# Medieval Anchorites in their Communities

*Edited by*
Cate Gunn *and*
Liz Herbert McAvoy

Studies in the History of Medieval Religion

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# MEDIEVAL ANCHORITES IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

Studies in the History of Medieval Religion

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Liz Herbert McAvoy

For
Dorothy Mary Gunn (1927–2015)
and
Richard Maxwell (1963–2015)
*In memoriam*

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# Acknowledgements

THE sociability of anchorites and their roles within the various types of communities with which they interacted have long been under debate within academic circles and at the forefront of our work, both as scholars and editors. Both of us, too, have been closely involved with the series of conferences on medieval anchorites, inaugurated in 2002 at Gregynog, Newton in Wales, where debates concerning anchorites and their material and spiritual environments began to take on greater momentum. This book reflects the latest in anchoritic scholarship, introducing new scholars alongside more seasoned ones to discuss the complex issue of anchoritic communal engagement throughout the Middle Ages. First and foremost, therefore, our thanks are due to all our contributors and to those other participants in the most recent conference on anchorites, 'Medieval Anchorites in their Communities', again held at Gregynog in 2015. Those contributing to this present volume have been remarkable in their rapid responses to editing requirements, requests for amendments and sometimes tight deadlines, making this collaborative venture a source of great pleasure.

We would also like to express our thanks to Caroline Palmer for her continued interest in the work of anchoritic scholars and for her help and support in the production of this volume. Thanks are also due to the volume's reader, both at proposal stage and in its final manuscript form. The constructive criticism, helpful suggestions and evidence of detailed scrutiny offered all served to strengthen the volume significantly, for which we remain most grateful. Gratitude is also due to the students at Swansea University, particularly at MA level, whose interested responses to anchoritic texts continue to provide new insights into old material and demonstrate the importance of listening to our student voices within the wider academic world.

Finally, thanks are due to our families who, as ever, continue in their support as deadlines loom and personal pressures demand attention. Particularly in our thoughts are close relatives, Richard Maxwell and Dorothy Mary Gunn, who sadly died whilst this volume was coming to fruition. This book is dedicated to them.

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# Abbreviations

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| CCSL | Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina |
| EETS | Early English Text Society |
| e.s. | Extra Series |
| o.s | Original Series |
| HMSO | His/Her Majesty's Stationery Office |
| JMRC | *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* |
| MED | Middle English Dictionary |
| MGH | Monumenta Germania Historica |
| MLR | *Modern Language Review* |
| ODNB | Oxford Dictionary of National Biography |
| PL | *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J-P Migne, 221 vols (Paris, 1844–64) |
| RES | *Review of English Studies* |
| VCH | Victoria County History |

# Introduction: 'No Such Thing as Society'? Solitude in Community

CATE GUNN AND LIZ HERBERT McAVOY

Anchorites live a life in solitude. Solitude and community seem to be in opposition to one another; indeed, many early Christians withdrew from Roman society, a society founded on city life, in order to live in solitude in the desert.[1] But this was not a total rejection of all society; as more Christians were attracted to the desert, monasteries formed, and although they remained removed from mainstream society, this withdrawal took place with the support of a community. For Cassian (d. 435), one of the first Christian 'anchorites', his period in the desert was a training for his vocation, which involved establishing monastic communities in France for men and women in the fifth century.[2] In the sixth century, Benedict (d. c. 547) described anchorites as monks who, having been trained in the community, were able to pursue a solitary vocation.[3] This type of interdependent relationship between solitaries and communities continued throughout the Middle Ages in complex and multivalent ways – as essays in this collection serve to illustrate. However, as many contemporary scholars have begun to point out, there is no impenetrable firewall between the Middle Ages and the modern period and while we inevitably study the Middle Ages through

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[1] Diana Webb, *Privacy and Solitude in the Middle Ages* (London, 2007), p. 21.

[2] For a detailed study of Cassian, his writings and theology, see Columba Hart, *Cassian the Monk* (New York and Oxford, 1998).

[3] Much has been written on Benedict and his rule, but for a detailed overview see, for example, Adalbert de Vogüé, *Saint Benedict: The Man and his Work*, trans. Gerald Marlsbary (Petersham, MA, 2006). For an examination of both Cassian and Benedict in the context of medieval anchoritism and gendered language of enclosure, see Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Medieval Anchoritisms: Gender, Space and the Solitary Life* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 1–42.

the prism of our present age, that study can also illuminate our own communities and societies.[4]

Margaret Thatcher's infamous declaration in 1987 that 'there is no such thing as society'[5] and David Cameron's more recent idea of a 'Big Society'[6] suggest a continuing interest and concern with the notion of society, what it means for individuals living within – or rejected by – that society, especially in the face of the expanding and constantly evolving societies and their communities now generated by explosions in digital and communications technologies, the internet and myriad new media platforms in recent years. Every day, sizeable and world-changing global communities are being produced by countless individuals in communication with countless other individuals, whether in densely packed urban centres or remote, isolated settlements; in busy airports and internet cafes or small, single bedsits. More than ever before, or so the story goes, whilst frequently physically alone, individuals are nevertheless grouping together to form – and find strength in – new communities and societies worldwide. While some individuals, especially those for whom relationships with virtual communities is replacing physical contact, may ultimately be alone and lonely, the overlap and interaction between the physical and the 'virtual' is highly complex, creating a nexus that we are only just beginning to comprehend.

Belonging to a community as part of a wider 'society' therefore remains important for many, especially in terms of their own identity formation. In claiming that society was nothing but a collection of individuals, Thatcher rejected the notion of an entity greater than the sum of its parts while also denying the tension which allows individuals to exert their autonomy over and against the society in which they exist and within which they glean their identity. A study of medieval society, however, provides a different model; indeed, a number of the essays collected here demonstrate the extent to which the individual is *defined* in terms of his or her society, however active interaction with it may be. Whilst the very idea

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[4] On the presence of the medieval past in the contemporary *now*, see, for example, Kathleen Biddick, *The Shock of Medievalism* (Durham, NC and London, 1998); Bruce Holsinger, *The Premodern Condition: Medievalism and the Making of Theory* (Chicago, IL and London, 2005); and, more recently, Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now? Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers and the Queerness of Time* (Durham, NC and London, 2012).

[5] For Thatcher, society and the forms of communal living associated with it, boiled down to 'individual men and women . . . and families [who] must look to themselves first'. Margaret Thatcher, the UK's first female prime minister, made these comments on 31 October, speaking to *Women's Own* magazine; the interview is available at: www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689. Accessed 22 January 2016.

[6] BBC News item, 10 July 2010, www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-10680062. Accessed 23 February 2016.

of 'being' a solitary suggests individuality, in Thatcherite terms the notion of the individual was a celebration and promotion of individual selfhood (ultimately attracting accusations of selfishness).[7] In the Middle Ages, however, the solitary sought to *transcend* the self, rather than embrace it, ultimately shedding it in order to reach a state of perfection. In many of the essays in this volume, this apparent paradox, as well as that attached to solitude within community, is challenged, dissolved or resolved as the relationship between a solitary and his or her interaction with community is examined. To the medieval mind it was a commonplace that solitude is a state of being that can be readily attained within the social setting of community – and that communities ultimately evolve out of solitude.

Such a growth of community out of solitude was a basic tenet of the early anchoritic life, as already mentioned above. In other influential religious contexts, too – demonstrated in the Confessions of Saint Augustine (d. 430), for example, or Bernard of Clairvaux's (d. 1153) sermons on the Song of Songs – the need for a looking inward by the individual Christian in order to be able to look beyond the self in a changed way is also emphasised, whether that was an outward-looking towards the existing community or a transcendent gaze towards God. The confessional narrative exemplifying the need to transform the self in the light of both internal and external scrutiny is therefore anything but contemporary and was embraced by men and women alike (despite women's being cast ideologically as fleshly, sinful, non-rational beings by generations of male exegetes).[8]

The capacity of medieval women for such inward contemplation has recently been highlighted by concerted examination of previously ignored female-authored writings, greatly increasing our understanding of the roles played by solitude and community within contemplative practices that were often gendered female.[9] Such contemplation frequently led to episodes of heightened individual illumination and, ultimately, when pursued rigorously, fusion with the Godhead.

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[7] Interestingly, the earliest entry for *selfish* in the OED (online) dates from the seventeenth century: 'In Hacket's life of Archbishop Williams, *Scrinia Reserata* (1693) ii. §136, the word is said to be of the Presbyterians' 'own new mint'; it is used in reference to events of the year 1641': www.oed.com/view/Entry/175306?redirectedFrom=selfish&. Accessed 15 February 2016.

[8] The literature on this is now extensive, but for a comprehensive overview, see Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1993); and Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1990).

[9] For the influence of women's spirituality upon late-medieval affective religious beliefs and practices, see Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia, PA, 2009). See also the essays collected in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c. 1100–1500*, ed. Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden (Turnhout, 2010)

Moreover, this deep level of contemplation was not confined to monastic environments: laywomen and, sometimes, laymen were also subject to contemplative ecstasies from the twelfth century onwards, experiences which seem also to have had a profound effect upon the history of late-medieval religiosity. Now, affective and bodily expressions of a personalised devotional piety allied themselves to the personalised practices of others, to take up centre stage in new communal configurations of Christian piety.[10]

The role – or even the possibility – of the 'individual' within medieval culture is something that has long been subject to scrutiny within academic circles, reaching a tipping point, perhaps, upon publication in 1980 of Caroline Walker Bynum's pivotal essay, 'Did the Twelfth-Century Invent the Individual?'[11] In this essay, Bynum both questioned and problematised the arguments of previous commentators such as Colin Morris and R. W. Southern, both of whom regarded the twelfth century in the West as having produced a new awareness of the self that was ultimately deleterious to the life of community.[12] This was also the century in which, according to Georges Duby, an increase in privacy in both domestic life and personal devotions can be detected.[13]

The main focus of these and similar studies challenged by Bynum's work had tended towards the religious pieties of male monastic life, extrapolating out from that context a general 'one size fits all' conclusion that entirely overlooked the contribution made by groups of female religious and other women. Bynum's essay, however, argued that new social groupings and burgeoning new religious orders and communities during the period meant that 'people now had ways of talking about groups as groups, roles as roles, and about group formation'. For Bynum, this, in turn, meant that '[t]he discovery of self in all its aspects went hand in hand with the discovery of models and the discovery of community'.[14] Viewed from this perspective, the individual and the surrounding community were commensurate as part of a process of mutual engagement, understanding

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[10] Again, the literature on such women's writing is too extensive to document here, but for an overview of women's writing in Britain during the period, see *The History of British Women's Writing: Vol. 1 700–1500*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Diane Watt (Basingstoke and New York, 2012).

[11] Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Did the Twelfth Century Invent the Individual?' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 31.1 (1980), 1–17.

[12] Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual: 1050–1200* (New York, 1973); and R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (London and New Haven, CT, 1953; rev. edn London, 2007).

[13] Georges Duby, 'Solitude: Eleventh to Thirteenth Century', in *A History of Private Life II: Revelations of the Medieval World*, ed. Georges Duby, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA, 1988), pp. 509–33.

[14] Bynum, 'Twelfth Century', 15 and 16.

and development. To belong was both personal *and* communal – and belonging was clearly understood in those terms.

Bynum's perceptive essay in many ways also served also to unpick the type of paradox that later medievalists have come to recognise as fully inherent not only to medieval life and social structures but *any* life and social structure. Indeed, the Middle Ages spawned a delight in such paradox, along with its local resolutions: Christ as both God and man, humble and exalted; Mary as both virgin and mother, same and other; Christ's and Mary's bodily assumptions into heaven, both able to transcend the fleshly prison of humanity which they shared.[15] This is especially true of the life lived by the medieval anchorite, whose prescribed *raison d'être*, as defined in the high Middle Ages in texts such as *Ancrene Wisse*, was an ideological solitude that was personal, perpetual and fixed, played out within a small, walled-up cell, with God as sole companion.

While 'anchorite' is the term used in this introduction for this model of the solitary life, it is a term that has a history. Derived from a Greek word meaning 'withdrawal', Tom Licence has suggested that it is 'an umbrella label for ascetics who embraced withdrawal, either at liberty (hermits) or in the confines of a cell (recluses)'.[16] Some of these essays' contributors use alternative terms: Andrew Thornton uses the term 'recluse' for a solitary enclosed within a monastery and Sophie Sawicka-Sykes follows this usage with reference to Eve of Wilton who, like the Grimlaicus of whom Thornton is writing, belongs to the early Middle Ages; at the other end of the historical spectrum, Clare Dowding uses the term 'recluse' to identify the secular solitaries enclosed at a city church in the sixteenth century, recluses who are nevertheless referred to in contemporary documents as anchorites. This suggests something of the complexity, indeterminacy and dynamism of the solitary life and its relation to community. Indeterminacy amounting to ambiguity is also apparent in James Plumtree's account of the hermit in Fisherton: he may have been a *false* hermit, but he was still a hermit.

Solitude itself was not necessarily permanent or absolute, then:[17] whether the anchorite's withdrawal was actual or largely symbolic it rarely involved total isolation. Rather, while being set apart, the anchorite also occupied a pivotal role at the heart of the local community: as role-model, confidante, intercessor and spiritual healer. In physical terms, too, the anchorite's existence was utterly dependent upon the community's response to those roles, not only in terms of patronage but

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[15]  For an interesting and illuminating study of the complex language and paradox arising from the incarnation, see Cristina Maria Cervone, *Middle English Writing and the Leap of Love* (Philadelphia, PA, 2012).

[16]  Tom Licence, *Hermits and Recluses in English Society, 950–1200* (Oxford, 2011), p. 11.

[17]  Licence, *Hermits and Recluses*, p. 16.

also in terms of food provision, personal care and, in the case of women, spiritual supervision.

To date, those significant studies of medieval anchorites undertaken have focused on issues largely extraneous to their communal identities. The formative work of Rotha Mary Clay and Ann K. Warren, for example, whilst fundamental to all later examinations of this extraordinary way of life, served to illuminate the anchorite within largely historical and topographical contexts;[18] and, whilst Warren's work, particularly on anchoritic patronage, identified those ways in which the anchorite sustained a living by means of individual donation and bequest, to glean a strong sense of the anchorite as an interactive – indeed, proactive – participant within the life of a much wider community or communities was not part of her principal endeavour. Later studies, however, began to build on the work of both Clay and Warren, inching towards the type of conclusions drawn by the contributors to this present volume. Some, for example, began to focus on anchoritism's remarkable gender differentials, an aspect noted by Warren but left relatively closed in terms of discussion and analysis.[19] In these studies, female anchoritism began to be viewed as rather distinct from its male equivalent, forming what McAvoy has termed 'an inexorable "woman's movement"' from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries within the European West.[20] These findings have also been supported by the exhaustive work of Anneke Mulder-Bakker on the anchoresses of the Low Countries whose influence upon both local and international communities – social, religious and political – she has carefully documented.[21]

More recently, in her detailed study of those guidance texts specifically written for anchoritic use between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries, Mari Hughes-Edwards chose to include all the guidance texts that were originally for women 'so that the book can make conclusive arguments about the basis of the ideological constructions of the vocation for at least one gender', while also including some

[18]  Rotha Mary Clay, *Hermits and Anchorites of Medieval England* (London, 1914); Ann K. Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons in Medieval England* (Berkeley, CA, 1985).

[19]  The first of these was *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs: Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards (Cardiff, 2005; new edn 2009), followed by *Rhetoric of the Anchorhold: Space, Place and Body within the Discourses of Enclosure* (Cardiff, 2008).

[20]  McAvoy, *Medieval Anchoritisms*, p. 179.

[21]  Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses: The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe*, trans. Myra Heerspink Scholz (Philadelphia, PA, 2005). For further evidence of the preponderance of women taking up the anchoritic vocation in Western European regions, see *Anchoritic Traditions of Medieval Europe*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Woodbridge, 2010).

guidance intended for men.[22] This study demands that we consider the anchoritic life as having been ideologically shaped by such texts, but that we should remain open to the fact that ideology and lived practices are very often at odds with one another – in fact, subject to the same type of paradoxes mentioned above. For Hughes-Edwards, the medieval anchorite had to be seen as individual, apart and isolated but had also to be readily available for the types of social interactions demanded of her by the community too. In Hughes-Edwards's apposite words: 'Despite the continued centrality of its comparative physical isolation, the [anchoritic] guides have been shown to site the anchoritic vocation within the wider Christian community, in terms of shared spiritual ideals and practices.'[23]

Building on these previous treatments of the topic, then, *Medieval Anchorites in their Communities* offers for the first time a broad examination of anchorites' interactions with a whole range of different communities, whether immediate and tangible (as in the congregations of the church to which the cell – or 'reclusory' – may have been physically attached); textual (as in those who used the various anchoritic guides across the centuries or at any given time, or those who shared their own writings and those of others); or spiritual (as in those inhabiting a shared identity as lover of Christ, communicator with the angels and emulator of the saints). The aim of the volume is therefore to break new ground in demonstrating the extent to which anchorites in fact played a central role within the devotional life of the community and to attest to their frequent involvement in local, national – and, sometimes, international – matters of great importance. In so doing, it will reclaim the medieval anchorite as operating, not on the periphery as has generally been considered, but at the very heart of a variety of communities – synchronic, diachronic, physical, metaphysical, racial, religious, secular, textual and gendered.

The particular strength of the essays here lies in their cross-disciplinary approaches and methodologies, combining in seamless ways evidence from literature, history, religious studies, archaeology, art history, theology and folklore, concentrating very often on lesser-known or hitherto unexamined sources to support their arguments. This wealth of evidence old and new demonstrates unequivocally that anchorites operated readily within both solitary *and* communal contexts, playing a central role within the rich complexities of medieval life, whether rural or urban. In this way, just as the traditional conflation of anchoritism with life-long solitude is brought into question as a lived 'reality', so traditional understandings of the medieval practices of solitude more widely

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[22] Hughes-Edwards chose the guides for women since 'female recluses commonly outnumbered their male counterparts'. See Mari Hughes-Edwards, *Reading Medieval Anchoritism: Ideology and Spiritual Practices* (Cardiff, 2012), p. 9.

[23] Hughes-Edwards, *Reading Medieval Anchoritism*, p. 109.

are thrown into relief and are rethought, pointing towards the myriad ways in which a deep and intense 'aloneness' could nevertheless be pursued in the midst of the 'white-noise' of community.

The volume opens with an essay by E. A. Jones that incorporates many of the above concerns, and deals with many of the themes which run throughout the volume examining the various collocations of aristocratic power and the solitary vocation in late-medieval English culture. Covering a wide range of sources, from courtly literature to architecture and material culture to hagiography, Jones's discussion also includes copious information regarding the cells of those anchorites enclosed within the precincts of a busy castle – a phenomenon that, as he points out, has been almost entirely neglected within anchoritic scholarship. In so doing, Jones's essay addresses the question raised by a good number of subsequent essays: whether the ideological liminality of the anchorite and his/her withdrawal into the cell at the heart of the aristocratic castle serves to critique the tenets of secular power or else reinforce them.

Anchoritism as a type of critique (or, to use a term coined by John D. Barbour, a 'critical practice') that enables a society, by projection, to view its own practices from an entirely different perspective, also constitutes a recurring theme in the other essays contained in this volume.[24] Far from being mere symbols or figureheads to any given community, the anchorites and their texts featured in all three Parts following on from Jones's essay in this volume consistently demonstrate their ability to cast those communities in a new light.

Part I, focusing on the anchorite's interaction with and within religious communities. begins with Cate Gunn's appraisal of an all but invisible anchoress who may well have been attached to the Benedictine community of Colne Priory in the thirteenth century. Drawing together the circumstantial evidence of manuscript traces and those material remains identified by modern geo-physical technology, Gunn reads this unnamed anchoress with comparison to other anchorites and with reference to contemporary guidance texts – *Speculum Religiosum* by Edmund of Abingdon, the early twelfth-century dialogue *Vices and Virtues* and the anonymous *Ancrene Wisse*, perhaps the best known of the extant texts written specifically for a group of anchoresses during the same period – while also acknowledging the place of this particular individual in a long history of anchoritism. In so doing, Gunn argues for anchoritic solitude's being understood more as a withdrawal from selfhood into inward contemplation, rather than withdrawal from community into a physical isolation within a lonely cell.

The question of what sorts of communal interaction take place when the

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[24] John D. Barbour, *The Value of Solitude: The Ethics and Spirituality of Aloneness in Autobiography* (Charlottesville, VA and London, 2004), p. 201.

anchorite *has* achieved a measure of contemplation is addressed by Sophie Sawicka- Sykes in the following essay. Here Sawicka-Sykes presents the reader with two models for the contemplative anchorite's interaction with angelic and other heavenly entities: what she terms the 'Spatio-Celestial' and 'Biblio-Celestial' models of communing. In the first, levels of both meditation and contemplation must be attained in order to bring the anchorite in contact with the angelic; in the second, the reading of sacred literature positions the anchorite alongside those figures from holy scripture about whom they read, enabling them to effect contact via intense textual mediation and self-identification.

The final essay of Part I, by Andrew Thornton, focuses on the earliest anchoritic guidance text known to us, dating from the late tenth century. It details the contents and direction of the guidance to institutional male recluses proffered by Grimlaicus in his *Regula Solitariorum*, a work based on Benedict's *Rule* but adapted for those wishing to live a life of more concerted withdrawal and solitude. However, as a text comprising a mixture of exhortation, homily, personal insight and prescription, it is, in Thornton's estimation, rather than being devised to guide the solitary desiring to live within a *coenobium*, ultimately more concerned with assisting the coenobite wanting to live a more reclusive form of the monastery's own practices of observance.

The book's second part, 'Lay Communities', opens with an essay by Clarck Drieshen discussing a fifteenth-century visionary text known as *A Revelation of Purgatory*, hitherto thought to have been authored by a female anchorite in Winchester. This text details a visionary encounter of the anchoritic author with the soul of a friend in purgatory. Read to date alongside the writing of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe as another example of late-medieval women's writing in England, Drieshen brings entirely new manuscript evidence to bear upon this assessment, claiming this as a formulaic text able to be adopted and adapted by religious communities of women to facilitate and enhance their intercessionary credentials and encourage lay donors to contribute money in anticipation of prayers to be said after their own deaths. For Drieshen, therefore, the 'anchoritic' protagonist of this text becomes a figure with whom religious women could identify, allowing also for the laity in turn to identify with the suffering soul. In both cases, the text would have been able to bring about new interactions between the laity and their local religious communities and/or solitaries.

Michelle Sauer's essay picks up where Drieshen's essay leaves off, focusing on a variety of communities emanating from the laity with whom both the rural and the urban anchorite would have interacted. This essay examines in particular the hitherto ignored issue of friendship forged between anchorites and members of the lay community, focusing upon its mutual contractual obligations and transactional inclinations. Developing this idea with a carefully examined case study, Clare

Dowding's essay brings such obligations and transactions into strong relief in her study of the provisions to the community made by a series of anchorites attached to the church of All Hallows, London Wall, between 1455 and 1536. Focusing on the churchwardens' accounts during this period, Dowding illuminates the type of paradox associated with the anchoritic life mentioned above by arguing that those wishing to withdraw into the solitary life actually ended up as much dependent upon the surrounding community as that community was upon them – and frequently in very tangible and pecuniary ways. Indeed, the inherent dangers of such mutual interdependence are dramatically illuminated by James Plumtree in the essay that follows Dowding's. Here, Plumtree offers the example of a 'false' hermit who set himself up as priest in the small village of Fisherton Anger in Wiltshire in 1348, immediately after the Black Death began to wreak its destruction in the area. Using this hermit as a focus, Plumtree proceeds to examine the various social, ecclesiastical and geographical elements that allowed such 'impersonation' of the semi-regulated holy life to go unchecked, arguing ultimately for a 'porous' relationship between the hermit, the community and the church hierarchy. Forms of impersonation also loom large in the final essay in this part – that of Godelinde Perk – who argues for the encounter with the fiend, as recorded by the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century mystic, Julian of Norwich (d. c. 1416), as being closely allied to folkloric beliefs about the *māre* or nightmarish attacks by what resembles, to all intents and purposes, an incubus. As Perk's analysis demonstrates, this episode reveals Julian's engagement with a variety of 'discourse communities' – including the official, orthodox beliefs of the church regarding demonic attack, those unofficial beliefs inherited from communal folkloric tales and the grey area in between the two positions. In discussing the development of Julian's account of this episode between her Short and Long Text accounts, Perk argues for Julian's delicate negotiation between these apparently conflicting but ultimately compatible communities of discourse where Julian can be seen at her most creative and authoritative.

The final part of this book aptly turns to textual communities, with all three of its essays focusing on allied groups of texts emanating from, or connected with, the best-known anchoritic text of them all, the early thirteenth-century *Ancrene Wisse*. Whilst covering a widely discussed group of texts, all three essays provide new and important inroads into our understanding of them, both in their original forms and in their appropriated and adapted manifestations as they appeared in the fifteenth century. First, Catherine Innes-Parker examines the circulation of the 'Wooing Group' of anchoritic texts, drawing upon research resulting from her recent production of a new edition and translation of these texts.[25] Here,

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[25] *The Wooing of Our Lord and the Wooing Group of Prayers*, ed. and trans. Catherine Innes-Parker (Peterborough, Ont., 2015).

Innes-Parker argues for far wider circulation of the texts than has hitherto been understood, although it still remains unclear exactly who was reading them. Innes-Parker's findings, however, suggest that, whilst the immediate audience was clearly primarily an anchoritic one, the texts nevertheless reached a wide lay readership during the later Middle Ages, presenting evidence for a much wider textual community than has been considered before. Next, Diana Denissen examines fourteenth-century borrowings from the Wooing Group texts, as they emerge in the late-medieval compilation, *A Talkyng of the Love of God.* Here Denissen demonstrates how close examination of the 'compiling strategies' of the later texts allows for valuable insight to be gleaned from the fourteenth-century reception of earlier anchoritic texts and their discourses, revealing also the intertextual links the compiler brought to the reading of his sources. Finally, Dorothy Kim asks entirely new questions of *Ancrene Wisse*, reading it for the first time alongside a mid-thirteenth-century Oxford Book of Hours (London, British Library MS Egerton 1151). In particular, Kim investigates the ways in which religious dialogues between the laity and female religious textual communities form and mutate in complex entanglements, and how these entanglements manifest themselves in text and image. Most importantly for anchoritic studies, Kim's essay focuses on images of Jewishness inherent to both texts, with the graphic iconography of Jewishness in the Egerton manuscript demonstrating the dense theoretical complexities of thirteenth-century English Jewish–Christian relations.

The new ground covered in all twelve essays contained within this volume speaks cogently to the so-called 'ethical turn' within all areas of medieval studies in recent years. As the volume's contributors demonstrate, far from being concerns manifesting themselves during a period at the far end of a dark 'spectrum' before the onset of a more 'enlightened' modernity, the pressing paradoxes inherent to the synchronic and diachronic coexistence of solitude and community in the Middle Ages have much to say to a contemporary world. Within our own epoch, once again new technologies of the 'virtual' generate new paradoxical and entangled 'communities' on a daily basis, asking again for concerted reappraisal of the meanings of 'self' and 'other', 'solitude' and 'community', along with ideas of individuality. Once again, too, these communities of discourse both join people together and simultaneously consolidate their isolation from one another.

Whilst the internet has been blamed for problems associated with physical isolation, its use enables those who choose to live in solitude to remain in contact with a large community. In October 2015, the *Independent* newspaper published a full-page profile of 'a very modern hermit', Sister Rachel Denton, a Benedictine nun who sought the life of an anchorite, having rejected her former life as a novice within a Carmelite convent ('Their tagline was "solitude in community"' she tells us, adding: 'I loved the solitude but not the community'). Sister Denton now lives

in 'solitude' and 'seclusion' in a terraced house in Lincolnshire ('For me, that silence is where I can best meet God').[26] She does, however, have a 'window on the world': and, although a comparison is made with the window through which Julian of Norwich communicated with the world, Sister Denton's 'window' is the internet.[27] The 'critical practice' of Sister Denton's own individual expression of anchoritism, therefore, serves, amongst other things, to redefine for the twenty-first century what it means to be simultaneously communal, silent and alone.

[26] 'Facebook, Twitter, online shopping: the tools of a very modern hermit', The Independent, 24 October 2015, p. 21.
[27] www.stcuthbertshouse.co.uk/about.html/

# CHAPTER 1

# 'O Sely Ankir'

E. A. JONES

THE poems of Charles d'Orléans (d. 1465) are well known for their employment of imagery – natural enough in their author's circumstances – of exile, solitude and imprisonment. Many of the better known among them are also marked by a playful mix of religious forms with erotic content (one thinks of the much-anthologised 'My gostly fader I me confesse. . .'). Thus, while it remains a surprise to find a courtly lyric making use of anchoritic imagery, there is a certain inevitability to Charles's comparison of himself, in Ballade 97 of his English narrative-cum-lyric sequence *Fortunes Stabilnes*, to an anchorite in his cell. Here is the poem in full:

> O sely[1] Ankir, that in thi selle
> Iclosid [enclosed] art with stoon and gost not out,
> Thou maist ben gladder so forto dwelle
> Then y with wanton [undisciplined] wandryng þus abowt
> 5    That haue me pikid amongis þe rowt [crowd]
> An endles woo withouten recomfort,
> That of my poore lijf y stonde in dowt.
> Go, dul complaynt, my lady þis report.
>
> The anker hath no more him forto greue
> 10    Then sool alone vpon the wallis stare,
> But, welaway, y stonde in more myscheef,
> For he hath helthe and y of helthe am bare,
> And more and more when y come where þer are
> Of fayre folkis to se a goodly sort –

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[1] The translation of *sely* is notoriously slippery. At this date, it includes senses of 'happy', 'naïve' and 'blissfully ignorant' – we think of the *sely* carpenter in Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*.