

SIR ISRAEL GOLLANCZ MEMORIAL LECTURE

THE DATE AND COMPOSITION OF
ANCRENE WISSE

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Read 25 May 1966

THE date of the *Ancrene Riwe* or, as I prefer to call it, *Ancrene Wisse*, has been so long and so often debated by scholars that it may seem superfluous to return to it yet again. My reason must be that the work concerns an unusual variety of medieval disciplines, some of which require as precise a date as we can assign; moreover, the consideration of its date involves questions of its genesis and authorship of even greater importance.

I do not propose to go over all the familiar ground. During the last forty years it has come to be generally agreed that *Ancrene Wisse* cannot have been written much before 1200. The study of its literary sources by R. W. Chambers and others has shown that it is influenced by books written in the mid twelfth century and indeed later.¹ Professor J. R. R. Tolkien, in a fundamental discussion of the language of the Corpus MS.,² demonstrated that it was so pure that one must assume that the scribe wrote and spoke the same dialect as the original author; and it is now generally accepted that this was a West Midland dialect, probably of north Herefordshire or south Cheshire. Tolkien also argued that, in a time of rapid linguistic change, so uniform and unmixed a language could not have been produced if any great interval of time had separated composition from copying; he was disposed to limit the interval to some twenty years, and as the Corpus MS. cannot be earlier than 1224 this would mean that the date of composition could hardly be before 1200. Tolkien's views have been challenged,³ though

¹ See G. Shepherd, *Ancrene Wisse: Parts Six and Seven* (1959), pp. xxii–xxiii; A. Zettersten, *Studies in the Dialect and Vocabulary of the Ancrene Riwe* (1965), pp. 13–14; and the references there given.

² J. R. R. Tolkien, 'Ancrene Wisse and Hali Meidhad', *Essays and Studies*, xiv (1929), 104–26.

³ See J. R. Hulbert, 'A Thirteenth Century Literary Standard', *JEGPh*, xlv (1946), 411–14; Dickens and Wilson, *Early Middle English Texts* (1951), p. 91.

not to my mind convincingly: it has been argued that (i) accurate translation from one ME. dialect into another, which Tolkien dismissed as inconceivable, has to be reckoned with (I do not think that this is at all likely), and (ii) if, as Tolkien held and everyone would agree, the language in question was a cultivated literary one, then it would of its nature be conservative and a greater interval of time might have elapsed between composition and copying, without leaving traces on the language of the Corpus MS., than he had allowed. In theory this argument has some validity, but in practice Tolkien was certainly right. It was also argued that his assumption that Corpus preserved the original dialect was itself dubious, since more archaic forms occurred in other manuscripts, and it was assumed that these forms, being more archaic, must be more original; but this is in fact a false assumption, for collation proves that the more archaic forms are introduced by the scribes of the manuscripts in question (mostly the Nero MS.) and are not original.¹ The author's dialect was more modern than that of some of the scribes, and it would not be easy (in view especially of its accident, syntax, and vocabulary) to date it before 1200.

In 1945 Miss Beatrice White added an argument of a different sort.² Pointing to the passage³ which describes Christ on the cross as having 'the one foot, according to the opinion of many, set upon the other', she argued that it reflected a new style of iconography in which Christ's feet were portrayed as transfixed by a single nail, and that no examples were to be found before 1200. But subsequent investigation has shown that this feature, though more likely to be met with in the thirteenth century, is not inconsistent with a date in the late twelfth; in particular Mr. Shepherd⁴ cites a literary reference in a meditation of which the earliest known manuscript is dated to the end of the twelfth or the beginning of the thirteenth century.

Mr. Shepherd's⁵ is the most compact recent discussion of the problem. Without relying on Tolkien's linguistic argument, he accepts a date about 1200, 'and on the whole probably after,

¹ See C. A. Ladd, 'A Note on the Language of the *Ancrene Riwele*', *N. & Q.*, ccvi (1961), 288-90; E. J. Dobson, 'The Affiliations of the Manuscripts of *Ancrene Wisse*', *English and Medieval Studies presented to J. R. R. Tolkien* (1962), ed. N. Davis and C. L. Wrenn, pp. 133-4.

² Beatrice White, 'The Date of the *Ancrene Riwele*', *MLR*, xl (1945), 206-7.

³ Corpus MS., ed. J. R. R. Tolkien (*E.E.T.S.* 249, 1962), f. 106a/2-3.

⁴ Shepherd, *op. cit.*, p. 57 (note to p. 22, l. 13).

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. xxi-xxiv. See also Zettersten, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-18, for a fuller but less incisive account.

rather than before 1200'. He rejects the view that the correspondences between the Rule and later twelfth-century writings might be due to the influence of the Rule on them (and not vice versa), and says that if the passages concerned are later interpolations into the original Rule 'then we need not be much concerned with the original Rule, for it must have been completely recast and reformed'. He goes on to say that the material of latest date as yet discovered which has been incorporated into the Rule is a salutation *Ave principium nostrae creationis* which is stated by an early thirteenth-century writer to have been composed by 'dominus P. Cancellarius Parisiensis', i.e. either Peter of Poitiers, who was chancellor of the University of Paris from 1193 to 1204, or Praepositinus, chancellor from 1206 to 1210.¹ And more generally Mr. Shepherd remarks that the liturgical background of the Rule 'cannot be earlier than the late twelfth century, and may well be that of the early thirteenth'.

I rehearse very summarily these arguments, because they seem to me to be in accordance with all informed recent thinking on the subject. But Shepherd's attempt to set up a *terminus ante quem* of about 1215 is less happy. He has two arguments. The first is that, if he had been writing much after that date, the author, if he 'was knowledgeable about contemporary affairs, as he appears to have been, . . . would not have referred to the tournament as he has done';² and he cross-refers to one of his textual notes, which discusses love-tourneys and the presence of ladies at tournaments.³ In the note, as I understand it, the line of thought is this: (i) the author refers to knights performing in love-tourneys, but only as something that happened in days gone by (*sumhwile* 'at one time, formerly'); (ii) in fact ladies were only just beginning to attend tournaments in the early thirteenth century, so the allusion must relate to an ideal past and be based on passages in Geoffrey of Monmouth; (iii) the earliest reference to a tournament in England 'at which ladies

¹ Shepherd refers to V. L. Kennedy, 'The Handbook of Master Peter Chancellor of Chartres', *Medieval Studies*, v (1943), 9; but it was C. H. Talbot, 'Some Notes on the Dating of the *Ancrene Riwe*', *Neophilologus*, xl (1956), 49-50, who pointed out the significance of the fact briefly recorded by Kennedy. There is no explicit evidence that the salutation was composed during P's chancellorship, and Shepherd points out that Peter of Poitiers was active in the learned world by 1175; Zettersten, *op. cit.*, p. 19, goes too far in saying that the salutation establishes 1193 as a *terminus a quo* for the composition of *Ancrene Wisse*.

² Shepherd, *op. cit.*, p. xxiii.

³ *Op. cit.*, pp. 56-57 (note to p. 22, ll. 8 f.).

were present, i.e. [to] something which can plausibly be described as a love-tourney, is in 1215 at Staines, where the prize of a bear was presented by a lady'. So the note: but the Introduction seems to turn the argument round slightly, to the proposition that since ladies were present at tournaments in England as early as 1215, whereas the author does not know of it as a contemporary practice, therefore he must have written before 1215 (or at least not long after).

I must say that I think the argument mistaken. In the first place, a *terminus ante quem* which depends on the assumption that the author must have known almost immediately of a new fashion seems insecure. Tournaments were under papal ban and royal prohibition; a religious living in the Welsh marches might not have known, for years afterwards, that ladies had started attending them in France and the east of England. Secondly, the reference in the text of *Ancrene Wisse* does not explicitly refer to love-tourneys or the presence of ladies, and to take it in this sense is probably to read into it something more definite than the author intended. What he says is that Christ, like a noble wooer,

after many messengers and many good deeds came to prove his love and showed through knightliness that he was worthy of love, as knights were at one time accustomed to do; he engaged himself in a tournament and for the love of his dear one had his shield pierced on both sides in the fight, like a bold knight.¹

The reference is plainly to knights engaging in deeds of valour and in tourneys to show that they are manly and worthy of love (here indeed the author is almost certainly thinking of Arthurian material, either in early romances or in Geoffrey of Monmouth), but it is not necessarily to formal love-tourneys, nor does it necessarily imply the presence of ladies to watch. And finally and most important, Mr. Shepherd seems to have got his historical facts wrong; the very historians to whom he refers (Lady Stenton and Mr. Denholm-Young) contradict him. Some misunderstanding seems to be involved in the belief that at Staines in 1215 ladies were present and the prize was 'presented by a lady'. Lady Stenton² translates the relevant sentence as

¹ Corpus MS., f. 105b/21-27.

² Doris M. Stenton, *English Society in the Early Middle Ages* (1951), p. 82. The Latin text is 'Qui melius ibi faciet, habebit ursum, quem domina quædam mittet ad torneamentum' (Roger of Wendover, *Flores Historiarum*, ed. H. G. Hewlett (Rolls Series, 1887), ii. 138). The ambiguous phrase, 'prize . . . presented by a lady', used by Shepherd, p. 57, comes from a

'He who shall do best there will have the bear which a certain lady will send to the tournament.' The lady 'presented' the prize in the sense that she donated it, not that she handed it to the winner; she need not have attended at all, and indeed the word used (*mittet* 'will send') implies that she intended to keep well away from both tournament and bear. Clearly the discreetly anonymous lady was encouraging this tournament (doubtless because she was a political supporter of the barons in rebellion against King John, who were arranging it), but this seems a slender basis for assuming that 'ladies' (in the plural) 'were present' and that the occasion was 'something which can plausibly be described as a love-tourney'. The participants were not fighting for the lady, but the bear; and that is not my idea of a love-tourney. The tournament at Staines seems indeed to have been the ordinary early type, a mass engagement in open country between two teams; and Mr. Denholm-Young assumes, as is surely obvious, that the occasion was political. Denholm-Young¹ himself says that apart from this lady in 1215, 'the ladies at Kenilworth [in 1279] are the first heard of in connexion with an English tournament'. After referring to *Ancrene Wisse* and the romances, he observes that in the romance of *Fulk FitzWarin* (which he dates about 1258), the men 'are specifically stated to have tourneyed for love (*pur amurs*)'; but in his next sentence he coldly remarks, 'We have no actual records of this in thirteenth-century England.' The whole notion of knights tourneying for the love of ladies seems to have originated as a romantic literary fiction; and when eventually they did begin to joust for ladies' favours, it was a case of fact trying to catch up with fiction. The *Ancrene Wisse* author's use of the word *sumhwile* is therefore not at all surprising; he was doubtless very well aware that though 'Gawain with his olde courtesie' may have tourneyed for the love of ladies, real knights in his own day fought, often in deadly earnest, for horses and arms, and sometimes for all that they owned. Certainly, if there are no records of love-tourneys in thirteenth-century England, there is no case for using the author's ignorance of them as an argument for dating his work.

footnote of Denholm-Young's (on his p. 245) which refers for details to Kate Norgate, *John Lackland*, p. 239. Only Miss Norgate gives a reference to Roger of Wendover, without quoting him.

¹ N. Denholm-Young, 'The Tournament in the Thirteenth Century', *Studies in Medieval History presented to F. M. Powicke* (1948), ed. R. W. Hunt, W. A. Pantin, and R. W. Southern, p. 265.

Mr. Shepherd's second reason for preferring a date early in the thirteenth century is that the author's

devotional interests belong to the twelfth rather than the thirteenth century. His treatment of confession, his apparent aversion from mysticism, his insistence on the usefulness of reading as against overmuch prayer, all point in the same direction. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 insisted upon a stricter ecclesiastical control of unattached religious, and it is reasonable to assume that the original Rule, even the Rule as presented in N[ero], is somewhat less concerned with institutional religion than is *AW* [i.e. the Corpus text], and considerably less concerned with it than the Lateran Council expected spiritual directors to be. Most of the insertions peculiar to [the Corpus text] attempt to inject into the Rule a slightly more formalistic spirit.¹

I do not understand what is meant by the contrast thus drawn (or rather, considered as 'reasonable to assume') between the original Rule and the Corpus text, for I cannot think of any Corpus addition or alteration (let alone 'most' of them) which in any way modifies the attitude to 'institutional religion'. One of the most characteristic additions, which occurs both in Cleopatra and in Corpus, is the passage in Part VIII which reads:

Understand always concerning all these things that none is a command or a prohibition which is comprised in the Outer Rule, which matters little; for when the Inner is well kept, as I said in the beginning, this can be changed wheresoever any necessity or any reason requires it, according as she may best serve the Lady Rule as her humble handmaid. But assuredly without her the Lady comes to disaster.²

This, so far from 'injecting' any more formalistic spirit, is repeating and re-emphasizing the author's teaching that the outward observances are secondary, and matter little compared with the spiritual life; and it is expressed in terms of a metaphor used in the Preface which is undoubtedly an integral part of the original text.

The belief that the 'original Rule' did not show the influence of the Lateran Council of 1215 is in any case to be set against the views expressed in 1955 by Dom Gerard Sitwell in his Introduction and Appendix to Miss Salu's translation of the Corpus text.³ This important discussion seems to me not to have received sufficient attention, perhaps because, being published in this

¹ Shepherd, *op. cit.*, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

² Corpus MS., f. 115a/15-21; cf. Cleopatra MS., f. 193 foot.

³ *The Ancrene Riwe* translated into Modern English by M. B. Salu (1955).

context, it is thought to refer only to the Corpus text, and not to the original work; but in fact Mr. Sitwell's arguments are not in any way based on the Corpus modifications. His major point is that *Ancrene Wisse* shows the influence of the manuals for confession that began to appear in the early years of the thirteenth century, but received a 'great impetus' from the decrees of the Lateran Council of 1215; and he draws attention to particular activity in this matter in England in the years immediately before the Council of Oxford in 1222.¹ He also remarks on certain features of the devotions prescribed for the anchoresses, especially the comparative modernity of the purely private devotions, which he says might be regarded as typical of a fifteenth-century book of hours;² he comments, as others had done, on the significance of the devotions for the Elevation of the Host,³ and says that *Ancrene Wisse* 'seems to give the earliest known example of the devotion to the Five Joys of Mary set out in an elaborate form'.⁴ In the following year Professor C. H. Talbot independently discussed, in rather closer detail, certain of these liturgical and devotional questions.⁵ Of the Hours of the Holy Ghost he concluded that 'it seems safe to say that the end of the twelfth or the beginning of the thirteenth century saw the beginning of this new devotion'.⁶ Of the Elevation of the Host, he argues that no writer could have referred to the consecrated host as 'godes licome' and suggested prayers as an expression of adoration until the theological controversy about the precise moment at which the host became the Corpus Christi had been settled and the ecclesiastical legislation had been completed, and that 'this would have been 1207 at the earliest and may well have been some time after 1215'.⁷ He points out that the Constitutions of London (1215-22) warn priests not to raise the host above the head until the words of consecration have been uttered, and that Pope Honorius II in 1219 decreed that all parish priests should bow reverently at the elevation; he might have added that the Constitutions (1216-22) of Bishop Richard Poore of Salisbury have an article *De reverentia habenda in elevatione hostiae*.⁸ The link in this matter

¹ Op. cit., pp. xviii-xxi.

² Op. cit., p. xxii.

³ Op. cit., pp. 193-4.

⁴ Op. cit., p. 196.

⁵ C. H. Talbot, 'Some Notes on the Dating of the *Ancrene Riwele*', *Neophilologus*, xl (1956), 38-51.

⁶ Op. cit., p. 46.

⁷ Op. cit., p. 48.

⁸ W. Rich Jones and W. D. Macray, *Sarum Charters and Documents* (Rolls Series, 1891), p. 147. The text of the article (§ 56) reads: 'Moneantur laici quod reverenter se habeant in consecratione eucharistae, et flectant genua, maxime in tempore illo quando post elevationem hostia sacra dimittitur.'

between *Ancrene Wisse* and English synodal legislation in the period after 1215 seems to me especially significant, in view of evidence to be cited later.

There are a few minor points, all concerned with the Outer Rule, which may reinforce the argument for a date after rather than before the Lateran Council. But first I should like to glance at one which has nothing to do with the Council. It concerns the practice of blood-letting or *minutio*, on which Professor Knowles has a section in *The Monastic Order in England*.¹ He tells us that originally blood-letting took place only when supposedly necessary: so in Lanfranc's *Statuta*, which provide that the individual concerned 'stays away from choir until chapter on the following day and for two days takes the anticipated light meal or *mixtum*; there is no mention of recreative talking'. But in the next century blood-letting had become 'a regular event treated in effect as a kind of vacation. The earliest detailed enactments are those of Abbot Warin of St. Albans (1183-95), who was himself a master of the medical university of Salerno.' Abbot Warin expressly permitted two periods of talking, and provided that if the permitted two days of relaxation were interrupted by the occurrence of a great feast, then the day lost should be made up on the day following (i.e. the two days of relaxation had become a vacation to which the monk had a right). Finally, says Knowles, the *minutio* ceased to be a matter depending on 'personal initiative or the abbot's judgement', but a matter of routine, and the whole community went in batches to be bled 'four or five times a year'; at Peterborough this practice seems to have been introduced as 'one of the first acts of Abbot Robert in 1214', though 'it may possibly have been introduced somewhat earlier elsewhere'. It is obvious, from this account, that the system prescribed in *Ancrene Wisse*² is the fully developed one of the thirteenth century: the anchoresses are to be bled four times a year and if need is oftener (though if anyone can do without it, the author can well allow it); and when they are bled, they are to do nothing for the *three* days that they feel ill, but are to talk with their maidens and entertain themselves with virtuous stories. The two days of relaxation have become three, and have passed even beyond the stage of being a recognized holiday; rest is *commanded* as something necessary and prudent, and so is the conversation.

Professor Knowles also has much to say about meals in religious

¹ David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England* (1940), pp. 453-6.

² Corpus MS., f. 115a/1-5, 8-12.

communities. Originally the winter fast, during which a single meal was taken, began on 14 September and continued until the end of Lent. But the monks whittled this away, first by making exceptions for the major feasts as well as for Sundays, and then by putting off the beginning of the winter fast; by the early thirteenth century it had become customary to have two meals a day until 1 November, and for a period of two or three weeks at Christmas.¹ The monks also found various means of avoiding the prohibition on the eating of meat. By 1216, says Knowles, these practices were almost universal, though 'a few monasteries . . . held for long to the original observance and may have preserved it unimpaired'.² The Lateran Council of 1215 set out to reform the abuses, but its decrees were only reluctantly accepted by the English Benedictines; it was not until their second General Chapter of September 1219 that the strict rules of the winter fast were accepted, and even then a relaxation, whereby monks might eat meat in a separate room, was continued until a special visitation ordered by Gregory IX took place a few years later.³ Now *Ancrene Wisse* is notable for its strictness in these matters. Twice the author says that the winter fast is to start on 14 September—once in Part VIII, where it is altogether appropriate,⁴ and once in Part I, which deals with the anchoresses' devotions;⁵ here it comes in as a rather inappropriate parenthesis, which suggests that it may be something much in the author's mind. During the winter fast, two meals are to be eaten on Sundays only; there is no mention of feast-days or of the Christmas period. They are never to eat meat or fat (*seim*) except in great sickness or if anyone is over-feeble; and they are not to eat dairy products (*hwit*) in Advent (this seems an extension of the Lenten régime to Advent). This is obviously a very strict régime, and not the lax practice described by Knowles as typical of the beginning of the thirteenth century. It is true that the author is simply reasserting traditional rules,

¹ David Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England* (1948), i. 17-18.

² Knowles, *Mon. Order*, p. 462.

³ Knowles, *Relig. Orders*, i. 19. The final article of the decrees of the Council of Oxford of 1222 forbids monks to receive special food either in refectory or elsewhere, or when dining with abbot or prior or almoner, and to eat meat in refectories in which it is not customary to do so; this is obviously aimed at the continuing attempts to avoid conformity to the strict rule. (D. Wilkins, *Concilia*, i. 593.)

⁴ Corpus MS., f. 111b/9-19. There is the usual exception for those who are ill or have been bled.

⁵ Corpus MS., f. 6a/6-7.

as any rigorist might have done at any time; but in a book which lays down so few rules of external observance, and which normally treats the external rules as comparatively unimportant and capable of variation, the insistence on strict dietary rules is striking and somewhat surprising. It would be easier to understand if these matters had been the subject of recent discussion, as they obviously were in England after 1215.

There are other details of the same sort. Bishop Poore's Salisbury Constitutions, which served as a model for those of other dioceses,¹ forbade clerics to engage in secular business or trade, as did Archbishop Langton's Council of Oxford in 1222; *Ancrene Wisse* forbids trade to the anchoresses.² Poore orders all clerics to wear dress appropriate to their order, and priests to wear 'clausa desuper indumenta', Langton that they shall wear clerical dress, 'et cappis clausis utantur'; *Ancrene Wisse* refers to 'a wid hod ant a loke cape' as distinctively clerical dress.³ Poore and Langton both forbid clerics to let their hair grow and order them to be properly tonsured; *Ancrene Wisse* modifies this for women, but retains a shaven head as one of its alternatives.⁴ Poore forbids clerics all ostentation in dress, instancing masculine vanities (long sleeves, embroidered or painted shoes, gilded riding-gear); *Ancrene Wisse* condemns feminine vanities, especially wimples.⁵ Poore and Langton both qualify their prohibition of non-clerical attire by the phrase 'unless a matter of justified *fear* shall have demanded a change of clothing'; *Ancrene Wisse* twice uses a similar qualifying phrase, saying that an anchoress shall not change her place of abode 'except for necessity alone, as force and *fear* of death', and that the anchoresses shall not guard other men's possessions 'unless necessity or force bring it about, or great *fear*'.⁶ Langton, after observing that among other vices gluttony is liable to attack religious in no

¹ Marion Gibbs and Jane Lang, *The Bishops and Reform 1215-1272* (1934), pp. 116-17.

² Poore in *Sarum Charters*, p. 134; Langton in Wilkins, *Concilia*, i. 586; *A.W.* (Corpus MS.), f. 113a/8-10 (the sentence is slightly expanded in Corpus and Cleopatra but is part of the original text).

³ Poore in op. cit., p. 133; Langton in op. cit., i. 589; *A.W.* (Corpus MS.), f. 14b/7-8.

⁴ Poore and Langton, loc. cit.; *A.W.* (Corpus MS.), ff. 114b/26-115a/1.

⁵ Poore, loc. cit.; *A.W.* (Corpus MS.), ff. 113b/18-114a/15.

⁶ Poore, loc. cit. ('nisi iusti causa timoris exegerit habitum transformari', after a reference to clothing); Langton, loc. cit. ('nisi forte iusta causa timoris exegerit habitum transformari', immediately after the reference to tonsure); *A.W.* (Corpus MS.), f. 2a/23-24 and f. 113a/16.

mean way (*non mediocriter*), forbids monks or canons regular to presume to take time off for eating or drinking except at the appointed times and places, unless someone is really thirsty, when he may after getting permission go in a proper way into the refectory to supply his need; *Ancrene Wisse* forbids eating and drinking between meals, except with permission, to the servants and *a fortiori*, we may assume, to the anchoresses themselves.¹ Finally, and perhaps not least, Poore provides by his article 75 that

every priest, if he has anchorites in his parish, shall admonish them that they shall not receive a young woman by night in their house, and likewise that a woman shall not receive a male; nor shall they receive articles for deposit without the knowledge of the priest and of trustworthy living persons.²

The first part of this is repeated, in almost identical words, in Constitutions believed to have been issued either by Alexander Stavensby, Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield 1224–38, or by his predecessor.³ The passage in *Ancrene Wisse* forbidding the anchoresses to guard other men's possessions and legal documents in their house, or to let any man sleep in their dwellings, might have been written in direct obedience to such an injunction.⁴ It is not easy to believe that these correspondences between *Ancrene Wisse* and the episcopal legislation after 1215 are fortuitous; and it would be unreasonable to suppose that the bishops were the debtors.⁵

¹ Langton in *op. cit.*, i. 593; *A.W.* (Corpus MS.), f. 116b/3–5. But there is a textual difficulty at this point in Corpus; see Appendix A on pp. 206–207 below.

² *Sarum Charters*, p. 153.

³ Gibbs and Lang, *op. cit.*, pp. 108–9, 119–20 on Stavensby's Constitutions; text of the article referred to in Wilkins, *op. cit.*, i. 661. The Constitutions undoubtedly issued by Stavensby himself (Wilkins, *op. cit.*, i. 640 f.) contain what has been described as the most explicit treatment of the devotions for the Elevation of the Host after *A.W.* (Talbot, *op. cit.*, p. 48), and a fairly elaborate exposition of the Seven Deadly Sins, with the English names of some of them (somewhat mangled by Wilkins; they include *iiscinge* for Avarice, which he gratuitously and fancifully emends).

⁴ Corpus MS., f. 113a/13–19.

⁵ One might add, as a further less easily demonstrable instance, the fact that the author in his Preface tells the anchoresses that they are to vow obedience only to the bishop 'or to his superior' (*oðer of his herre*, Corpus MS., f. 2a/25, and so Cleopatra; the Nero-Vernon *hire* for *his* is an error). The addition of the latter phrase may reflect the attempt, after the Lateran Council, to extend the powers of supervision of the metropolitans—an attempt much resented, during the thirteenth century, by English diocesan bishops and religious houses (Knowles, *Relig. Orders*, i. 80–81).

For such reasons of detail, and for the more general one suggested by Mr. Sitwell—the interest in penance and confession—it seems that *Ancrene Wisse* might well have been written in or shortly after the period, between 1215 and 1222, when the bishops and abbots were promulgating the Lateran decrees in England. Certainly the attempt to set up 1215 as a *terminus ante quem* must fail. There is in fact no later limit that can be set other than the dates of the manuscripts. The Cleopatra MS. is I think the earliest, though only perhaps by a year or two;¹ but there is no way of dating it otherwise than by the inexact estimates of palaeography and philology. Strictly speaking there is no better means of dating the Corpus MS., but we know that the revision of which Corpus is a copy must have been made after 1224; for a passage peculiar to Corpus, but containing textual errors, refers to the friars, both Dominican and Franciscan, as men of such a way of life that they may be trusted, and received whenever any of them comes to instruct and comfort the anchoresses—indeed, if he is a priest, the anchoresses should make confession to him.² There is also a briefer reference added in Part VIII to friars of both orders as men whom the anchoresses might allow to eat in their presence by general leave of their director (in contrast to the special leave required for all other men).³ The Dominicans came to England in 1221, the Franciscans in 1224, but plainly the two passages were not written immediately after their arrival; the Franciscan house in Hereford is believed to have been set up about 1227,⁴ but we should probably allow a year or two more before their visits to the anchoresses could become as regular as the passages imply. This is still merely a *terminus a quo* for the revision, but on linguistic grounds (particularly some of the conservative features of the orthography) it would be difficult to regard the Corpus MS. as

¹ This view depends on the assumptions (a) that the additions in the Cleopatra MS. were first drafted in its margins and were not transferred to it from any other manuscript, (b) that some of them are earlier drafts of the related but slightly different versions of Corpus. Cf. E. J. Dobson in *English and Medieval Studies*, pp. 158–62, and see further below.

² Corpus MS., ff. 16b/13–17a/2.

³ Corpus MS., f. 112b/10–14. This is part of an addition to the basic text which is shared by the Latin version, though in an abbreviated form which omits the reference to the friars; but the Latin version in Part VIII follows the expanded text, as in Corpus, and is not independent. Cleopatra lacks both additions, as does the Vitellius French version.

⁴ Knowles, *Relig. Orders*, i. 132. According to Knowles (*ibid.*, i. 182) few of the first friars were priests, but this situation appears to have changed by 1230; hence perhaps the author's qualification *3ef he is preost*.

much later than 1230; and indeed 'about 1230' is the date that is usually accepted.¹

I turn from these attempts to date *Ancrene Wisse* by reference to external evidence to matters concerned with the internal history of the text itself. Anyone who reads any discussion of its composition will soon find himself faced with the concept of an 'original Rule' different from any of the texts that survive. This concept obtrudes itself twice even in Shepherd's brief discussion of the date. In its more extreme form, with which he wisely refuses to concern himself, it is of a text so different from what survives that it contained none of the passages referring to or based on later twelfth-century writers. This notion of an 'ur-text', it may fairly be said, exists solely in order to accommodate those who wish to believe in an earlier date for the origin of the Rule than the extant text allows; it is strictly beyond reason; and it is impossible. *Ancrene Wisse* is a most carefully and explicitly planned work. The division into parts, and their order, is explained in the Preface and is kept constantly in view throughout, and the individual parts are equally carefully planned internally—sometimes indeed their arrangement is explicit, and always it is revealed by analysis. Despite the liveliness of the style and the ease with which the transitions are managed, *Ancrene Wisse* is from first to last an ordered book, conceived and written as a unity. It has not just grown by successive additions and amplifications by various hands. Moreover, it is unified in style and language. Take away any substantial part—in particular take away the parts that show the influence of St. Bernard and his disciples—and one would not be left with an ur-text; no book at all would remain. Such an 'original Rule' is not merely a thing with which we need not concern ourselves; it can never have existed.

The other form of the concept of an 'original Rule' is very different; it is simply an original text contrasted with the admittedly revised version of the Corpus MS., and differing to some degree (though not so much) from any other surviving early manuscript. Shepherd (like many others) speaks of this 'original text' as if it too were somewhat hypothetical, though he implies (as is generally and rightly held) that the Nero MS. is closer to it, in content, than is Corpus;² but in fact it need not

¹ Shepherd, *op. cit.*, p. xxi, says 'after 1225 and probably before 1235' and Zettersten, *op. cit.*, p. 19, says '1225-1230', but for the reasons given 1225 is several years too early.

² *Op. cit.*, p. xxiv.

be at all hypothetical, for it is the archetype from which the extant manuscripts descend and can therefore be reconstructed by the ordinary processes of collation and textual criticism. It is the 'basic text' common to all the extant manuscripts and versions; for there is no reason at all, in text, language, style, or thought, to suppose that this 'basic text' was itself an alteration or a rewriting of any earlier version—on the contrary, it was the text as originally written. But, of course, by the same processes of collation and criticism the additions and deletions and alterations are revealed. We are not here concerned with the extensive rewriting of some later redactions (the Trinity French version, or the Pepys and Royal versions) or with the mere extracts, in rearranged order, of the Gonville and Caius MS., but with revisions found in texts which remain generally faithful to the original, i.e. the early English manuscripts (including Caius as far as wording is concerned in the extracts which it gives), the French version of the Vitellius MS., the Latin version (with some reservations, as it tends to compress), and the Vernon MS. (which, though late, is very faithful). In these manuscripts and versions one may distinguish three types of alterations:

1. Deliberate changes obviously not by the original author nor intended for the original audience: so especially in the Titus MS. and its group, where the text is generalized as part of the process of making it suitable for a male audience (as Caius also does, to a lesser degree).

2. Purely scribal changes, mostly mere errors of the ordinary sort, but also deliberate attempts to improve on the original (e.g. in details of grammar or word-order, or by more serious alteration when the scribe failed to understand his exemplar and attempted emendation). The Nero MS., though in content closest to the original text, is a particular offender in this way, and the original Cleopatra scribe was also too ready to emend and rewrite when he did not understand.

3. Alterations, omissions, and additions which belong to neither of these categories, i.e. are neither plainly by a different author and/or intended for a different audience, nor plainly merely scribal. They are by a redactor or redactors (to use a neutral term), not by a mere scribe, but are still addressed to an audience of women religious and either develop the thought of the original or else (to put it at the lowest) are not evidently inconsistent with it. Such changes occur in all early manuscripts, even in Nero, which contains a few passages (two peculiar to itself) which are not part of the basic text; but above all they

occur in Corpus, which not only contains all the more important additions found in one or more of the other manuscripts (sometimes in revised form), but also many peculiar to itself. Corpus is in a special sense the revised text of the Rule, which is why some scholars reserve to it the distinct name *Ancrene Wisse*, in contrast to the title *Ancrene Riwele* used of all the rest.

Now there are two contrasting attitudes to this last class of alterations, and one's view of the problem of dating is inevitably affected by one's attitude to the revisions. Some hold that the revisions are not, or are not necessarily, by the original author, and are not, or are not necessarily, intended for the original community. In this case one can well envisage quite a long gap—as long as the external evidence will allow—between the date of original composition and the date of the Corpus MS.; indeed, one may try to extend the gap as much as one can, to allow time for the 'original Rule' to fall into the hands of revisers who were not its author. But others hold that the revisions are by the original author and intended for the original community, and merely show that the community had grown in numbers and to that extent somewhat changed in nature. In this case one will not wish to separate by any great length of time the original composition from the Corpus revision; both must come within the working life of a single author, though time must be allowed for the growth of the community.

I myself am entirely committed to this second view. I can see no reason at all to suppose that the revisions were by a different hand. They are identical in language and style, and are most skilfully fitted into the original text; for the most part their purpose is simply to elaborate or make clearer, or sometimes to qualify, the original thought, or to deal with points that had been overlooked or too lightly treated; others can be explained by altered circumstances either within the community or without (e.g. the coming of the friars). It may be that it cannot be definitely proved that the Corpus revision is by the original author,¹ but I do not see why it should really need to be proved. When two or more states of a text transmitted in writing, and not orally, are known to have arisen at an early stage of its history—as is the case here, for only a few years at most can separate the Cleopatra MS., which as originally written was essentially the 'unrevised' text, and the Corpus MS., with its

¹ Dr. Zettersten observes of my view that the Corpus version is 'the author's own final and definitive version of his work' that it is 'very likely but cannot be definitely proved' (op. cit., p. 287).

'revised' text—there is a presumption that they are due to the original author. We do not ask for proof that Chaucer was responsible for the various states of the text of *Troilus and Criseyde*, or Gower for those of the *Confessio Amantis*; we assume it, and leave the onus of proof to anyone who wishes, against the evidence of language and style, to assert the contrary.¹ If the Corpus MS. alone had survived, so that we could not demonstrate its revisions and additions by comparison with other texts, no one would dream of denying its unity of authorship.² Nevertheless I accept the obligation, if not of giving strict proof of the identity of reviser and author, at least of indicating some of the difficulties that lie in the way of those who doubt it.

It will I think be found, when the work of collation and recension is complete, that the archetype of the surviving manuscripts and versions was a most unusually correct text. I do not mean that its readings can never be improved; there are places where they obviously could be, and where the medieval scribes themselves succeeded in improving them. But a text is not corrupt merely because it contains an anomaly that can easily be got rid of; the author may have written the anomalous form or sentence. There are a number of such cases in the archetypal text of *Ancrene Wisse*.³ Again there are places where no satisfactory explanation has yet been found for what was evidently the archetypal reading, but where, I am convinced, the fault is in our knowledge or understanding, not in the text.⁴ So far as my work has gone, I know of only one case where the archetypal

¹ It may be pointed out that Gower does not name himself in the revised passages of the Prologue and conclusion of the *Confessio*, and that Chaucer does not name himself at all in *T. & C.* As far as the evidence of the texts is concerned, the revisions of both works are anonymous; but no one doubts their authenticity.

² The discrepancy remaining in the Corpus MS. between the reference to 'three women' and that to 'twenty now or more' would no doubt be rationalized by saying that the author's concern was with three women in particular who lived in a larger community.

³ Thus at Corpus f. 3a/6, the false syntactical sequence *openlukest descriue(t)* . . . *pen is* (superlative followed by 'than') is apparently the archetypal reading; it is easy to correct and was indeed corrected early (it is not in Cleopatra or the Vitellius French version), but is a blend-construction that an author might well fall into. At Corpus f. 83a/3 *subtra* for the correct *subtus* (used by Anselm, who is being quoted) is an analogical form suggested by the preceding *supra*; Mr. Peter Dronke kindly informs me that one other instance is known in Medieval Latin.

⁴ For an example, see Appendix B on pp. 207–208 below.

text must be regarded as corrupt, in the sense that the author cannot possibly have intended to write what it represents him as writing, and that is where, in a description of a warrior-ascetic, there is applied to him the ludicrous phrase *wiuene sarest* 'most grief-stricken of wives'.¹ We should emend, in my view, to *wiuene sune sarest* 'most grief-stricken of the sons of women', an alliterative phrase entirely in the author's style; the tag *wiuues* (*wiuene*) *sunen* 'sons of women' occurs earlier in the text,² and it is only in this traditional phrase that the author uses *wif* in its old generic sense of 'woman' as distinct from 'wife'. But if so, the error (the omission of a word from a conventional phrase), though it is one to which copyists are very liable, is also one which an author himself can easily commit; we have all done it in letters or lecture-notes, or even in typescript sent to press.³ When we consider the length and complexity of the text—for it is often difficult, in style or syntax or vocabulary—and the number of errors committed even by the meticulous Corpus scribe, the almost complete freedom from error of the archetype can only reasonably be explained by the assumption that it was the author's autograph. Otherwise we should be confronted with the phenomenon in which textual criticism

¹ Corpus MS., f. 103b/15. For further details, see Appendix C on p. 208 below.

² Corpus MS., f. 43a/4 (*wiuues sunen*); Nero MS., ed. Mabel Day, 70/7 (*wiuene sunes*).

³ Another probable but not certain case of the accidental omission of a word occurs at Corpus f. 13a/13, where *clad* must be supplied or understood after *parlures*; Nero and Cleopatra (as originally written) agree with Corpus, but scribe B of Cleopatra (on whom see below) adds *clad* between the lines, to give a reading shared (or adopted) by Titus, Vernon, and the Trinity French version. (But the Vitellius French version has *louerture del parler*, supplying the omission in a different way.) The Corpus reading must be that of the archetype; what is doubtful is whether the omission of *clad* was an accidental error, as the word could be understood from the previous sentence.

At Corpus f. 33b/13, the reading *seinte stefne þ te stanes* is an error for *seinte stefne polede þe stanes*. The other manuscripts running agree with Corpus in having *þ* or *þet* or its translation (so Cleopatra, Caius, Nero, Vernon, Titus, Vitellius French version, Latin version), except for the Trinity French version, which inserts *ausint soffri* before *ke*, and Pepys and Royal, which rewrite. On the face of it, the error goes back to the archetype. But I think it more likely that the author used the *ad hoc* abbreviation *þ*. for *poledede*, as he used similar abbreviations elsewhere for repeated words (e.g. *m. b.* for *muchele blisse* at Corpus f. 9b/20, f. 10a/2), and that this was independently miscopied as *þ* both in β and in Corpus (or alternatively, the author himself wrote *þ* though intending an *ad hoc* abbreviation for *poledede*).

refuses, with good reason, to believe: the perfect or near-perfect copy of a long and difficult text.¹

This in itself does not affect our consideration of the date, for an archetype may long antedate the earliest surviving copy. But it does have relevance to another textual fact. The Corpus text, though very good, has not infrequent errors, often revealed only by collation; but they are always simple, and never require the assumption of more than a single process of copying. And if we again bear in mind the length and complexity of the text, we must conclude that if it is only necessary to assume a single process of copying, it would be wrong to assume more; for error begets error, and in particular omissions which obviously destroy grammar or the continuity of sense (and Corpus has such omissions) provoke rewriting in the attempt to restore coherence. But in Corpus there is no difference at all between the state of the unrevised parts of the text (which are the overwhelming bulk of it) and that of the added passages; indeed the only complex error, where for once the Corpus scribe attempted to rewrite a sentence he did not understand, comes in one of the additional passages.² Textually, Corpus is no more remote from the original in the basic text than in the additional passages, and it must follow that the reviser who produced the Corpus version used, as the physical basis of his revision, the archetype; the exemplar from which the Corpus scribe copied was the archetype as altered and added to by the reviser. But if, as I believe,

¹ On a parallel case of errors in a text which are attributable either to the author's autograph or to a master-copy used in his own scriptorium see G. C. Macaulay, *The Works of John Gower*, vol. **, pp. cxxx-cxxxi.

² Dobson, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-5. The argument that the Corpus MS. is a direct copy of the revised version is unaffected by the fact that for this long addition (Corpus f. 28b/21-29b/25), which occurs also in the Vitellius French version and in the Vernon MS., it is necessary to assume that in two respects Corpus and Vernon descend from a common antecedent distinct from that represented by the French version (Dobson, *op. cit.*, pp. 153-5, especially p. 155). It is clear that this addition was originally written and circulated on separate sheets of vellum, for both the French version and Vernon misplace it; and we must suppose at least three copies of the addition, (i) that inserted into the ancestor of the French version, (ii) that inserted into the exemplar of Corpus, (iii) that inserted into the ancestor of Vernon. The author of the addition may well have sent his first draft to the anchoresses, to be inserted eventually in the ancestor of the French version, and have kept for his own use (and insertion into the exemplar of Corpus) a second copy in which (a) the phrase *leafdi of londes* had been changed to *leafdi of hames*, (b) a desirable though not essential clause had been omitted (probably by accident, but perhaps by design). The third copy, inserted into Vernon, derived from the second, but not by way of the Corpus MS. itself.

the archetype was the autograph, this means that the reviser possessed the author's own manuscript and used it to make the revised text. This need not surprise us, since Middle English literature provides one exact and one close parallel among surviving manuscripts. The exact parallel is the *Ormulum* MS., an admitted autograph in which one can still see the revisions and additions; the close one is the Fairfax MS. of the *Confessio Amantis*, which Macaulay held to have been used as an exemplar in Gower's own scriptorium and which was altered from the first state of the text to the third.¹ But if we ask, as we must, how it came about that the reviser of the Corpus version owned and used the autograph, there are two possible answers, one simple and the other complex; and I take it that simple answers are always to be preferred unless there is positive evidence to the contrary. The simple answer (suggested by the parallels I have cited) is, of course, that the reviser was the author, and therefore naturally used his own manuscript. The complex answer is that he was some friend or literary executor or successor in function of the author, who had therefore been given the autograph; who wrote the same language and style, and thought the same thoughts; and who so perfectly understood the original text, despite its difficulties, that his revisions and additions were made in a way that the author himself could not have bettered. I can imagine such a man, but I cannot believe in him.

No discussion of the genesis of *Ancrene Wisse* can afford to neglect the evidence of the Cleopatra MS. It has been corrected or annotated by a variety of hands, of which two stand out. One is that of an early fourteenth-century north-east Midland scribe, whose interventions are notable—apart from the damage they do to the text—chiefly for the fact that he had access to a lost manuscript of the Rule, not (it would seem) very accurate. The other is an early thirteenth-century scribe who used the pure form of the 'AB language', and whom I call scribe B. I have spent much of the last three years or more in preparing an edition of the Cleopatra MS., and I have recently reviewed in detail the changes made by scribe B.² He makes numerous alterations to the original scribe's punctuation, converting it into the same system as that of the Corpus MS.—in all but a couple of

¹ Macaulay, vol. cit., p. cxxx.

² Scribe B works on ff. 3–25^v, 123^v–29^v, 149^v–50 (corrections by erasure), 190–97^v. For a brief preliminary account of his work see Dobson, op. cit., pp. 158–62; but the detailed evidence must await my edition of the Cleopatra MS. for the Early English Text Society.

cases (where he blunders) as the intended sense requires; he corrects spellings or grammatical forms, especially but not only when to do so aids the understanding; he corrects the text when it is miscopied, and sometimes revises it, especially if an error of the first scribe's was obviously due to some difficulty in the original text; and he makes many additions to the original text, some peculiar to the Cleopatra MS., others shared with one or more other manuscripts, especially, in Part VIII, with Corpus. He is an extremely skilful corrector, and the great majority of his textual alterations exactly restore the original text, often in small details; such corrections could obviously be transferred from another manuscript, providing that we assumed that it was one in the original dialect and at least as good as, but not identical with, Corpus. Similarly many of his additions could be regarded as transferred to the Cleopatra MS. from some revised and expanded text¹—though it would have to be one different from Corpus or any other surviving manuscript. But there is a substantial and significant minority of cases where such an explanation will not do at all: where a correction restores the original sense but not the original wording or word-order, or a faulty piece of text is corrected into an acceptable sense which is not the original sense, or a revision is plainly occasioned by an error of the first scribe, or a good addition which clarifies the original sense is based on and grows out of an unauthorized

¹ So G. C. Macaulay, 'The *Ancren Riwele*', *M.L.R.*, ix (1914), 146, followed by Shepherd, *op. cit.*, p. xi. But Macaulay's can hardly be thought a considered opinion; his inspection of Cleopatra was obviously very superficial (his main concern having been with Corpus). He did not distinguish the hands of the correctors of Cleopatra, and in particular appears not to have noticed the very obvious difference between hand B and the early fourteenth-century hand D; 'alterations for the worse' and 'the substitution of a more modern or familiar form' are a correct description of D's usual activities, but are phrases quite inapplicable to B's. Macaulay does not mention, and presumably did not notice, the additions and alterations by hand B which are peculiar to Cleopatra, including those that obviously originated in it (cf. p. 201, note 1, below for two examples).

Such an explanation as Macaulay's assumes that scribe B worked by careful comparison of Cleopatra as originally written with his superior copy of the expanded text, so that he was able to detect passages not included in Cleopatra and to supply them. But this was plainly not his regular method of working; he often misses errors or omissions in Cleopatra, especially if the sense remains acceptable. He obviously tended to read the manuscript through for sense, and to intervene if he noticed that the sense was broken or unsatisfactory. He would be unlikely to observe the lack of added passages unless he were specially looking for them (as, in Part VIII, he might have been, if he knew that it had been revised and expanded).

and nonsensical rewriting and expansion by the first scribe.¹ Such corrections, revisions, and additions are plainly made for the first time for the Cleopatra MS. and in it, and the same is probably true of other additions in hand B which Cleopatra shares with other manuscripts; indeed in one case it can be proved that another manuscript must have got the addition from Cleopatra.² The work of scribe B, all in all, resembles nothing so much as a modern author correcting and revising a bad set of proofs, and concerned not always to restore the text into agreement with copy, but sometimes to take what the compositor has been pleased to supply and to make something acceptable out of it with the minimum of change. Again two explanations are possible, one simple and the other complex. The simple one is that scribe B was indeed the author, correcting and revising parts of a copy of his own work and holding himself free to alter it if he wished, and naturally enough not always bothering to look up his own original autograph to discover exactly what he had said, or exactly how he had said it, in the first place; if so, here in the Cleopatra MS. is the author's hand preserved for our inspection. The complex explanation is to suppose some friend or colleague of the author's, using the same

¹ Sometimes one can see the first scribe change in mid-sentence from copying the true text to rewriting it. Such a case is at Cleopatra ff. 127^v-8, where the true text (as at Corpus f. 77b/15) is *lime is þe frensch of file*. The Cleopatra scribe began to write *lime is þe* but then interlined *þ* and continued so as to read *lime is (þ) þe | þe file fret of þeiren* 'lime is that which the file rubs from the iron' (the last six words being at the top of f. 128). Scribe B erased the interlined *þ* and altered the words at the foot of f. 127^v to *lime is þe frensch of file* (the true text, but for the form of *frensch*). At the top of f. 128 he adopted the original scribe's unauthorized phrase (but rewrote *þeiren* as *þe irn*) and added to it to give the sentence *þe file fret of þe irn þe rust & tet rugget & Makeð hit hwit & smeðe*, an addition found in no other manuscript. On f. 129, after the phrase *to freo of hire seluen* (corresponding to Corpus f. 78a/26-27), the first Cleopatra scribe had added a line of text for which no other manuscript offers any parallel; scribe B erased it so completely that it is now illegible, but wrote over the erasure *þ is. in hire ahne bodi large towart lechur þurh hire gestringes*. This is a meaningful explanation of the preceding sentence, and again occurs in no other manuscript; it was obviously occasioned by the first scribe's unauthorized addition, whatever it may have been.

² The first marginal addition in Cleopatra (f. 3) is also found in Vernon, but misplaced in a way directly explicable from the facts of Cleopatra's text; for at this point in Cleopatra there is a long omission, and Vernon brings in the addition so as to follow the omitted passage when it ought to precede it, i.e. Vernon inserts the addition *before* the sentence which it happens to *precede* in Cleopatra (owing to the omission), when it belongs *after* the sentence which it *follows* in Cleopatra. Only in Cleopatra is there precisely this omission.

literary dialect and commanding the same style; possessed of an excellent manuscript which he nevertheless did not always bother to consult, though he was not correcting his own composition, even when he detected an error; possessed also of a remarkable understanding of the intended sense, a keen eye for detail, great self-confidence, and a willingness to revise and add to what his friend had written. Again I can imagine such a man, but I cannot believe in him.

It does not seem credible that the skilful and tactful corrector of the Cleopatra MS., who had access to an excellent text in the original dialect, understood it so well, and was himself capable of writing in the original style and dialect, should be a different man from the skilful and tactful reviser of the Corpus version, who used the archetype as the basis of his revision, understood it well, and was also capable of writing in the original style and (unless the Corpus scribe has completely translated him) in the original dialect. Moreover, there is an obvious relationship between some of the additions made by scribe B in the Cleopatra MS. and some of those of the Corpus version; if scribe B and the Corpus reviser were different men, we should have to explain how one of them got to know of the other's work. We could perhaps suppose that the two revisers (more than two could be imagined, but I confine myself to two) were members of a close-knit religious community which possessed the autograph of *Ancrene Wisse* and had a uniform literary language and a common style; but then the question would arise why the community, instead of leaving the work of revision to a single person, should have put it, as it were, into commission. For such an improbable process definite evidence would be required. And since on the evidence of language and style we should have to suppose that the original author was or had been a member of the same community, we should also have to explain why he was not left to revise his own work. At all points explanation is easy if one accepts the obvious and simple hypothesis of an author who continued to revise copies of his work for the benefit of those for whom it was written; but difficulties, improbabilities, and complications multiply if one rejects it.

That the obvious answer is the right one is in any case strongly suggested by the use in additions of the pronoun *I*. An addition to the Preface which is peculiar to hand B of the Cleopatra MS. reads: 'You shall not, I say, make any greater use of firm promises.'¹ The 'Understand ever' addition, which is shared by

¹ Cleopatra MS., f. 4^v (to follow *herre*, corresponding to Corpus, f. 2a/25).

hand B and the Corpus version, not only picks up the metaphor used by the original author in his Preface, but also uses the phrase 'as I said in the beginning'.¹ The reviser could easily have written here 'as was said in the beginning', using the passive turn of expression which is so common in this work in references back; but he did not. Similarly the last of scribe B's modifications of the Cleopatra MS., which seems certainly to be an addition to the basic text in spite of its occurrence in Nero as well as in Corpus, is the closing sentence 'I am moderate enough who ask for so little'.² In a modern work it might just be possible, though by no means easy, to explain this use of 'I' in added passages as a dramatic device, the deliberate assumption by a reviser of the personality of the original author; in a medieval work it is much more difficult.³

If then a single man was responsible for the composition of *Ancrene Wisse*, for the correction and revision of the Cleopatra MS., and for the making of the Corpus version (including the additions which it shares with other texts, notably the Vitellius French version), the whole process must fall within a comparatively short span of years. But we have still to allow for an evident change in the numbers of the community for which the work was written. Three passages are relevant. The first is a passing reference to 'all three of you, my dear sisters, the women dearest to me', which, presumably because it was unobtrusive, escaped revision; the numeral could easily have been deleted without other change in the sentence, but was not, even in the Corpus version.⁴ The second is a longer passage which refers in some detail to the personal circumstances of three well-born anchoresses, sisters born of one father and one mother, for whom it is generally and rightly accepted, from this and the previous reference, that the Rule was originally written. This second passage occurs in full only in the Nero MS.,⁵ where it consists of two paragraphs. In the Titus group⁶ the passage is generalized

¹ Corpus MS., f. 115a/17-18; Cleopatra MS., f. 193 foot.

² Corpus MS., f. 117b/14-15; Cleopatra MS., f. 197^v; Nero MS., ed. Day, 196/20-21.

³ Since even in works of fiction, and even in the fourteenth century, the concept of the wholly fictitious first-person narrator seems to have been unknown; to a medieval author 'I' meant himself, even if what he represented himself as doing or as being was fictitious. Cf. George Kane, *Piers Plowman: The Evidence for Authorship* (1965), pp. 53-58.

⁴ Corpus MS., f. 31b/15. But Titus (30/23) excises the reference.

⁵ Nero MS., ed. Day, 85/8-86/5.

⁶ Titus MS., ed. Frances M. Mack, 61/1-19; Pepys MS., ed. (as *The Recluse*)

and depersonalized, but it seems clear that the redactor who was responsible (presumably the same man as generalized the text elsewhere in the ancestor of this group) had the full text of the two paragraphs before him, i.e. his exemplar had the same text as Nero's. This is consistent with the textual affiliations, for the Titus group and Nero are related.¹ Their text at this point must go back to a very early and quite unrevised manuscript. But in the Cleopatra MS.,² despite its early date, the two paragraphs are already truncated in the text as written by the original scribe: of the first only the opening sentence, which is entirely general, is left, and the rest, containing the personal allusions, is cut; so is the first sentence of the second paragraph, which refers back to the excised matter, but the rest of the second paragraph remains. The result is unsatisfactory, for what is left is pointless. But the cut is significant, for it shows that already, before the Corpus version had been made, the personal details had become inappropriate and therefore had to be deleted; and they had obviously been deleted (or marked for deletion) in Cleopatra's exemplar, for the scribe writes straight on. In the Corpus version³ the whole of the two paragraphs is removed, which is much more satisfactory; and the same is true of the Vernon MS.,⁴ which, despite its close textual affiliation with Nero, here as elsewhere follows the revised text of Corpus.

The third passage was first added in the Corpus version.⁵ It begins

You are the anchoresses of England so many together—twenty now or more; God increase you in good—that most peace is among, most singleness and unity, and community of a united life according to one rule

and continues that their manner of life is 'as though you were a community (*cuuent*) of London or of Oxford, of Shrewsbury or of Chester'. As throughout the passage the writer makes use of the word *cuuent*, though not in any technical sense (it evidently

by J. Pählsson, 91/20–25; Latin version, ed. Charlotte D'Evelyn, 66/2–15; Trinity French version, ed. W. H. Trethewey, 266/28–267/32.

¹ See the stemma given by Dobson, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

² Cleopatra MS., f. 80, l. 11–f. 80v, l. 8. The omission is from the words (in Nero's spellings) *vor mid more eise* (Nero 85/10) to *of ower mede* (Nero 85/29) inclusive.

³ Corpus MS., f. 51b/1.

⁴ Vernon MS., f. 380v, col. 2, l. 34.

⁵ Corpus MS., ff. 69a/12–69b/11.

means no more than 'community'), and speaks of their fame as having recently (*nunan*) become widely known,

so that your community begins to spread towards the extremity of England; you are as the mother-house from which they are begotten, some have taken the passage as referring to a larger community of a different sort. But its beginning makes it clear that the persons addressed are still anchoresses, not nuns, and that the community is not in fact a convent in our sense, and the phrase 'twenty *now* or more' clearly implies growth from a smaller number; the whole passage is dealing with an increase in numbers and reputation, with some allusion to the consequent risk of loss of unity. The addition of this passage in Corpus, and the omission of the one dealing with the personal circumstances of the three sisters, are perfectly well accounted for by the supposition that the community had outgrown its origins in such a way that revision was forced on the author himself. It is significant that the Cleopatra MS. was made by some form of *pecia* system,¹ and for that there can be only one probable explanation—that more copies than one were being made simultaneously from a single exemplar; evidently there was some urgent need for additional copies. And in the exemplar of Cleopatra, as we have seen, the main reference to the original three anchoresses had already been cut.

Plainly we must allow some years for the growth of the community, but at this period, when the eremitical movement was strong and there was much renewed enthusiasm for the religious life (one need only cite the extraordinarily rapid development of the orders of friars), we need not allow very many. Moreover, though obviously there were still only three anchoresses when the author first wrote, their community was not newly founded; they had for many a day begged him for a Rule,² and he spent

¹ This is shown (to summarize very briefly) by the fact that the manuscript subdivides into six unequal sections, the end of each section being marked by (i) a break in the regular collation in quires of eight leaves, (ii) the failure of the text, on the last leaf of each section except the fifth, exactly to fill the writing-space (at the end of the first section the text was a few words too long, which necessitated an extra but only part-filled line, at the end of the second, third, and fourth it was too short). The last two sections (fifth and sixth) were probably copied continuously, i.e. are really one continuous section; but each of the first four had evidently to be returned by the scribe to his employer before he was issued with the exemplar of the next section, so that he was unable to make the text run continuously, without blank spaces, from the end of one section to the beginning of the next.

² Corpus MS., f. 12/11-12.

a great deal of time writing it.¹ The increase in numbers may have begun soon afterwards. The sort of time-scheme that I have in mind is that the work was first written after the Lateran decrees had become known in England, even possibly after the Council of Oxford of 1222; and that there soon began a process of progressive revision of the text, culminating in the correction and revision of the Cleopatra MS. and the making of the Corpus version about 1228–30, followed almost immediately by the writing of the Corpus MS. itself as a fair copy of the revised text. Such an assumption seems best to satisfy the requirements. It is true that it means that the latest of the identified literary sources is a good deal earlier than the date of composition, and I do not doubt that it is true that the purely intellectual interests of the author are those of the late twelfth rather than the thirteenth century. But some allowance must be made for an author living and working in a remote situation in the Welsh marches; and if, as is probable, he was a man of some authority and seniority, his days in the schools were probably far behind him. It would not be the first time that a middle-aged man was more up to date in such matters as liturgical practice, pastoral theology, and ecclesiastical legislation than in his intellectual interests. Nor should much be made of his indifference to mysticism; not all men are of a mystical temper. The later date that I suggest would suit well the iconography; the advanced liturgical and devotional practices; the general nature of the work, and its concern with confession and penance; the minor but I think significant details of the Outer Rule; and more importantly, the uniformity of the language of the Corpus MS. and the virtual identity of the language of scribe B of the Cleopatra MS. Above all it enables us to regard the unity of style and thought of the Corpus version not as some miracle performed by a tactful redactor, but as the normal consequence of single authorship, of a man revising his own work before he has had time to alter his view or forget what he meant.

APPENDIX

A

At Corpus f. 116b/3–5, the manuscript now reads *ne gru[ch]esi ze naut*, but *gru[ch]esi* is an alteration of whatever the original scribe wrote (probably *grulesi*) and *ze*, though by the original scribe, is a false addition to the text which is shared by Nero and Titus. The Cleopatra MS.,

¹ Corpus MS., f. 117b/2–3.

f. 196, reads *ne gruēsi naut* (corresponding to *ne manguent* in the Vitellius French text), in which the subject of the subjunctive verb is understood. Corpus and Cleopatra together point to an archetypal form **grulesi* for normal *gruseli* (as Nero; cf. *O.E.D.*, s.v. *gruse*, *grusel*, and Tolkien's note ad loc., which are followed by Zettersten, op. cit., p. 225). We should restore the text as *ne grulesi* (or *gruseli*) *naut* 'let them not munch anything'. As Tolkien's note says, the context clearly requires 'they' as the subject; but the evidence of the manuscripts is better explained by the assumption that it was left to be understood than by treating the false *ʒe* as a substitution for an expressed *ha* or *heo*. The archetype obviously did not have the erroneous pronoun; Corpus and the original of the Nero-Titus group have independently supplied the wrong subject-pronoun, doubtless because they knew that religious were forbidden to eat or drink between meals and assumed wrongly that the injunction was directed to the anchoresses themselves.

It may be observed, in view of my argument that the archetype was the autograph, that if the assumed archetypal reading **grulesi* is to be regarded as an error and not as a genuine metathesized form, it is an error of a type which an author himself may make, and that hand B of Cleopatra has the similar error *wimlunpe* for *wimplunge* in an addition on f. 193^r.

B

At Corpus f. 26b/25-26, *Ga ut as dude dyna iacobes dohter to himmere heile, hire to wraðer heale*, where Corpus alone seems to preserve the archetypal text, no one has satisfactorily explained *himmere heile*, but I do not think it is corrupt; Cleopatra has *to himmere Heale* (omitting *heile hire to wraðer* by homeoteleuton), and the alliteration on *h* within the phrase and the jingle *to himmere heile* / *to wraðer heale* seem to be intended. The problem is to find an etymology for *himmere*. I would suggest OE. **hin-mære*, similar in formation and meaning to OE. *ūt-gemære* 'extreme boundary' (used to translate Latin *finis* and *terminus*) and to OE. *ūt-land* 'foreign land', *el-lende* sb. 'foreign parts'. For the prefix, cf. OE. *hinfūs*, *hingang*, *hinsīð*, OS. *hinfard* (beside OE. *ūtfūs*, *ūtgang*, *ūtsīð*, *ūtfaru*); and for the extension of the sense of (*ge*)*mære* from 'boundary' to 'boundary district' and (in the plural) 'territories' see especially Bosworth-Toller, Supplement, s.v. *gemære*, sense I (2). But *himmere* in *A.W.* probably represents not an OE. noun, but an OE. *jō*-stem adjective **hin-mære* 'foreign'; cf. OE. *ūt-lende* and *el-lende* adj. OE. **hinmære* could well become *himmere* in *A.W.* (i) by assimilation of *nm* to *mm* (cf. assimilation of *n* to *m* before *b* and *p* in OE. *hlimbed* < **hlinbed*, ME. *hemp* < *henep*), (ii) by the change of secondarily-stressed OE. *ǣ* to *e*, as in the suffix *-red(d)en* < OE. *-ræden*. The sense of *to himmere heile* would then be 'to foreign fortune'. *O.E.D.* does not record the noun *hail* < ON. *heill* so early, but the verb occurs, in the sense 'to salute, to greet', in Orm and Lazamon and implies the noun. This meaning for

to *himmere heile* agrees (a) with the immediate context, in which the leading idea is of going or being driven into exile to seek abroad a transitory and illusory prosperity (cf. especially the phrase *Ga sech wiðuten þe worldes frakele froure*); (b) with the Biblical citation, 'ut uideret mulieres alienigenas' (Corpus MS., f. 14a/16-17) for the Vulgate's 'ut uideret mulieres regionis illius' (Genesis xxxiv. 1); and (c) with the *Glossa Ordinaria*, which says that Dinah went out to see 'mulieres extraneae regionis' (marginal gloss) and interprets her as 'infirmata anima quae postpositis propriis aliena negocia curat' (interlinear gloss) and as 'mens . . . actiones alienas curans [quae] extra ordinem proprium evagatur' (marginal gloss, which goes on to speak of 'spem ac securitatem vacuam'). I would translate the sentence, 'Go out as did Dinah Jacob's daughter to a foreign fortune, to her misfortune.'

C

Only Corpus and Titus preserve the reading *wiuene sarest* (Corpus MS., f. 103b/15). Cleopatra and Nero alter it to *monne sarest*, the two French translations omit *wiuene* and translate *sarest* as an adverb (*angoissement* Vitellius, *mout tendrement* Trinity), and the Latin and Pepys versions omit the whole phrase. I agree with Mr. Shepherd (op. cit., p. 51) that *wiuene sarest* was the archetypal reading; only so can the variations of the manuscripts be explained. But I think him mistaken in saying that the reading *monne sarest* 'improved nothing but the gender', for it gives the required sense ('grief-stricken' being a well-established ME. sense of *sore*; cf. *O.E.D.*, sense 11); and his emendation, *wi[ð] e]uene sarest*, seems to me improbable in method and result. It assumes that two meaningful words have been telescoped into a quite different meaningful word, which does not happen very often; and I doubt whether *wið euene sarest* is acceptable ME. idiom for 'in bitterest fashion'. Moreover, when the evidence so strongly suggests that the archetype was the autograph, an emendation which assumes a type of error unlikely to be committed by an author himself must be suspect. I am aware of the danger of circuitry of reasoning; but what is required is proof of one or more undoubted errors, of a type which an author cannot reasonably be supposed himself to have committed, before we can entertain emendations which presuppose processes of error unlikely in an author. The case where the archetype may be suspected to be the autograph arises so seldom in classical and medieval studies that we all of us forget that it is, or ought to be, a principle of textual criticism that certain types of emendation are only acceptable *after* it has been proved that the archetype was not the autograph. Ordinarily we assume that it was not, and get away with the assumption; but it really always needs to be proved, for every copy must in the end descend from the autograph, and only chance—aided no doubt by a preference on the part of scribes for a fair copy as an exemplar—has decreed that in most cases the archetype is distinct from the autograph.