33</sup>

To explain the underlying assumptions behind this kind of source analysis, it is helpful to use a simple diagram:



For any given passage, if A contains more of source  $\alpha$  than B, A is closer to O. It also follows that A is probably not descended from B; indeed, the only plausible way that A could be descended from B in this situation is if A also draws on another manuscript or source. Where sources are known, this type of analysis can provide valuable and relatively trustworthy information about original readings. Source analysis is particularly valuable for a work like *Ancrene Wisse*, for which a great deal of variation complicates any attempt to identify original readings, and for which its complexity complicates any attempt to identify errors.

### Source Analysis and *Ancrene Wisse*

Unfortunately, the original sources of *Ancrene Wisse* are not easy to pin down. The work is densely allusive, drawing not only on more traditional sources like the psalms and the writings of the Church Fathers, but also on the large body of penitential writing that was taking hold in Europe in the early thirteenth century. These sources, only occasionally named by the author, are found alongside much more quotidian material, including popular song lyrics and proverbs.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> As A. R. Bennett has noted, medieval works were constantly being written and rewritten, and it is perhaps best to think of the medieval text as one constantly in flux; see “What Do the Numbers Mean? The Case for Corpus Studies,” in *Manuscript Culture and Medieval Devotional Traditions: Essays in Honour of Michael G. Sargent*, ed. Jennifer N. Brown and Nicole R. Rice (Cambridge: Brewer, 2021), 48–83, at 51.

<sup>34</sup> For an overview of sources of *Ancrene Wisse*, see the introduction in *Ancrene Wisse: A Guide for Anchoresses*, trans. Millett, xxvi–xxvii.

Although the author does not usually mention his sources, a significant body of scholarship has identified analogues and ultimate sources for many passages of *Ancrene Wisse*, and I have aimed to base the analysis that follows on passages for which the ultimate source has already been identified. One of these passages occurs at the start of the work, which contains in both French and English versions of a passage with wordplay on the words for “right” and “rule.” Millett writes that the “ultimate source” of this passage is Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiae*, but the passage is not attributed to Isidore in any of the English copies.<sup>35</sup> The *Vie*, however, quotes from Isidore’s work directly, and in Latin, and it directly attributes this material to Isidore’s work. The correspondence between the *Vie* and the ultimate source of this passage is striking:<sup>36</sup>

| Isidore of Seville’s <i>Etymologiae</i>   | <i>Vie de Gent de Religion</i>   |
|---|--|
| Regula autem dicta quod recte ducit, nec aliquando aliorum trahit. Alii dixerunt regulam dictam uel quod regat, uel quod normam recte uiuendi praebeat, uel quod distortum prauumque quid corrigat. | Regula enim ut dicit in libro ethimologiarum dicta est; eo quod recte ducit. nec aliquando aliorum trahit uel quod <del>trahit</del> [crossed out] regat uel quod normam recte uiuendi praebeat. uel distortum. prauumque quod est corrigat. |

Millett, who was the first to notice that this section of the *Vie* differs from the English versions in its direct citation of Isidore, notes elsewhere that the *Vie* “is sometimes augmented by additional Latin quotations, and the phrasing is often expanded.”<sup>37</sup> But this particular section of the *Vie* does not appear to be a simple expansion; it stands out because it draws directly on the ultimate source that lies behind the English version, but that is never cited in the English version.

Since the *Vie* is closer to the ultimate source of the passage here, it seems likely that the *Vie* preserves original readings not found in any of the English versions. Of course, it could instead be argued that the French author used both *Ancrene Wisse* and Isidore for this passage—that he merely supplemented his text with extra material from the passage in Isidore’s text (or that the English text does not draw on Isidore at all, and the correspondence is only accidental). The evidence from this example alone is therefore inconclusive. But examples like this one (of the French text preserving more of the ultimate source of a passage) are numerous, and they are not relegated to borrowings from Isidore.

<sup>35</sup> *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:1–2, 3–33, and the commentary in *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 2:1–2, 3–33.

<sup>36</sup> For the Latin, see Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiarum sive Originum libri xx*, ed. Wallace Martin Lindsay, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1911), 1:234 [book 6, chapter 16]. For the French, see *The French Text*, ed. Trethewey, 161–62, ll. 27–31.

<sup>37</sup> See *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:xliv.

A very straightforward example occurs in part 5, on the “conditions of confession.” The discussion of why confession should be “hopeful” in *Ancrene Wisse* is drawn from (and indeed attributed explicitly to) Gregory’s *Moralia in Iob*. Both English and French texts display remarkable similarities to a specific passage of Gregory’s *Moralia* here, but the French text gives a longer section of the passage from Gregory’s work than any of the English versions of the text:<sup>38</sup>

**Gregory’s *Moralia in Iob*<sup>39</sup>**

Unde etiam per Moysen admonet, dicens: Non accipies loco pignoris superiorem, aut inferiorem molam. Accipere namque aliquando dicimus auferre. Unde et aves illae quae sunt rapiendus avibus avidae, accipitres vocantur. Unde Paulus apostolus dicit : Sustinetis enim si quis devorat, si quis accipit. Ac si diceret, Si quis rapit. Pignus vero debitoris est confessio peccatoris. A debitore enim pignus accipitur, cum a peccatore jam peccati confessio tenetur. Superior autem et inferior mola est spes et timor. Spes quippe ad alta subvehit, timor autem cor inferius premit. Sed mola superior et inferior ita sibi necessario junguntur, ut una sine altera inutiliter habeatur. In peccatoris itaque pectore incessanter debet spes et formido conjungi, quia incassum misericordiam sperat, si non etiam justitiam timeat; incassum justitiam metuit, si non etiam de misericordia confidat. Loco igitur pignoris mola superior aut inferior tolli prohibetur, quia qui peccatori praedicat, tanta dispensatione componere praedicationem debet, ut nec derelicta spe timorem subtrahat, nec subtracta spe, in solo eum timore derelinquat. Mola enim superior aut inferior tollitur, si per praedicantis linguam in peccatoris pectore aut timor a spe, aut spes a timor dividatur.

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**38** For *Ancrene Wisse*, I have used the edition of the work preserved in Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 402, because this version is thought to reflect an authorial revision of the work (see above). Given the high degree of variation among copies of *Ancrene Wisse*, however, I have taken into consideration the variants printed by Millett in her edition and I have also double checked the readings in Corpus against those of other branches of the English text (N and T, London British Library, MS Cotton Titus D. xviii). For the *Vie* I have supplied references to Trethewey’s edition, since it is the only one that is readily available, and since its base text is commonly thought to be the earliest.

**39** Gregory I, *Moralium libri, sive Expositio in librum B. Job*, ed. J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina* 76 (Paris: Migne, 1849), ch. 12 [sect. 24], col. 687C–688A. The translation is from Gregory I, *Morals on the Book of Job*, ed. James Bliss and Charles Marriott, 4 vols. (Oxford: Parker, 1850), 3:579. I have removed the biblical references that were added by the editors.

**Vie**<sup>40</sup>

E pur ceste chose signefier fu comande en la ueu lei; ke nul homme ne deust de partir ne deseuerer les deus meules; dont lem mout.<sup>41</sup> La mouele aual ke git tut dis en pes e port grant charge; signefie pour ke tret homme de pecche. e port isci grant charge de penance; ke est ore en ceste siecle pesant et dure. Pur estre quites de plus dure peine en le autre siecle. la muele amont signefie esperance ke curt en tour. e si se torne e se muet en bones oueres tuz iours ou a fiance de grant uerite [BN : merite].<sup>42</sup> *hinc per moysen dominus amonet dicens. Non accipias loco pignoris superiorem aut inferiorem molam. Non accipias id est non auferas ut dicit Gregorius. superior autem et inferior mola; sunt spes et timor. Spes quippe ad alta subuehit. Timor autem cor inferius premit. sed mola superior et inferior ita sibi necessario iunguntur; ut una sine altera in utiliter habeatur. In peccatoris itaque pectore incessanter debent spes et timor coniungi quia incassum misericordiam sperat; si non etiam iusticiam timeat. et frustra iusticiam metuat; si non etiam de misericordia confidat.* de trop grant afiance. e de desperance. Cestes deus choses ne deit nul homme {desseuerer ne la une}<sup>43</sup> del autre de partir. kar sicome dit li seint homme; esperance sanz pour fet homme dit il trop asseuerer. pour sanz esperance fet homme trop desperer. *Spes inquit sine timore luxuriat in presupcionem. Timor sine spe degenerat indesperacionem.*<sup>44</sup>

**Ancrene Wisse**<sup>45</sup>

Schrift schal beon hopeful.<sup>46</sup> Hwa-se seið as he con, ant deð al þet he mei, Godd ne bit na mare. Ah hope ant dred schulen aa beon imengt togederes. Þis forte bitacnin, wes i þe alde lahe ihaten þet te twa grindelstanes ne schulde na mon twinnin. Þe neoðere, þe lið stille ant bereð heui charge, bitacneð fearlac, þe teieð mon from sunne ant is iheueget her wið heard forte beo quite of heardre. Þe vuere stan bitacneð hope, þe eorneð ant

<sup>40</sup> *The French Text*, ed. Trethewey, 92, l. 25–93, l. 11. I have very lightly standardized the text to improve readability (by removing, for example, an unnecessary capital). The translation from the French is mine; in places of exact correspondence between the Latin version and the Latin of the *Vie*, I have used Bliss and Marriott's translation (the translation for "Superior autem... misericordia confidant," for example, is Bliss and Marriott's). I have not added diacritics to passages from the *Vie*. This is in part for the sake of consistency (Trethewey's edition does not add them), and in part because a section of the argument below rests on rhyming evidence, and adding diacritics could arguably distort the interpretation of this evidence.

<sup>41</sup> I am grateful to Bella Millett for her guidance on the translation here.

<sup>42</sup> In both of the other manuscript copies, the text here reads "merite"; this reading is obviously superior so I have adopted it in the translation.

<sup>43</sup> This phrase is copied in the margin in Tr but in this place in the other two copies of this text.

<sup>44</sup> See the footnote below.

<sup>45</sup> *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:126, 5.462–5.472. The translation is from *Ancrene Wisse: A Guide for Anchoresses*, trans. Millett, 126.

<sup>46</sup> Millett notes that four manuscripts (designated with the sigla CFG and T) have "for-þi" before "beon"—apparently an addition; see *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:126. The other variants recorded for this passage are all minor; see *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 2:237n5.462–71.

stured hire i gode werkes eauer wið trust of muche mede. Þeos twa na mon ne parti from oþer, for as Sein Gregoire seið, *Spes sine timore luxuriat in presumptionem, timor sine spe degenerat in desperationem*; dred wiðuten hope madeð mon untrusten, ant hope wiðute dred madeð ouertrusten.<sup>47</sup>

## English Translations of the Quoted Passages

### Gregory's *Moralia in Iob*

Whence He also warns us by Moses, saying, Thou shalt not take either the upper or the nether millstone to pledge. For by “take” we sometimes mean “take away.” Whence also those birds which are eager in seizing other birds are called hawks. Whence the Apostle Paul says, *For ye suffer, if a man devour you, if a man take*. As if he said, If any one takes away. But the pledge of the debtor is the confession of a sinner. For a pledge is taken from a debtor; when a confession of sin is obtained from a sinner. But the upper and nether millstone are hope and fear. For hope raises up the heart, but fear weighs it down lower. But the upper and nether millstone are so necessarily joined together, that one is possessed in vain without the other. Hope and fear, therefore, ought to be unceasingly united in the breast of a sinner, because he hopes in vain for mercy, if he does not also fear justice; he in vain fears justice, if he does not also rely on mercy. The upper or the nether millstone is, therefore, ordered not to be taken as a pledge; because he who preaches to a sinner, ought to order his preaching with such management, as not in leaving hope to remove fear, not yet in withdrawing hope, to leave him in fear only. For the upper and nether millstone is removed, if by the tongue of the preacher, either fear is severed from hope, or hope from fear, in the breast of the sinner.

### Vie

And to signify this [idea], it was commanded in the old law: that no man should split or separate the two millstones, of which one does the grinding. The stone underneath which lies ever in tranquility and holds a heavy burden/charge signifies fear, which holds man back from sin, and which holds here a large burden of penance, which is heavy and hard in this present life/world, to ensure that we are released from harder suffering in the afterlife. The upper stone signifies hope that runs in a circle and so turns and acts always in good works, in which there is a promise of great reward. *Hence the Lord warns us by Moses, saying, Thou shalt not take either the upper or the nether millstone to pledge. “Thou shalt not take” that is “do not take away”—so says Gregory. But the upper and nether millstone are hope and fear. For hope raises up the heart, but fear weighs it down lower. But the upper and nether millstone are so necessarily joined together, that one is possessed in vain without the*

<sup>47</sup> Although Gregory's *Moralia* has an analogous Latin passage, Millett notes that the form differs from that in Gregory's text and resembles much more closely that in a late twelfth-century *Admonitio ad claustrales* (see Millett, *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 2:228n5.470–71).

*other. Hope and fear, therefore, ought to be unceasingly united in the sinner, because he hopes in vain for mercy, if he does not also fear justice; he in vain fears justice, if he does not also rely on mercy.*

Of overly great trust, and of despair: No man should separate these two things from each other. For as the holy one says: hope without fear, he says, makes a man feel overly secure. Fear without hope makes a man feel overly despairing. *Hope, he says, without fear, makes a man swell with presumption. Fear without hope makes a man dissolve into despair.*

### **Ancrene Wisse**

Confession should be hopeful. If someone says what he knows and does everything that he can, God does not ask for anything more. But hope and fear must always be mixed together. To signify this, it was commanded under the Old Law that nobody should separate a pair of millstones. The lower one, which lies still and supports a heavy weight, signifies fear, which restrains people from sin, and is weighed down in this world with a heavy load of suffering so as not to incur a heavier one. The upper stone signifies hope, which constantly runs around and busies itself with good works in the confident expectation of a great reward. Nobody should separate these two from each other. For as St Gregory says, *Hope without fear swells into presumption, fear without hope sinks into despair*; fear without hope leads to despair, and hope without fear leads to presumption.

It is worth noting that the English version here exhibits a hint of alliteration (“ant is i-heveget her with heard for-te beo quite of heardre”), which may suggest it preserves original readings (the issue is discussed further below). On the other hand, the French contains sections in verse, both in the Latin quotations and in their French translations. For example, “esperance sanz pour fet homme dit il trop aseurer. / pour sanz esperance fet homme trop desperer,” functions as an alexandrine couplet once the interjectory “dit il” is removed (rhyming passages such as this one are common in the French text, as discussed below). Little, then, can be gleaned about the language of composition from the rhetorically marked elements of the passage.

Nevertheless, the lines of borrowing here seem obvious. Both French and English versions contain ideas that are attributed to, and drawn from, Gregory’s work, and both versions explicitly state that they are quoting Gregory. But the French version’s borrowings from this section of Gregory are more extensive than those of the English version. As is typical in the French text, the translation is given first, then the Latin passage that inspired it. The comparison above suggests that the original author of the French version copied his Latin quotations carefully from his source (Gregory), modifying them to remove references to a preacher that would not be useful in a guide designed primarily for penitents, and offering translations of these sections into French. Since the French text preserves more of the source text than the English versions here, it seems evident that the French text is closer to this source. The alternative possibility—that the redactor of the *Vie* looked up the specific passage of Gregory’s text quoted in *Ancrene Wisse*

and then added additional material from this passage—is possible, but it would be surprising for a translator to take this step, and it seems unlikely given the other evidence presented here.

The same conclusion emerges from another section taken from (and attributed in both English and French texts to) Gregory. The source of this passage, identified by Millett, is Gregory's *Homiliae in Euangelia*:

| <b>Gregory's <i>Homiliae in Euangelia</i><sup>48</sup></b>   | <b><i>Vie</i><sup>49</sup></b>   | <b><i>Ancrene Wisse</i><sup>50</sup></b>            |
|--|--|---|
| quia quicquid precipitur,<br>in sola caritate solidatur...<br>nec habet aliquid uiriditatis<br>ramus boni operis, si non<br>manet in radice caritatis.               | Quia quicquid precipitur;<br>in sola caritate solidatur<br>nec habet aliquid viriditatis<br>ramus boni operis; si non<br>manet in radice caritatis.              | Quicquid precipitur, in<br>sola caritate solidatur. |
| whatever is commanded<br>is founded on love alone...<br>[but] the branch which is<br>our good works has no sap<br>unless it remains attached<br>to the root of love. | Whatever is commanded,<br>is founded on love alone<br>but the branch which is<br>our good works has no sap<br>unless it remains attached<br>to the root of love. | Whatever is commanded,<br>is founded on love alone. |

Here, too, the lines of borrowing seem evident; the French clearly preserves more of the source passage than the English.

Examples such as this one, in which the French text preserves more of an ultimate source than the English versions, are numerous. In addition to the three examples already discussed, there is also an extended section apparently derived from Raymond de Penafort's *Summa de casibus poenitentiae* which is included here as an appendix. I have also supplied ten shorter examples below. I have aimed to take these examples from different parts of *Ancrene Wisse* to ensure they are representative. In the interest of brevity, I have tried to choose examples in which the ultimate source is indisputable, so these examples are all based on the Vulgate. In this respect, they differ somewhat from the examples already discussed; because the Vulgate was more accessible, extra material from the Vulgate could more easily have been supplied by memory. Several of these examples (all noted), have been commented on before, but it is nevertheless helpful to note them here, and I have given the examples in an abbreviated form wherever possible:

**48** Gregorius Magnus, *Homiliae in Euangelia*, ed. R. Étaix. Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 141 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 229–30 [Hom. 27, section 1]. The translation is from Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. and ed. David Hurst (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 212.

**49** *The French Text*, ed. Trethewey, 140, ll. 17–19. I have very lightly standardized the text to improve readability. I have based the translation for this text and the English one on Hurst's translation.

**50** *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:146, 7.40–41. The identification of the quotation is in *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 2:261n7.40–41.

1. Still in the section on hopeful confession, *Ancrene Wisse* states that fear can help motivate a full confession. The work then supplies a quotation from the Psalter. The quotation is more complete in the French version than in any of the English versions:

*Vie*: “Exarcerbavit in-quit dominum peccator; secundum multitudinem ire sue non queret.”

*Ancrene Wisse*: “Secundum multitudinem ire sue non queret”<sup>51</sup>

Since the *Vie* quotes more of the Psalter, it seems likely that it represents an original reading. Yet the example is not straightforward. The Psalms would have been well known during the thirteenth century, and it is therefore possible that the author of the French text supplied the extra line here from memory or from a Psalter.

2. The preface of the English version of *Ancrene Wisse* quotes six words from James 1:27 (and the quotation is attributed to the Vulgate in the text). The French version quotes the whole verse.<sup>52</sup>
3. *Vie*: “Pur ceo fu comande par deu en la ueu lei; ke fosse fust tuz iors couerte. E si acuns la descouerist e beste le enz chaist; il la rendreit. *In exodo enim legitur. Si quis aperuerit cisternam et foderit. et operuerit eam ceciderit bos aut asinus in eam; dominus cisterne reddet precium iumentorum.*”

*Ancrene Wisse*: “For-þi wes ihaten on Godes [halue in þe Alde] Lazþe þet put were iwriþen eauer, and 3ef ani were vnwriþen ant beaste feolle þer-in, he [**þe unwreah þe put**] hit schulde 3elden.”<sup>53</sup>

This section (from part 2 of *Ancrene Wisse*) contains a passage drawn from the Vulgate (and identified as such by Millett). The bold text, in keeping with Millett’s editorial policies, indicates a section added by a corrector. The French version (along with the L copy) contains the original quotation from the Bible, which is missing in all English versions of the text. As Millett notes, most of the English versions contain an error that obscures the sense of the passage (it is corrected in copy C by C<sup>2</sup>), whereas the French version (along with copies FTV and L) contain the correct interpretation.<sup>54</sup>

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**51** For the French passage, see *The French Text*, ed. Trethewey, 94, ll. 9–10. For the English, see *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:126, 5.481. Millett notes that it is Psalm 9:25; *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 2:229, 5.481. Millett’s corrected edition does not give any variant readings for this line; see *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:237. I have checked the two versions thought to be closest to the authorial originals (A and C) and the version thought to be closest to the *Vie* (T), and none of these texts contains a longer version of this quotation.

**52** The English version is *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:4, P.130–13; for the *Vie* see *The French Text*, ed. Trethewey, 167, ll. 8–11.

**53** The English version is *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:23, 2.123–26; for the *Vie* see *The French Text*, ed. Trethewey, 174, ll. 27–31.

**54** For the comparison and the errors in the English versions, see *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 2:53, 2.124–26.



4. In the discussion of Christ's love in part 7, the English and French versions quote from Jeremiah 3:1. The *Vie* quotation is more complete than that of the English versions. And, as Millett points out, the *Vie* version reflects the Vulgate word order for "amatoribus multis" (as do versions in MSS L and G), whereas the order is reversed in the other versions.<sup>55</sup>

5. *Vie*: "Cauete uobis inquit quia. . .lupi rapaces. A fructibus autem illorum congno-  
scetis eos"

*Ancrene Wisse*: "Set multi ueniunt ad uos. . .lupi rapaces."<sup>56</sup>

Millett notes this quotation, which appears in part 2 of *Ancrene Wisse*, is drawn from Matthew 7:15. The French text (which contains 7:15–16) includes a line of Matthew that is missing in the English.<sup>57</sup>

6. *Vie*: "Tristis est...sed sicut|tu uis"

*Ancrene Wisse*: "Tristis est...iste"<sup>58</sup>

This quotation, which is in part 6 of *Ancrene Wisse*, is also drawn from Matthew.<sup>59</sup> The last part of the quotation is given in the original Latin and then in translation in the *Vie*, but it appears only in translation in *Ancrene Wisse*.<sup>60</sup>

7. At the start of part 7, both *Ancrene Wisse* and the *Vie* quote from the Bible; Millett traces the quotation to 1 Cor. 12:1, 3. Millett notes that in the English version of the work, "the second and third conditions [are] reversed." The *Vie* contains a longer passage from the same section of 1 Corinthians and the conditions are in the right order.<sup>61</sup>

8. Also in part 7, the French version quotes Psalm 44:3 (the identification is given by Millett). The English version is "probably echoing" the same Psalm according to Millett ("as...bihalden") but the English version does not include the Latin text of the psalm, whereas the French does.<sup>62</sup>

**55** The English is *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:148, 7.142–43. The French is *The French Text*, ed. Trethewey, 145, ll. 19–23. Millett's edition notes that "GLS have restored the Vulgate word order" in this passage but does not suggest that any of the English versions give longer versions of this quotation; I have also verified versions A, C, and T and none contains the longer version of this quotation. See *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 2:265n7.142–44.

**56** For the English text see *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:28, 2.305–6. For the *Vie* see *The French Text*, ed. Trethewey, 181, ll. 2–4.

**57** See *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 2:64n2.305–6.

**58** *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:138, 6.250–251; *The French Text*, ed. Trethewey, 127, ll. 7–9.

**59** Millett notes that the selection in *Ancrene Wisse* is Matt. 26:38–39; see *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 2:247n 6.250–51; 6.253.

**60** *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:138, 6.253; *The French Text*, ed. Trethewey, 127, ll. 7–9. See *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 2:247n6.253. Millett notes that copy L resembles the *Vie* here.

**61** For the passage, see *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:145, 7.5–8; *The French Text*, ed. Trethewey, 139, ll. 2–7. See *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 2:259, 7.5–8.

**62** For the passage, see *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:147, 7.76; *The French Text*, ed. Trethewey, 142,

9. Both English and French versions provide a loose translation of the Song of Songs, 8:7. In the English version the translation alone is provided; in the French version the translation appears alongside the original line from the Song of Songs.<sup>63</sup>
10. Both English and French versions quote from Genesis 19:22 (the reference is identified by Millett). The quotation is abbreviated in the English versions but not in the *Vie*. Millett notes that the *Vie* and the L version contain the exact phrasing of the Vulgate (“donec ingrediarius illuc”), which is changed to “donec egressus fueris illinc” in most other copies.<sup>64</sup>

More examples of this nature are possible.<sup>65</sup> It is true, as Millett writes, that the addition of material from the Vulgate is not uncommon in the developmental history of the English versions of *Ancrene Wisse*.<sup>66</sup> But these examples are not the usual products of *mouvance*; they suggest that the *Vie* contains more original source material than the English versions of *Ancrene Wisse*.

The evidence, then, suggests that there are many places in which the *Vie* is closer to an ultimate source than any of the English versions of *Ancrene Wisse*. There are two possible explanations: 1) the *Vie* is closer to the original version of *Ancrene Wisse* in these places than any of the English versions of *Ancrene Wisse*, or, 2) the *Vie* is descended from an English version (as is usually assumed) and the author often (i.e., on at least the fourteen occasions mentioned above, and many more) identified the specific sources of *Ancrene Wisse*, and then identified the specific passages in these sources that *Ancrene Wisse* cites, and then added extra material from these specific passages, either from memory or from the specific passages themselves. We can probably never know with complete certainty which of these explanations is correct; as with most approaches to medieval recension, the limitations of the surviving evidence mean that we must be content to approach them seeking to establish probability rather than certainty.

With that caveat in mind, the probability weighs heavily in favour of the first interpretation. It is by far the simplest, and the assumptions that lie behind it are the ones that are commonly accepted by those approaching recension problems such as this one.<sup>67</sup> And there are significant problems with the second interpretation. We would have to

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ll. 12–13. See *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 2:263n7.76.

**63** For the passage, see *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:151, 7.264–66; *The French Text*, ed. Trethewey, 151, ll. 26–29. The reference is noted by Millett; see *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 2:270n7.263–64.

**64** For the passage, see *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:151. 7.351–52; *The French Text*, ed. Trethewey, 156, ll. 2–3. The reference is noted by Millett; see *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 2:273n7.351–52. MS T here has “egrediarius”; see *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:249.

**65** In addition to the examples already given, I have listed five more here: *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:3.454 (cf. *The French Text*, ed. Trethewey, 237, ll. 16–18); and *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 2:2.398–99, 2.400, 2.552–55, 2.672–73 (shared with L).

**66** See Millett, “Textual Introduction,” in *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:xliv.

**67** For a relevant example, see the approach taken by Hannah Byland in “Three New Sources for the *Ancrene Wisse*,” *Notes and Queries* 62, no. 4 (2015): 519–21.

imagine that the redactor of the *Vie* had a remarkable ability to recognize specific passages of a wide range of sources (Isidore, Pennafort or a related work, two different works by Gregory, the Psalms, multiple other sections of the Vulgate, etc.). Many of these sources are unattributed in *Ancrene Wisse*, so the redactor would have had to identify them by working from memory or from intertextual comparison. On each of the occasions listed above, the redactor of the French text would have to recognize the specific passage being cited, hunt down the exact place of the text where the citation appears (either from memory or from a codex), and then add extra material from this exact same place. It is not just a matter of adding new material (which happened often as a fluid work like *Ancrene Wisse* evolved), but of adding material *from the exact same source and passage that the original author would have used*. This is not impossible, but it seems unlikely. It would have been extremely time consuming, and it is hard to imagine what the redactor's motivation would be for doing all the extra work involved (if his goal was to expand the text or to add clarification, there were far easier ways of achieving this goal). It would be very surprising to find a medieval redactor working in this elaborate way, and it is not a commonly accepted model of medieval textual development.

There is therefore a high probability that the *Vie* is closer to the original source in many places than any English version of *Ancrene Wisse*. The evidence, taken together, raises several questions surrounding the *Vie*'s relationship to other copies of *Ancrene Wisse*.

### Some Possible Implications

So what is the relationship between the *Vie* and the original version of *Ancrene Wisse*? It should perhaps not surprise us if the *Vie* retains some original readings, since on Millett's stemma it is depicted as having a relatively direct line of descent from the original (through one of three branches on the stemma). What is more notable is that the work seems to contain original readings that are absent in all English copies of the work (meaning that all English copies are missing the same apparently original passages). This raises the possibility that the *Vie* may be closer to the original version of *Ancrene Wisse* than any of the English copies.

There is other evidence that supports this suggestion. For example, the *Vie* contains several passages in which the text is more correct than in any of the English copies—either the English version is muddled in some way, or it contains a grammatical or syntactical error (the sort that Millett would describe as true error) that is absent in the *Vie*. The principle of common error must be approached with caution and these differences could be (and in some cases, have been) explained away by suggesting these passages were simply corrected by the redactor of the *Vie*, but the principle would suggest that these passages are closer to the original than those of the English versions.<sup>68</sup> To test

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**68** In multiple instances, a reading is muddled in most versions of *Ancrene Wisse* but makes sense in the *Vie*. Millett generally approaches these instances as though the *Vie* readings are “corrections” but it is possible (and, in view of the evidence presented here, likely) that they are original readings that became corrupted in the textual history of *Ancrene Wisse*; as noted above, it is often difficult

this evidence, it is helpful to consider the inverse—that is, whether the *Vie* contains the sort of errors that indicate that it was derived from an English version. I have checked the critical apparatus in Millett's edition and can find no error of this sort.<sup>69</sup> A complete collation of all French and English *Ancrene Wisse* manuscripts is still wanting, but I can find nothing in existing collations that would suggest that the English text is closer to the original than the *Vie*, or that would call into question the hypothesis put forth here. Nor can I find any contextual or historical information that would disprove it.

Yet before proceeding to the next two implications, it is worth examining a possible objection to this one. Given that *Ancrene Wisse* has been edited many times, a revision to its stemma at this stage would be surprising. But as we have seen, Dobson, whose stemma has been the basis for the currently accepted stemma of the work, assumed that the English version of the work was closest to the original, and this assumption led him to treat many variants in the French text as errors or additions without further collation or detailed analysis. Dobson had reasons for making his assumption at the time; the *Vie*'s discovery came relatively late (and after a tradition of scholarship on the English text had already been established), and Dobson was working at a time when source analysis of the sort undertaken here was far more challenging. But since Dobson's assumption has informed all subsequent stemmata of the work, and since no one has done an extended collation of the *Vie* against other copies of *Ancrene Wisse*, the *Vie* has correspondingly been treated, almost *prima facie*, as a derivative of the English versions of *Ancrene Wisse*. It seems to me very possible, under these circumstances, that the relationship between the *Vie* and other copies of *Ancrene Wisse* has been misunderstood.

The second implication of the evidence presented here concerns the work's audience. If the *Vie* preserves readings that are missing in the English versions of *Ancrene Wisse*, this might suggest that the audience of the *Vie* was the original audience of the work—in other words, that the work began as a guide for a mixed audience (composed of both women and men), and that *Ancrene Wisse* was then substantially adapted for a more limited audience of women religious recluses. In this scenario, the redactor of *Ancrene Wisse* would have removed much of the *Vie* that was not relevant to his audi-

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to determine the direction of influence when analysing errors. Examples include 2.192 (agrees in overall meaning with LPR), 7.230, 7.277–79, 2.405–6 (agrees with N), 2.436 (agrees with T in giving what Millett terms a “smoother” reading; see *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 2:75), 3.123, 3.513 (interrupted syntax in most versions that is smoother in the *Vie* and NTV), and 8.338–9. Dobson writes that at 2.192 the *Vie* contains a copying error, but if we take “garnit” here to mean “warns” (as seems to me a likely interpretation) then there is no error; see *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 2:59. There are also places where the English text contains mechanical errors where the French version has a superior reading, e.g., 2.21, 2.344 (most versions are missing a verb; the *Vie* and FLP contain the verb), 2.466 (shared with LNP), 4.433–34 (shared with LP), and 4.1046.

**69** Millett supplies a list of “shared errors in ST” (xxxiii) (so errors shared between the *Vie* and the version in the Titus manuscript). I have analysed each of these and they can be described as errors only if we assume that the English text came first. I have also searched through the critical apparatus for other places that suggest that the French text must be descended from an English text, but I cannot find any.

ence of women religious and added the prologue and parts 1 and 8 (the “outer rule”) about life specific to anchorites. Certainly this scenario would help to explain some of the particularities of *Ancrene Wisse*; for example, the shift of address in part 5 from a general audience to a specific one would make more sense if the *Vie* (addressed to a general audience) preceded the English versions of *Ancrene Wisse*.<sup>70</sup>

The third implication of the evidence presented here, and perhaps the most interesting, is that the English *Ancrene Wisse* may have been translated from a French original. Although the question of the work’s original language of composition is often assumed to be closed, this assumption is based on analysis of the other French version of *Ancrene Wisse* (i.e., the text preserved in F) and the question has not been examined seriously with respect to the *Vie*.<sup>71</sup> Before re-examining it here, it is worth noting that the fact that the *Vie* is preserved in French does not mean that it was written in French; the *Vie* as it comes down to us is clearly a later redaction of its original form and it is found in a compilation that includes some translated material. But there is some evidence that the *Vie*’s original language of composition was indeed French.

One of the ways scholars have sought to determine the language of composition of *Ancrene Wisse* is by looking at the use of stylistic devices that only work in one language, such as rhyme or alliteration.<sup>72</sup> This approach must be used with caution; it is evidently possible to put a work into rhyme during the translation process and the *Speculum vitae*, which is a conservative but rhyming poetic translation of the French prose treatise known as *Somme le roi*, serves as a good example. But since evidence drawn from stylistic devices is often used to argue in favour of the English text’s primacy, it is worth considering here. First, although the English version of *Ancrene Wisse* is generally considered a prose composition, the French version of the *Ancrene Wisse* is often structured by rhyme. The rhyme in the French text has gone almost entirely unnoticed—likely because the versification is rough, inconsistent, and its interpretation complicated by questions of the text’s dating.<sup>73</sup> But many passages of the *Vie* are versified (or preserve vestiges of versification) that are not versified in *Ancrene Wisse*. The versification in the *Vie* tends toward flexible octosyllabic rhyming couplets; as is typical with French octosyllabic poetry from medieval England, some lines contain fewer than eight syllables and some more. Heptasyllabic lines are relatively common, as is also typical of French flexible octosyllabic verse.<sup>74</sup> All lines have been copied as prose in all three manuscripts that preserve

**70** See further the discussion in the appendix.

**71** See note 3 above.

**72** See note 3 above.

**73** Marcel Thomas identifies and prints two passages that contain rhyme, although he notes that the versification is rough; see Thomas, “Une compilation,” 595. See also Watson and Wogan-Browne, “The French of England,” 43.

**74** The traditional view of French octosyllabic poetry from medieval England is described in “Part IV: Two Essays,” in *Vernacular Literary Theory in the French of Medieval England*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Delbert W. Russell, and Thelma S. Fenster (Cambridge: Brewer, 2016), 414–16. As

the text, and some of the lines show evidence of prosification. The nature of the versification can be illustrated with an example from part 5, in the discussion of the value of humility in confession:<sup>75</sup>

| <i>Vie</i>  | <i>Ancrene Wisse</i>  |
|---|---|
| <p>deuant les euz<br/> dampne deu eli requiert e prie<br/> pur le amurs seinte marie;<br/> sa tres douce uirgine mere,<br/> prie sanz reles e sanz mesure<br/> pur sa digne passion dure.<br/> e pur soen precious sanc.<br/> ke curut aual soen flanc<br/> e pur se cinc plaies granz<br/> ke il lui seit succurans<br/> pur les lermes ke sa mere plora.<br/> e pur les douces mameles ke il suscha e leita.<br/> pur le leit douz ke lui pust.<br/> e pur la dame ke tant lui plust.<br/> pur la amurs de tuz ses seinz e ses seintes.<br/> dont il en ad meinz e meintes<br/> ke il deigne oir ses pleintes.<br/> e pur la grant druerie.<br/> Ke il ad en uers sa chere amie<br/> e sa espuse. e sa drue;<br/> ceo est la nette alme;<br/> ke li eime. e ke li face aie.<br/> ke puist uenir a la celestiane uie.<br/> E ausint pur sa digne mort;<br/> ke il en la croiz suffri e a tort.<br/> pur reindre e pur regaigner sa epuse.<br/> ceo est la nostre alme ke il oust<br/> si cher ke il eit de lui merci.<br/> e lui lest fere sa penance issi.<br/> e ke il doint pardon de ses pecchez.<br/> ke il pur eus ne seit dampnez.<br/> mes par sa grant benigmetez.<br/> lui doint ke il puist estre sauuez.</p> | <p>biuore Godes ehnen; halseð<br/> meadlesliche on his derue passion,<br/> on his deorewurðe blod, on his fif<br/> wunden, on his moder teares,</p> <p>o þe ilke tittes þet he seac, þe milc þet<br/> hine fedde on alle his halhene luue, o<br/> þe deore druerie þet he haueð to his<br/> deore spuse (þet is, to cleane sawle<br/> oðer to Hali Chirche), on his deað o<br/> rode for hire to biȝeotene. Wið þis<br/> anewil ropunge halseð efter sum help<br/> to þe wrecche meoseise, to lechni wið<br/> þe seke, to healen hire cancre.</p> <p>Ant ure Lauerd, ihalset swa, ne me for<br/> reowðe wearnen hire ne sweamen<br/> hire wið warne, nomeliche swa as<br/> he is se unimete large þet him nis na<br/> þing leouere þen þet he mahe ifinden<br/> acheisun forte ȝeouene.</p> |

the authors of this essay note, the insular octosyllabic line was flexible, “with some lines as short as six syllables or as long as ten” (416); this flexibility is especially pronounced in later examples and appears to have emerged under the influence of local stress-based traditions of prosody; see 416–21.

**75** *The French Text*, ed. Trethewey, 88, ll. 18–27; *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:125, ll. 420–30.

The lines here are clearly versified in the French but not in the English version. It is notable that words that are required for the rhyme in the French appear on occasion in the English (such as “druerie” in the example above); it seems more likely that such words originated in the French text (because they are embedded in the rhyme) than in the English one.

This raises the question of what to make of the many alliterative passages in *Ancrene Wisse*. For M. L. Samuels, whose arguments for the English text’s primacy are still cited today, these alliterative passages are evidence of an English original.<sup>76</sup> But remarkably, many of the passages that Samuels takes as evidence for an English original occur in sections that do not appear in the *Vie*. So, for example, the passage containing the alliterative line which Samuels takes as evidence for an English original, “wið heate of hungri heorte” does not appear in the *Vie* and is marked in Millett’s edition as a part that was added in the English tradition of the text.<sup>77</sup> While more analysis is needed, the pattern of alliterative passages in the English text may suggest that the redactor of this text was more inclined to use this device when adding new material to his source text.

One further piece of evidence that needs to be considered here is a short section of verse that has been cited as possible evidence of an English original.<sup>78</sup> Six English manuscripts contain a Latin couplet in part 4 followed by a six-line section of English verse, which is offered as an interpretation of the Latin. The presence of rhyme in the Middle English verse has led to the suggestion that the text was written in Middle English originally.<sup>79</sup> But here, too, the evidence is inconclusive. The same Latin couplet also appears in the *Vie*, where it is followed by an interpretation in French. In the *Vie* (like in the English version), this interpretation is structured by rhyme, although the rhyme and prosody in the *Vie* appear to be corrupt—at least in the versions of the *Vie* that have survived.<sup>80</sup> But while the English verse is more elegant in most copies, it is neverthe-

<sup>76</sup> See, for instance, M. L. Samuels, “*Ancrene*.”

<sup>77</sup> See *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:44, 2.925. For another example, see the phrase “diggin, ant deluen deoppre ant deoppre” (*Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:43, 2.916), which appears only in the Corpus revision of the work and has no equivalent in the *Vie* (*The French Text*, ed. Trethewey, 209).

<sup>78</sup> G. C. Macauley, who sought to prove that the Vitellius text was closer to the original than the English, conceded that the rhyme in these lines complicated his argument. He suggested that the author was familiar with the English lines but decided to write them in French in his text; see G. C. Macauley, “The *Ancren Riwe*,” *The Modern Language Review* 9, no. 1 (1914): 63–78, at 69.

<sup>79</sup> The lines are *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:91, 4.880–85.

<sup>80</sup> The version of the *Vie* is written (like the Latin verse that precedes it) as prose, but it preserves what appears to be a vestige of versification; I have marked possible line breaks using /, but these are uncertain: “Mors tua mors domini. nota culpa gaudia celi./Iudicii terror figantur mente fideli./cest taunt a dire. pensez souent ou dolour / de vos pecchez pensez de la peine de enfern. /e de la ioie du ciel. pensez de uostre mort demeine. /e de la mort nostre seigneur en la croiz./e dil horrible iugement au joir de iuise./remenez souent e uostre quer. pensez /cum faus est li mound e quele est sa merite./E si pensez quei vus deuez a deu pur soen bien fet./ A checun de ces moz uoudreit estre longe posee. /pur bien mustrer les e ouertement./ e pur ceo en pensez en quant vus poez le plus longement”; *The French Text*, ed. Trethewey, 19, l. 28–20, l. 4. It is worth noting that the English lines appear outside of the *Ancrene Wisse* tradition, and this may imply, as some have

less possible that the French version predated the English one. It is worth noting that although the other French text is clearly an independent translation from the *Vie*, Berta Grattan Lee finds that both independent French translations are very similar in this section, and this raises the possibility that both authors were drawing on a well-known French verse.<sup>81</sup> It is equally possible that an earlier version of the text contained both English and French versions. Either way, it is evident that the presence of rhyme in the English versions of *Ancrene Wisse* is far more limited than in the *Vie*.

Finally, there is the use of puns, which is sometimes taken as evidence of the original language of composition. Samuels notes that the English text contains a pun not found in the Vitellius French text: the English text claims that the term “anchorite” is used because the anchorite serves as an “anchor” for the Church.<sup>82</sup> The exact same pun appears in the *Vie*, and it works just as well in French (the French “ancre,” in the sense of ModEng “anchor,” and the cognate verb “ancrer” are attested in other works as well).<sup>83</sup> There is also another pun in the English text that should be considered here. In some versions the text states that windows can be referred to as “eilþurles” (“eye-openings”) because they cause “eil” (“evil/ill”).<sup>84</sup> But a similar pun is made in the French: “a bon droit poent les fenestres estre apellez pertuiz nuisables car il ont fete grant nuisance a meinte recluse” (“and with good cause [rightfully], windows can be called *nuisables* everywhere, because they have caused great nuisance to many recluses”).<sup>85</sup> It is also worth noting that the French version seems to contain wordplay of this nature that is

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suggested, that they formed a popular verse that was interpolated into the *Ancrene Wisse* text. But they appear in only one other manuscript outside of the *Ancrene Wisse* tradition (London, British Library Arundel 507), which was copied in the late thirteenth century (with portions from the fourteenth century); see “Think oft mid sorrow of heart o thine sin,” in the Digital Edition of the Index of Middle English Verse (*DIMEV*) (<https://www.dimev.net/record.php?recID=5642>). Where they appear in this manuscript, they are preceded by the same Latin lines that precede these lines in *Ancrene Wisse*. In my view, the independent circulation of these lines provides little in the way of conclusive evidence for their language of composition.

**81** See Berta Grattan Lee, *Linguistic Evidence for the Priority of the French Text of the Ancrene Wisse: Based on the Corpus Christi College Cambridge 402 and the British Museum Cotton Vitellius F VII Versions of the Ancrene Wisse* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1974), 12–13.

**82** The passage is *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:56, l.329–333; see Samuels, “*Ancrene*,” 4.

**83** *The French Text*, ed. Trethewey, 231, ll. 21–28. The Anglo-Norman Dictionary records other uses for both the verb and noun forms.

**84** *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:25, 2.189–92; see also *Ancrene Wisse: A Guide for Anchoresses*, trans. Millett, 184n2.30.

**85** *The French Text*, ed. Trethewey, 177, ll. 16–17. Perhaps “nuisible” is not a pun; I can find no evidence that “nuisible” was ever used to describe windows outside of this text’s suggestion that it may be. But the same issue arguably arises with the English version, since the English equivalent (“eilþurles”) appears in only one other text (the Middle English *Saint Margret*) and Millett notes of *eilþurles* that “it was generally assumed to be an *ad hoc* coinage” (see *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 2:58n2.190–91). The Middle English Dictionary similarly describes *eilþurles* as “A deliberate creation of the author of *Ancren Riwele*”; see “eil-thurl”, in the Middle English Dictionary (<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED13164/>).



absent from the English version.<sup>86</sup> It is not practical to carry out a complete investigation of the use of wordplay in the two traditions, and it is unclear if doing so would provide us with much more information, given the tenuousness of this sort of evidence. But I have examined Samuel's evidence and I have found nothing that would disprove the primacy of the French text.

While the wordplay and poetic evidence is inconclusive, the linguistic evidence (while complicated) may point toward a French original. The high percent of French loanwords in *Ancrene Wisse* has been an important area of inquiry since Arne Zetterson's 1965 study of the work's vocabulary.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, in a 1974 study, Berta Gretta Lee argued that the linguistic evidence suggests a French original. Although Lee's argument draws on the Vitellius text, and so may seem to be irrelevant here, much of her study is not about this text at all but about French influence on the English version of *Ancrene Wisse* preserved in the Corpus manuscript. Lee finds a high percent of French vocabulary words in this Corpus text and she notes that "whole phrases" in French "are incorporated into the English."<sup>88</sup> Lee also finds that personal names (such as those of saints) in the English text often exhibit French influence.<sup>89</sup> On the basis of this and other evidence, Lee concluded "French was probably the original language of the *Ancrene Wisse*."<sup>90</sup>

Reactions to Lee's study have been mixed. Most point out that, focused as it is on the Corpus and Vitellius texts, it is too limited to offer any firm conclusions about the language of composition of *Ancrene Wisse* and, as D. A. Trotter and others have pointed out, evidence of French influence on the English text does not necessarily indicate a French original but could just as easily reflect the linguistic patterns of an English author working within the fundamentally multilingual environment of thirteenth-century England.<sup>91</sup> Yet more evidence of *Ancrene Wisse*'s French influence has emerged. Trotter observes that the English work contains a high proportion of French-derived words and morphemes that are not attested in other English works until much later. On this basis, Trotter notes that "it is striking that *Ancrene Wisse* should consistently offer such early attestations, typically a century, and often the better part of two centuries, earlier than those found in any other source known to MED or OED."<sup>92</sup> Trotter concludes that "we are dealing with an author with (at the very least) a high level of exposure to Anglo-French."<sup>93</sup> On linguistic grounds, then, it would not be surprising to find that the English versions of the work were derived from a French original.

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**86** I would argue that the use of "tuche" in the Pennaforte example below is one example (see p. 29 below).

**87** Arne Zettersten, *Studies in the Dialect and Vocabulary of the Ancrene Riwle* (Lund: Gleerup, 1965).

**88** Lee, *Linguistic*, 80.

**89** Lee, *Linguistic*, 80.

**90** Lee, *Linguistic*, 81.

**91** See D. A. Trotter, "The Anglo-French Lexis of *Ancrene Wisse*," in *A Companion to Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Yoko Wada (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), 83–101, at 91.

**92** Trotter, "Anglo-French," 98.

**93** Trotter, "Anglo-French," 98.

## Conclusions

The evidence presented here points to the need for a full collation of the *Vie* against the English versions of the *Ancrene Wisse* and raises the question of whether the *Vie* may be closer to the original text than any of the English versions. The two usual methods of determining original readings (the error-based method and source analysis) suggest that the French version contains many readings that are closer to the original than any of the English versions. While both methods, grounded as they are in the complexities of medieval textual culture, cannot yield complete certainty, there is no reason to mistrust the results of these methods in this case, or to turn to alternative explanations for them, since, as far as I can tell, no convincing evidence has been presented yet for the English versions' primacy over the *Vie*. Indeed, if the *Vie* had surfaced before the English texts, it seems likely that, using the usual tools of determining textual authority, scholars would have concluded that the *Vie* was composed first. This conclusion is also supported by the other sorts of evidence that are used to determine directions of borrowing, including wordplay, rhyme, and vocabulary use.

If it is true that the *Vie* is closest to the original source of *Ancrene Wisse*, this would suggest that *Ancrene Wisse* began as a French guide about religious life addressed to a mixed audience, then was translated into English and adapted for the sake of a more limited anchoritic audience. This shift would help to explain some of the aspects of *Ancrene Wisse* that have seemed peculiar to modern scholars. Several have wondered, for example, why the work includes a section on sin addressed to a mixed audience if it is aimed at anchorites.<sup>94</sup>

Moreover, if the guide were written in French first, this would be in keeping with the broader linguistic patterns of the centuries after the Norman Conquest. As Nicholas Watson and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne have noted, French was the main language of pastoral education during these centuries.<sup>95</sup> Starting in the second half of the thirteenth century, we find an increasing tendency to translate pastoral works from French into English—seen, for example, in works like *Handlyng Synne* (ca. 1303–1317), a translation of the wildly popular French *Manuel des péchés* (ca. 1260). If the English *Ancrene Wisse* were translated from a French original, it would be an early and fascinating prelude to a broader shift in the language of pastoral theology that gripped England in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Further exploration of the relationship between the *Vie* and the English versions of *Ancrene Wisse*, then, will help elucidate not just the history of this important work, but also the literary and linguistic landscapes of post-Conquest England.

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**94** The section addressed to a general audience in part 5 was once considered a mistake on the part of the author, but it is now generally accepted that the pastoral focus of the section is in keeping with the broader theological aims of the guide; see K. A. Milne [Murchison], *Manuals for Penitents in Medieval England: From Ancrene Wisse to "The Parson's Tale"* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2021), 57n55.

**95** Watson and Wogan-Browne find, moreover, that "nearly half the items in Dean's list of 986 Anglo-Norman texts are non-hagiographic texts of religion"; see Watson and Wogan-Browne, "The French," 41. On the importance of French for pastoral education in England, see also Claire Waters, *Translating Clergie: Status, Education, and Salvation in Thirteenth-Century Vernacular Texts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), xi–xii.

## Appendix: Raymond de Pennaforte's *Summa de casibus poenitentiae* and *Ancrene Wisse*

Another example of the *Vie*'s tendency to contain more of an ultimate source appears in part 5. This section, which explains the conditions required for a good confession and gives guidance about how to confess, draws extensively on a body of theological thought that was becoming increasingly important in the thirteenth century. Since many new works on confession were emerging in the thirteenth century, and since part 5 draws on some of the most *au courant* ideas of its age, it is possible to compare the text with some of its ultimate sources in a relatively straightforward manner (by contrast, identifying the source for a section that draws on the Church Fathers can be much more complex due to the extensive patristic tradition that precedes the work). Thanks to the work of Bella Millett and other *Ancrene Wisse* scholars, several of the work's analogues for this part are known.<sup>96</sup>

Much of part 5 finds a close parallel in Raymond de Pennaforte's *Summa de casibus poenitentiae* (also known as the *Summa de paenitentia*).<sup>97</sup> This work was one of the most popular guides for priests of the period, and it circulated in several European vernaculars. It is worth noting, though, that the relationship between *Ancrene Wisse* and Pennaforte's *Summa* is not straightforward. Millett finds that although Pennaforte's *Summa* appears to have been the ultimate source for some sections of part 5, the author's use of sources in part 5 is complex, and Millett suggests that "it is quite possible that the author did not work from any specific source text."<sup>98</sup>

Yet the resemblances between *Ancrene Wisse* and Pennaforte are striking. *Ancrene Wisse* and the French *Vie* both use a structure for the discussion of confession that is very similar to the one used by Pennaforte for this material. In *Ancrene Wisse*, the discussion opens with the conditions that make a good confession. This section is aimed at penitents preparing to confess and is not specific to an anchoritic audience. The part concludes with a brief discussion of sin that is directed more specifically at the work's anchoritic audience. Pennaforte's guide also begins with a discussion of the conditions of confession (although here it is directed not at penitents but at priests). The section ends by giving further instructions to the priest, then giving specific instructions about the kinds of sins committed by those living religious lives.<sup>99</sup> In this way, the two works share a common structure. The *Vie* has the same structure in this section as *Ancrene Wisse*, although in keeping with the *Vie*'s broader audience, the list of sins at the end of the part is aimed at anyone living a religious life (not just anchorites). Despite small differences such as this, the three discussions of confession clearly share a common structure. The specific conditions of confession in *Ancrene Wisse* and in the *Vie* are also remarkably close to the conditions of confession in Pennaforte's *Summa*.

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<sup>96</sup> The most detailed examination of the work's sources is found in the second volume of *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett.

<sup>97</sup> See above, note 16.

<sup>98</sup> Bella Millett, "Ancrene Wisse and the Conditions of Confession," *English Studies* 80, no. 3 (1999): 193–215, at 211.

<sup>99</sup> Raymond de Pennaforte, *Summa de paenitentia*, ed. Javier Ochoa and Luis Diez (Rome: Commentarium pro religiosis, 1976), 834.

To illustrate, I have listed all the conditions of confession in Pennaforte's guide alongside those of *Ancrene Wisse* and the *Vie*. To facilitate comparison, I have re-arranged the conditions in Pennaforte's guide from the order given to match their order in *Ancrene Wisse* and the *Vie* (but I have also indicated each position in Pennaforte's guide in parentheses).

| Pennaforte's <i>Summa</i>                    | <i>Vie de Gent de Religion</i>               | <i>Ancrene Wisse</i>                         |
|--|--|--|
| Accusatory (7)                               | Accusatory                                   | Accusatory                                   |
| Bitter (1)                                   | Bitter                                       | Bitter                                       |
| 5 signs of bitter confession                 | 5 signs of bitter confession                 | 4 things that prompt a bitter confession     |
| Complete (3)                                 | Complete                                     | Complete                                     |
| Naked (9)                                    | Naked  | Naked  |
| 6 circumstances                              | 6 circumstances                              | 6 circumstances                              |
| Made often (13)                              | Made often                                   | Made often                                   |
| Promptly made (2)                            | Promptly made                                | Promptly made                                |
| 5 things that should hurry one to confession | 9 things that should hurry one to confession | 9 things that should hurry one to confession |
|  | <i>Humble</i>                                | <i>Humble</i>                                |
|  | <i>Shameful</i>                              | <i>Shameful</i>                              |
|  | <i>Fearful</i>                               | <i>Fearful</i> <sup>100</sup>                |
|  | <i>Hopeful</i>                               | <i>Hopeful</i> <sup>101</sup>                |
| <i>Faithful</i> (5)                          |  |  |
| Discreet (10)                                | Discreet                                     | Discreet                                     |
| Truthful (8)                                 | Truthful                                     | Truthful                                     |
| Voluntary (4)                                | Voluntary                                    | Voluntary                                    |
| One's own (6)                                | One's own                                    | One's own                                    |
| With good intentions ( <i>pura</i> ) (11)    | Resolute/with the intention of changing      | Resolute                                     |
| Fastidious/Thought out beforehand (12)       | Thought out beforehand                       | Thought out beforehand                       |

For Pennaforte's guide I have used the edition prepared by Javier Ochoa and Luis Diez. Of course, since there were so many copies of Pennaforte's guide circulating during the period we cannot expect that the version of Pennaforte's list that has been edited was the same as the one that served as ultimate source for *Ancrene Wisse*, but the collation in the edited version shows limited divergence between the manuscripts that were consulted.<sup>102</sup>

**100** Omitted from the list in MS A; see the apparatus criticus in *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:232n5.66.

**101** The conditions marked in italics here differ between the *Summa* and the *Ancrene Wisse* tradition. The treatment of the last of these, "hopeful" also differs; *Ancrene Wisse* and the *Vie* use the image of millstones here, apparently drawn from Gregory, to enjoin the reader to a hopeful confession; see above. The treatment of the final two conditions is also markedly different between the *Ancrene Wisse* tradition and Pennaforte's *Summa*.

**102** For the Latin conditions, see Pennaforte, *Summa*, 818, section 23; 27, section 29. For the

Two things stand out in this comparison. First, and most strikingly, the three lists are very similar; the only major differences lie in, 1) the middle section of the lists, where four conditions appear in the French and English works that do not appear in the ultimate source for this section, and, 2) the subcategories of the conditions—and especially of “bitter.” Based on this comparison and on the similar structure already discussed, Pennaforte’s guide, or a related source, appears to have been an inspiration for the discussion of confession in *Ancrene Wisse*.

With this in mind, we can look more specifically at the various conditions of confession. It is helpful to look at the section of *Ancrene Wisse* about how confession should be one’s own, since the passage has much in common with the corresponding passage of Pennaforte’s guide.<sup>103</sup> The section is relatively short in *Ancrene Wisse* and I have copied it out in full and noted major variants. Following Millett’s editorial policies, bold text indicates passages where the Corpus text (A) contains sections that appear to be additions.<sup>104</sup>

### **Pennaforte’s Summa**

Propria, ut seipsum tantum accuset, et non alium. Psalmus: “Meditatus sum nocte cum corde meo et exercitatus sum et scopebam spiritum meum.” Item: “Deus vitam meam annuntiavi tibi.” Alias, si crimen alterius diceret, non esset erroris illius corrector, sed proditor vel detractor. Fallit hoc ubi circumstantia facti talis est, quod aliter non posset confiteri peccatum, ut si cognovit matrem suam, vel filiam, vel simile; et tunc non est dicendus proditor, quia non dicit ut alium prodat vel gravet, sed ut se liberet; quod aliter facere non posset.

One’s own (to accuse himself alone), and not another. The Psalm says: “I have meditated in the night with my heart and was disciplined, and I stirred my spirit.” Item: “God, I have declared/revealed my life to you.” Otherwise, if he were to declare the sin of another, he would not be the corrector of that sin, but rather a traitor or a detractor. This does not work [fails] in cases in which the circumstance of the act is such that the sin could not be confessed in another manner, such as if he [i.e., the sinner] knew his mother, or daughter, or similar; and he should not be called a traitor in this case, because he does not say it to betray or hinder another, but rather he unburdens himself (which he could not do in another manner).

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French, see *The French Text*, ed. Trethewey, 54–103. For the English, see *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:115, 5.65–129. The translation of the English is Millett’s, from *Ancrene Wisse: A Guide for Anchoresses*, trans. Millett, 115–29. For the sake of consistency, I have used Millett’s terms for the conditions in the translations of the other works as well.

**103** Millett notes that the point here is “made elsewhere in confessional literature” and adds a cross reference to Pennaforte’s text; see *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 2:233n5.5643–8.

**104** The Latin is from Pennaforte, *Summa*, 821. The translation is my own. The French is from *The French Text*, ed. Trethewey, 100–101; the translation is my own. The Middle English is from *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:128–29, 5.562–5.568; the English translation is from the corresponding *Ancrene Wisse: A Guide for Anchoresses*, trans. Millett.

**Vie**

Ceo est a sauoir nul ne deit en sa con-fession autrui encuser fors sei meimes en soen pecche demeine tant com il peut. E ceo di ieo pur ceo ke teu cas ou tiel auenture auient a acun homme ou a acune femme; ke il ne puet mie pleinement en'cuser sei meimes si il ueut estre confes adreit si il ne en cuse autres. Si come un homme ke eust coneu char-neument sa mere ou sa suer ou sa filie. Mes par non nekedent especiaument; ne doit il ne ele nomer nul homme ne nule femme. ia soit issi ke li confessor bien sache. ke il ou ele tuche. Mes issi puet il ou ele bien dire. ieo ai fet teu pecche ou ma mere ou oue ma soer ou oue ma filie. ou un monie ou un prestre; fist tiel pecche ou mei. ou ieo ou lui. mes ne mie Robert ne Water. ia soit issi; ke il ne soit nul autre fors celui soul. e ke homme en sa confession ne deit pas en'cuser autri pecche me le soen demeine; dit dau en sauter. deu fet il ieo vus ai mus-tre ma uie; e ieo regeirai mon propre pecche demeine a nostre seignur. e ne mie autri pecche. *Deus inquit uitam meam annunciaui tibi. Et confitebor aduersum me iniustici-am meam domino.* Celui donc ke dit autri pecche en sa confession; il ne est par amen-der [*variant: pas amendeur*] de autri erreur; mes il est treitre e de'tractour. si ceo ne seit pur sei deliuerer si come ieo vus ai isci pardeuant dit; e ne mi-e pur autri pecche en-cuser, ceste reule donc dit li confessor tenir; ke il teignie pur uerite quanke li repentant die en sa confes-sion en countre sei meimes. mes nule rien ne tiegne pur uerite ke il die en con-tre autri; si il ne soit pur sei meimes desclo-re."

That is, no one should accuse another in his confession, only himself and his own sin—as much as he can. And I say this [last part] because a certain case or accident [lit. adventure] will happen to some man or some woman such that, if he wants to confess properly, he cannot accuse himself entirely if he doesn't also accuse others. For example, a man who knew his mother, or sister, or daughter in a carnal manner. But nevertheless, and in particular [and even in this case], he or she should not mention any man or woman by name. Even if the confessor knows well who he or she means [*lit. touches upon*]. But in this case, he or she could well say: 'I have committed such sin with my mother' or 'with my sister' or 'with my daughter', or 'a monk' or 'a priest'—'he committed this sin', or 'it was mine', or 'I' or 'him', but do not say 'Robert' or 'Walter'—although it could be no other but only that one alone. And so that in his confession man should not accuse the sins of another but his own alone, David in the Psalms says, "God,"—he says—"I have shown you my life, and I will confess my own personal sin—and no other sin—to Our Lord." "*God, I have revealed my life to you*" "*And I will confess my inequity to the Lord against myself.*" Thus the one who declares the sins of another in his confession, he is not the corrector the sin of others, but rather he is a traitor and a detractor. If it's not in order to unburden oneself in the way that I have already described above (and not to accuse others of sin), the confessor should keep this rule, which he keeps in truth when the repentant speaks against his own sin during his confession. But nothing that he [i.e., the repentant] speaks against another should be held as truth, if he isn't saying it in order to reveal his own sin.

### Ancrene Wisse

Schrift ah to beon ahne. Na mon ne schal i schrift wreien bute him seoluen, ase forð as he mei. Pis ich segge for-þi þet swuch auenture<sup>105</sup> bitimeð to sum mon **oðer to sum wummon** þet ha ne mei nawt fülleliche wreien **hire** seoluen, bute **ha** wreie oþre; ah bi nome, noðeleatere, ne nempni **ha** nawt þe ilke<sup>106</sup>, þah þe schrift-feader wite wel toward hwam hit turne, ah “a munk” oðer “a preost,” nawt “Wilgam” ne “Water,” [MS P: “Robert” ne “William”] þah þer ne beo nan oþer.<sup>107</sup>

No one should accuse anyone other than himself in confession, as far as he can. I say this because sometimes a man [**or woman**] may be placed in such a position that **she** cannot fully accuse **herself** unless **she** accuses others as well; but **she** should nevertheless not mention the person concerned by name, even though the confessor may know very well who is involved, but “a monk” or “a priest,” not “William” or “Walter” [MS P: “Robert” or “William”], even if it cannot be anyone else.

The striking resemblance between all three texts suggests that Pennaforte or a closely related work is the ultimate source of both the French and English texts. All three texts emphasize that the confessing penitent should give some detail, but not too much. The Latin text suggests that the penitent can describe the participant in the sin using vague references to a “mother,” “daughter,” or similar. The French, addressed to a mixed community, also has “mother,” and “daughter” here, but also includes “sister,” “monk” and “priest.” It then recommends using vague references (“‘it was his sin’ or ‘mine,’ or ‘I’ or ‘him’”), and then insists the penitent not name names explicitly (by saying for example “Robert” or “Walter”). In the English version, all references to a mother or daughter participant are absent, although “monk” and “priest” are found. The English, like the French, gives two names—here “William” and, like the French, “Walter” (in MS P, the French name “Robert” appears instead of “Walter”).

If the French text were descended from the English, the mention of a “mother” and “daughter” in the French text is odd. It could possibly be explained by the French text’s wider audience. Millett, in her edition of the Corpus manuscript, suggests that this reference to a ‘mother’ and ‘daughter’ in the French is an addition, “as in Raymond,” but does not make any pronouncement regarding the line of borrowing.<sup>108</sup> It seems very likely

**105** Four manuscripts of the English version have “swuch cas, swuch auenture” here; MS N has an analogous reading; see *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:238n5.563–64.

**106** Millett records variants for “þe ilke” but I have omitted them as they are not relevant to the discussion at hand; *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:238n5.566.

**107** For the variant reading of the names in MS P, see *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:238n5.568. Millett notes that “oðer to sum wummon” appears in the Corpus manuscript and two other manuscripts (S and T); *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 1:238n5.564. The Corpus manuscript also uses feminine pronouns in this section, as indicated here by the bold type. Millett points out that since the section is directed to everyone (and not just the anchoritic audience that is usually addressed by the work), ‘sum mon’ here is not gender-specific (it functions as ‘some person’); *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 2:234n5.564.

**108** *Ancrene wisse*, ed. Millett, 2:234n5.564.

that it was borrowed directly from Pennaforte's text, since the sin described (having committed a sin with one's own relative) has no equivalent in *Ancrene Wisse* that could have inspired its addition to the French text. It is far more likely that the French text here is drawing from Pennaforte directly, rather than through *Ancrene Wisse*.

Other evidence comes from the quotation from the Psalms associated with the passage. Both Pennaforte and the *Vie* quote from the same section of the Psalms here, and aside from the placement of the quotation, the French and Latin passages are strikingly similar. These correspondences, and other echoes throughout this section, indicate clearly that the French text is closer to the Latin here than the English text. It is of course possible that the redactor of the French text here supplemented the source with extra material from Pennaforte. But there is no reason why the *Vie* redactor would have felt inspired to take this extra step and it seems far more likely that the French text preserves original readings here not found in the English versions.

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**Abstract:** There are two French versions of *Ancrene Wisse*. One of these, which is preserved in London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius F. vii, has been examined in some depth. The other, known as the *Vie de gent de religion*, has been examined far less, and its place on the stemma of *Ancrene Wisse* has not been firmly established. This article seeks to establish its place on this stemma by using the two methods that scholars traditionally use to establish more "original" readings: source analysis and the common error method. Although it may come as a surprise to those familiar with *Ancrene Wisse*, both of these methods suggest that this French version preserves "original" readings that are missing in the English versions. The second part of this article, which explores the implications of this evidence and the key question of the *Vie*'s language of composition, shows that large sections of the *Vie* preserve rhyme, which calls into question the traditional argument that poetic elements in the English version of *Ancrene Wisse* suggest that it precedes the French. These and other findings presented here suggest that while the relationship between *Ancrene Wisse* and the *Vie* is often treated as a closed question, the issue is far more complex than has previously been acknowledged.

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**Keywords:** Early Middle English literature, Anglo-Norman literature, *Ancrene Wisse*, textual criticism, Middle English editions, stemmatics, medieval women readers