

## Reading Devotion

### Asceticism and Affectivity in Love's *Mirror*\*

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#### *Introduction*

The *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* was one of the most popular texts of the late-medieval period in England, with the number of surviving manuscripts surpassed only by a handful of works, including the Wycliffite translation of the Bible, the *Prick of Conscience*, and the *Canterbury Tales*.<sup>1</sup> Composed around 1410 by the Carthusian prior Nicholas Love, the *Mirror* constituted the first complete English translation of the Pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes vitae Christi*, a popular Franciscan text from the late-fourteenth century, and stood as one of the most important versions of the life of Christ of the pre-modern era.<sup>2</sup> As such, the *Mirror* is frequently cited in surveys of late-medieval devotion to the humanity and passion of Christ, as well as in studies of the monastic dissemination of themes and techniques of meditative devotion to the laity, particularly by the Carthusians.<sup>3</sup> Yet despite its clear influence and its presentation of

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Sargent, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Full Critical Edition*, Exeter University Press: Exeter 2005, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Sargent 2005, 1. Concerning the authorship of the *Meditationes*, see Sargent 2005, 10–15.

<sup>3</sup> Regarding Carthusian reading practice and meditation more generally, Marlene Hennessy has published several articles on the implications of the order's focus on the written word and the representation of devotional methods through texts and images. See e.g. Marlene Villalobos Hennessy, 'The Remains of the Royal Dead in an English Carthusian Manuscript, London, British Library, MS Additional 37049', *Viator* 33 (2002), 310–354; Hennessy, 'Passion Devotion, Penitential Reading, and the Manuscript Page: "The Hours of the Cross" in London, British Library Additional 37049', *Mediaeval Studies* 66 (2004), 213–256. Concerning readership and reception, Carol Meale's discussion of the *Mirror's* audience tracks its movement among various levels of society and attests to its relevance to members of nearly every social order, particularly religious and lay women, through its depiction of recognizable devout practices; see her "'oft sibis with grete deuotion I þought what I mist do pleyssyng to god": The Early Ownership and

archetypal meditative devotions on the life of Christ, the *Mirror's* tone is emotionally conservative in comparison with other texts of the period, with the result that it is rarely included in academic discussions of affectivity.<sup>4</sup> In this article, I will examine the affective elements of Love's *Mirror* in an effort to re-evaluate its connections to late-medieval devotional culture. I will argue that the *Mirror's* Franciscan-Carthusian origins comprise highly affective impulses, and that the Carthusian emphasis on the text as an object of and tool for devotion is characteristic of a peculiarly affective asceticism that imbues texts like the *Mirror* with added significance and power, which are made accessible to religious and lay readers alike. Devotional literature frequently promoted the imaginative meditation on Christ's life as a way to personalize his experience and example, allowing all Christians to relate and respond to the divine through participation with it. In this light, the *Mirror's* attraction of readers from all levels of society illustrates the potentially cooperative nature of the devotional enterprise, mirroring the reciprocal nature of reading and response. Love's presentation of themes, language, and imagery for devotional meditation provides compelling evidence for the increasing engagement between the monastic and secular spheres in the late Middle Ages.

I will begin with a brief overview of medieval devotion and the significance of devotional objects. This will be followed by a summary of the *Mirror's* historical background and purpose, showing how Love employs language and imagery that has great currency among religious and lay readers, and introducing the argument that the *Mirror's* devotional mandate represents and encourages a kind of partnership between readers. The next section will examine the relationship between asceticism and affectivity in Carthusian monastic practice, especially as it is manifested through the physical exercises of reading and writing, which have the potential to move the practitioner closer to God in spirit. This will be followed by further discussion of the aims and tools of devotional meditation, particularly how the imaginative construction of meditative scenes allows religious and secular practitioners to participate in the action of Christ's life, and how the cultivation of compassionate, affective responses to these scenes can elicit a spiritual transformation. Finally, I will consider the reception of and

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Readership of Love's *Mirror*, with Special Reference to its Female Audience', in Shoichi Oguro, Richard Beadle, & Michael G. Sargent eds., *Nicholas Love at Waseda: Proceedings of the International Conference 20–22 July 1995*, D.S. Brewer: Cambridge 1997, 19–46.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Beckwith has written provocatively on the subject of affective devotion and includes the *Mirror* in her considerations, but concludes that Love's institutional, anti-Wycliffite mandate prevents his text from reaching the charged heights of contemporary devotional works. See her *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture, and Society in Late Medieval Writings*, Routledge: London 1993, 65–70.

response to the *Mirror* by religious and lay readers, considering these in various social, cultural, and literary contexts, and exploring their implications for the discussion of the reciprocal nature of medieval devotion.

### ***Devotional piety and The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ***

From the eleventh century, the steadily increasing transmission of devotional ideals and practices from the monastic to the secular sphere widened the range and audience of meditative themes, so that by the fifteenth century devotional *topoi* had come to infuse medieval literature. The notion of the spiritual capacity and responsibility of individual Christians to operate within the corporate state of humanity found new expression as devotional literature allowed readers and hearers to place themselves within the action of biblical events, especially the life and passion of Christ, and to cultivate intense emotional responses to scripture, conventionally known as affective piety, in an effort to reinforce their internal spiritual development. Once exclusive to the realm of the professional religious, the increased popularity of devotional imagery and structures, evinced by a steady demand for devotional handbooks amongst the secular clergy and laity, is a key element of the general movement of religious thought and expression out from the cloister. Yet this progression of ideas was not necessarily a singular, linear translation of monastic values into secular terms, but involved a seeming mutuality of thought, a blurring of lines between learned and lay religiosity. The extension of devotional techniques to secular practitioners exposed those structures to elaboration and variation, so that monastic devotion not only informed the development of lay piety, but was possibly influenced by it in turn. In England, this process of cross-cultural exchange was most compellingly represented by the monastic order of Carthusians, whose particular interest in devotional literature and practice was manifested in their active composition, acquisition, and transmission of texts in Latin and English. As a result, they at once contributed to and were influenced by a culture of devotion that surmounted traditional boundaries between spiritual and secular.

Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* is one of the most representative of these devotional texts. In composing a new text based on an older, Latinate, religious one, Love chooses the vernacular to appeal more readily to extra-religious readers, while his regular use and validation of 'devout imaginations' highlight the currency and acceptability of inventive treatments of scripture for both religious and secular audiences. Love's

construction of devotional *tableaux* throughout the text reflects the habitual use of images of piety as meditative tools both by religious and lay practitioners, such as increasingly graphic representations of the crucifixion.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, it highlights the complex relationship between the earthbound instruments of devotion, such as words and images, which were used to condition the mind for meditation, and the ascetic roots of the meditative regime itself, which ultimately aimed for transcendence of earthly things. Love's *Mirror* not only illustrates how it is possible for the spiritual and the secular to accommodate one another, but offers solutions to an otherwise paradoxical aspect of devotion. That the Carthusians, one of the most ascetic monastic orders, should foster and encourage the seemingly unrestrained manifestations of piety of secular audiences is perhaps strange; however, upon closer examination, it is the affective qualities that could inform devotional meditation, recognized and accepted by both monastic and lay audiences as an effective mode of pious expression, that form a link between these two very different worlds. It seems to me that Jeffrey Hamburger's conclusions concerning the rise of devotional imagery in German monasteries are applicable in the literary context of devotion in late-medieval England:

The transformation of attitudes toward imagery and its proper place in devotional life should not, however, simply be attributed to a process of social adulteration, an assault by the laity on the spirituality of the cloister. Rather than a concession to a debased form of religiosity, late medieval devotional imagery should be seen as a response to a new set of religious aspirations in which the image plays a central role. These aspirations are manifested in the monastic as well as in the secular sphere.<sup>6</sup>

By the fifteenth century, religious and secular readers alike enhanced and refined their spiritual experience through their use of the written word, personally adapting and interacting with texts in order to suit their individual needs. The text became more than simply a physical tool for devotion, it was also the means for transcending the physical, the means by which the faithful might learn to approach and love God.

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<sup>5</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond*, University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia 2007, 6–16.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey Hamburger, 'The Visual and the Visionary: The Image in Late Medieval Monastic Devotions', *Viator* 20 (1989), 161–182, at 182.

The *Mirror's* primary purpose was to provide a model for meditation on the life of Christ that was theologically accessible to the devout laity, the "symple creatures þe whiche as chyldryn hauen nede to be fedde with mylke of lyzte doctryne & not with sadde mete of grete clargye & of h[ye] contemplacion,"<sup>7</sup> though its audience came to incorporate monastics and secular clergy as well.<sup>8</sup> It was made further accessible through its organization into sections that could be read or heard along the week or throughout the liturgical year, corresponding with the format of other devotional handbooks, such as Books of Hours. The *Mirror's* secondary purpose was polemical. Love's consistent references to authorized interpretations of the Gospel accounts, such as commentaries by Augustine and Bernard, as well as his original excursions and expansions on the *Meditationes*, constituted a simultaneous defence and affirmation of established church practice in the face of contemporary Wycliffite challenges; indeed, there are several "notae contra Lollardos" interspersed throughout the text. Due in part to its orthodoxy in this respect, the *Mirror* was approved by Archbishop Thomas Arundel as conforming to the Lambeth Constitutions of 1409, designed to examine and regulate clerical and academic orthodoxy, and so curb the spread of unorthodox doctrines such as those of Wyclif and his successors. This aim is indicated by the Latin memorandum that was circulated with the text, though whether Arundel formally commissioned the treatise is unknown.<sup>9</sup>

Next to nothing is known of Nicholas Love's origins or career. Though he is recorded as the prior of Mt. Grace charterhouse at the time of its incorporation into the Carthusian order in 1410, even the length of his term is unclear.<sup>10</sup> However, as Michael Sargent has outlined in his recent critical edition of the *Mirror*, it is possible to glean what sort of person Love might have been from the text itself: to be elected prior of a newly-founded house, he must have been a man of excellent judgement and strict discipline, and

<sup>7</sup> Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Reading Text*, ed. Michael G. Sargent, Exeter University Press: Exeter 2004, 10, ll. 14–16.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Salter, 'Nicholas Love's *Myrroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ*', *Analecta Cartusiana* 10 (1974), 46.

<sup>9</sup> *Mirror*, 7, ll. 9–20: "Memorandum quod circa annum domini Millesimum quadringentesimum decimum, originalis copia huius libri, scilicet Speculi vite Christi in Anglicis, presentabatur Londoniis per compilatorem eiusdem .N. Reuerendissimo in Christo patri & domino, Domino Thome Arundell, Cantuarie Archiepiscopo, ad inspiciendum & debite examinandum antequam fuerat libere communicata. Qui post inspeccionem eiusdem per dies aliquot, retradens ipsum librum memorato eiusdem auctori, proprie vocis oraculo ipsum in singulis commendauit & approbavit, necnon & auctoritate sua metropolitana, vt pote catholicum, publice communicandum fore decreuit & mandauit, ad fidelium edificacionem, & hereticorum siue lollardorum confutacionem".

<sup>10</sup> Sargent 2005, 30–1.

the *Mirror's* anti-Wycliffite tone and emphasis on the authority of the church suggest that he was strongly conservative.<sup>11</sup> Yet the *Mirror* illustrates the broad variety of approaches and responses that were possible from a conservative position. Love's essential argument against the Wycliffites was that the emphasis on 'scripture alone' denied a role for extra-biblical material in the education and stimulation of ordinary Christians in their faith, citing John 20:30 as support for imaginative excursions as they may be "resonably trowede." Love argues that devout treatments of scripture are often "more pleyne in certeyne partyes þan is expressed in the gossell of þe foure euaungelistes,"<sup>12</sup> and his ready employment of apocryphal material, for instance, suggests not only his comfort with technically unorthodox sources, but his confidence that a wide and mixed audience would understand and accept such references. His own "devoute ymaginacions" are liberally incorporated throughout the text alongside citations from scripture, biblical commentaries, and patristic authorities, providing compelling evidence for the ready synthesis of a variety of biblical sources in the Middle Ages, and validation of the role of each in Christian teaching.

In addition to being a commonplace in the late-medieval period, the imaginative consideration of Christ's life had a didactic purpose as well, as it could aid the faithful in understanding and applying Christ's example to their own lives. In his 'Proem,' Love introduces his central argument that it "be not azeyns þe byleue... þat holi writte may be expownet & vnderstande in diuerse maneres, & to diuerse purposes."<sup>13</sup> He defends his creative approach to the subject of Christ's life with a reminder that "seynt Jon seiþ þat alle þo þinges þat Jesus dide, bene not writen in þe Gosselle."<sup>14</sup> He frequently reads behind the Gospel accounts in an effort to fill them out and establish greater context for his audience, so that the occasionally obscure details concerning major events in Christ's life may be understood "as by þe processe" of events leading up to or touching them, such as what Christ was doing before performing his miracle at Cana, or raising Lazarus.<sup>15</sup> However, Love issues a caveat concerning his devout imaginations, warning that they are intended only as an aid in meditation and to stir the soul to God, and not meant to encourage readers and listeners to what the Wycliffites termed the "synne of curiosite."<sup>16</sup> His concern is to help his audience to a better

<sup>11</sup> Sargent 2005, 33.

<sup>12</sup> *Mirror*, 10, ll. 8–9.

<sup>13</sup> *Mirror*, 11, ll.1–3.

<sup>14</sup> *Mirror*, 10, ll. 40–1.

<sup>15</sup> *Mirror*, 79, l. 28; 127, l.19.

<sup>16</sup> *Mirror*, 31, ll. 31–6; Richard Beadle, "'Devoute ymaginacioun' and the Dramatic Sense in Love's *Mirror* and the N-Town Plays', in Shoichi Oguro, Richard Beadle, & Michael G. Sargent eds., *Nicholas*

understanding of the complexities of the divine through the more accessible figure of the human Christ: "As seynt Bernerde seye contemplacion of þe monhede of cryste is more likyng more spedefull & more sykere þan is hyze contemplacion of þe godhed ande þefore to hem is pryncipally to be sette in mynde þe ymage of crystes Incarnacion passion & Resurreccion so that a symple soule þat kan not þenke bot bodyes or bodily þinges mowe haue somewhat accordyng vnto is affeccion."<sup>17</sup> Love's use of the word "affection" is telling, a reference to the theological concept of *affectio* that was of particular importance to the Carthusians and Franciscans. The term carried with it a dual sense of both activity and passivity, of being inclined toward being affected, or moving to be moved upon.<sup>18</sup> It was linguistically and spiritually bound to the *affectus*, the place or aspect in which the human spirit moved/was moved, and encapsulated the ideal of actively striving to reach a state where action is no longer required, where the soul surrenders to the illumination of God. Through cultivating an emotional, compassionate link with God through imagining and meditating on his earthly life, readers of texts like the *Mirror* could learn to apply his example to their own lives in the form of moral thoughts and deeds, conditioning themselves and turning their hearts fully toward God. The 'mirror' in this sense was a glass which readers both looked through and were reflected in, doubly encapsulating the moral purpose of the *exemplum*. When their hearts were turned, then they could be transformed.

### *Carthusian monasticism and reading practice*

This language of affection and transformation had solid roots in the ascetic language and practices that characterized early desert monasticism, which served as the model for the situation and customs of the original Chartreuse monastery.<sup>19</sup> The Carthusians' unique combination of the eremitic and cenobitic lives, through incorporating individual cells into the communal plan of the monastery, provided a solution to the early monastic dilemma posed by the desire to live and worship God alone and the necessity of community in providing support and correction in the contemplative life. In contrast with the Benedictines, who provided the basis for Carthusian

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*Love at Waseda: Proceedings of the International Conference 20–22 July 1995*, D.S. Brewer: Cambridge 1997, 1–17, at 9.

<sup>17</sup> *Mirror*, 10, ll. 23–9.

<sup>18</sup> Dennis D. Martin, introduction to *Carthusian Spirituality: The Writings of Hugh of Balma and Guigo de Ponte*, Paulist Press: New York 1997, 6–7.

<sup>19</sup> C.H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., Longman: London 2001, 156.

customs in other regards, the Carthusian order was purely contemplative, designating all other aspects of the communal monastic lifestyle as an interruption of their primary occupation of prayer.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, their only daily, communal interaction was to sing the night offices; the rest of the Divine Office was recited privately by the individual monk in his cell. With the exception of Sundays and major festivals, when the monks ate in common and were allowed a period of conversation, they lived in solitude and silence.<sup>21</sup> Like the early desert fathers, the Carthusians believed that a monk could not worship God totally and unwaveringly unless he was free from worldly distractions, and they structured their physical and spiritual existence around this premise. Nicholas Love describes Christ's example of choosing solitary places where he could pray alone, "For by þe excercise of praierie specialy a man cometh to contemplacion & þe felyng of heuenly þinges."<sup>22</sup> The Carthusian monk's withdrawal from the world reflected John Cassian's argument that true withdrawal (*anachoresis*) was not simply a retreat into the desert but a retreat into one's true, inner self.<sup>23</sup> In this context, the 'desert' could represent several aspects of monastic existence: it was the monastery, the "fortress of stone"<sup>24</sup> that separated the monks from the false world beyond; it was the cell, where the monk trained and perfected himself through the exercises of prayer; it was the soul, the locus of true solitude. Thus the true aim of ascetic practice was to effect the transformation of the inner self through the discipline of the body, bringing body and soul together, rather than keeping them in opposition.

One of the most distinctive features of the order was its particular form of manual labour, the making of books, which illustrates the connection between the ascetic and affective thrusts of Carthusian spirituality. Guigo I, the fifth prior of the Grande Chartreuse, prized books as the "eternal food" of the soul, strongly and enthusiastically recommending the writing and copying of texts to monks as a mode of preaching with their hands, since they were unable to do so with their mouths.<sup>25</sup> Monks who could not write when they joined the order were taught to do so, and each cell was equipped with writing materials.<sup>26</sup> Writing also provided a way for the monks to "let

<sup>20</sup> E. Margaret Thompson, *The Carthusian Order in England*, Macmillan: London 1930, 25.

<sup>21</sup> Lawrence 2001, 158.

<sup>22</sup> *Mirror*, 107, ll. 7–9.

<sup>23</sup> Stephen D. Driver, *John Cassian and the Reading of Egyptian Monastic Culture*, Routledge: New York 2002, 103.

<sup>24</sup> Lawrence 2001, 159.

<sup>25</sup> John van Engen, preface to *Carthusian Spirituality: The Writings of Hugh of Balma and Guigo de Ponte*, Paulist Press: New York 1997, xvii.

<sup>26</sup> Lawrence 2001, 159.



themselves out" in action, as Margaret Thompson puts it, a break from the strain of long stretches of contemplation while still constituting holy work.<sup>27</sup> Books simultaneously represented the monk's withdrawal from the world and his loving approach to God, the objects with which he worshipped and through which he expressed his devotion. In the broader monastic context, reading (*lectio*) was a vital component of prayer, helping the monk to maintain consistency of thought between bursts of 'true' prayer (*oratio*), the point where the spirit was united with God. *Oratio* and *lectio* were inextricably bound: true prayer was, by virtue of its purity, brief. Because of this, it had to be done often, and reading constituted the physical and mental exercise that trained the soul to reach the spiritual height of pure prayer.<sup>28</sup> Meditation (*meditatio*) was the intermediate stage in this life of prayer, an application and extension of *lectio* that was also a prelude to *oratio*. Jean Leclercq notes that *meditatio* was primarily a memorial act, beginning with the initial reading of the text and followed by repetition or reflection on the words.<sup>29</sup> Tellingly, it was not an abstract exercise based on ideas alone, but always had its basis in the word of God as conveyed by scripture or biblical commentators. It included an integral imaginative quality, allowing the monk to consider the mysteries of his faith inwardly and without restraint.<sup>30</sup> The Carthusian approach to the text exemplified the ascetic purpose of monastic *lectio divina*: by internalizing the words on the page through reading, writing, or copying them, the monk took them to heart, to the *affectus*. As Love explains, "Hire hertes bene more proprely in cristes body by deuoute meditacion of his blessed lif þan in hir awne bodies."<sup>31</sup> Moreover, meditation on the physical word of the text transformed it into an object of devotion, a means by which to move and be moved toward God. It is perhaps this aspect of Carthusian spirituality that sheds some light on the reasons for their interest in devotional literature and culture, as corresponding to their programme of interaction with God through the text.

In a recent study, Marlene Hennessy has discussed the connection between reading practice and devotional meditation through examples from British Library MS Additional 37049. The late-fifteenth century manuscript is a devotional miscellany produced by the Carthusians in northern England, notable not only for its wealth of illustrations, but as a major source of

<sup>27</sup> Thompson 1930, 24.

<sup>28</sup> The traditional qualifications for *oratio* were purity, brevity, and frequency (*pura, brevis, frequens*). Jean Leclercq, 'Ways of Prayer and Contemplation', in Bernard McGinn & John Meyendorff eds., *Christian Spirituality* 1, Crossroad: New York 1986, 415–426, at 417–18.

<sup>29</sup> Leclercq 1986, 418.

<sup>30</sup> Leclercq 1986, 418–19.

<sup>31</sup> *Mirror*, 12, ll. 25–7.

Middle English passion lyrics.<sup>32</sup> One of the folios in question contains an illustrated, vernacular 'Hours of the Cross,' a well-known form of popular religious lyric which was related to the paraliturgical Hours of the Cross (typically included in Books of Hours by the late fourteenth century).<sup>33</sup> In more general terms, Hours of the Cross lyrics were a reflection and appropriation of the Divine Office (excluding Lauds), a literary example of 'serial meditation,' based on the monastic Office and promoted by the Franciscans in the thirteenth century, becoming popular with religious and lay alike.<sup>34</sup> In both the monastic and secular contexts, the canonical hours had a symbolic effect, referencing the sequence of the passion and crucifixion, and putting people in mind of the larger cosmological framework. Love draws the reader's gaze to "alle þat hæþ bene done to oure lorde Jesu, & alle þat he hæþ suffrede, at matyne tyme & pryme & tierce, in to þis tyme."<sup>35</sup> Sacred time overlaid secular time, reinforcing the sense of past as present and future. Indeed, the Additional folio's rubric explains that the seven hours are set out in this way so "a man sal remebyr þaim."<sup>36</sup> The Hours of the Cross also employed the devotional convention of meditating on a constructed scene, what was known as 'composition of place,' involving acts of visualization, enactment (or rather, re-enactment), and mimesis.<sup>37</sup> Hennessy explains that the format of the folio leads the reader/viewer through a set of responses to the passion, progressing almost exegetically from the liturgical to the sensory to the emotive, and resting in the penitential.<sup>38</sup> In a manner of speaking, the folio moves from the outside in, as the reader moves from observation to participation in the meditative scene. This movement mirrors the moral purpose of the devotional-meditative exercise, by which the practitioner moves inward to the spiritual centre of the self.

The contents of Additional 37049 are even more compelling in their explicit depiction of Carthusian textual practice. In several of the passion illustrations, Carthusian monks are pictured alongside Mary and John, reinforcing the sense of their spiritual presence at the events they meditate

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<sup>32</sup> Hennessy 2004, 216.

<sup>33</sup> Hennessy 2004, 217; Roger S. Wieck, 'The Book of Hours', in Thomas J. Heffernan & E. Ann Matter eds., *The Liturgy of Medieval Church*, Medieval Institute Publications: Kalamazoo, Michigan 2001, 473–513, at 474.

<sup>34</sup> Hennessy 2004, 218.

<sup>35</sup> *Mirror*, 172, ll.14–16.

<sup>36</sup> Hennessy 2004, 224.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia 1996, 37; Hennessy 2004, 216.

<sup>38</sup> Hennessy 2004, 220.

upon.<sup>39</sup> These were the same monks who had copied, illustrated, compiled, and read the manuscript, which added another ontological layer to the material and meditation.<sup>40</sup> The monks deliberately, permanently included themselves in the contents of the text, composing their space literally by writing and reading themselves into the scene, simultaneously present and returning as a guide for themselves and for others. As in Guigo's recommendation, the construction of the text was an ascetic, affective exercise, shaped in such a way that the reading monk was impacted by the reality of the scene and moved to interact with and witness it. Read or viewed slowly and repeatedly, so as to experience the text's meditative value more effectively, the result was a personalized encounter with the divine which in turn effected a more loving response. As a later source based on the same affective principles, the Additional manuscript thus provides a useful monastic complement to the *Mirror*, employing the same assumptions and practices visually that the *Mirror* employs textually.

### *Devotional meditation and the affective experience*

In providing meditative material for his secular audience, Nicholas Love located himself in a tradition extending from the eleventh century, including Anselm and Bernard, and further popularized outside the cloister by the Franciscans. The role of meditation as a vehicle for spiritual transformation gained increasing prominence in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, resulting in the development of a literary mode specifically designed to aid meditation, including meditative dialogues with the Virgin and reflections on the mysteries of the incarnation and resurrection. Anselm's emphasis on 'faith seeking understanding' was instrumental in the transition from the notion of passive faith to an active and dynamic interaction with it, moving from simple belief to a fuller understanding.<sup>41</sup> Anselm encouraged his readers to engage more intimately with scripture on an individual level, and so come to comprehend the complexities of Christian teaching.<sup>42</sup> Half a century later, Bernard highlighted the potential of a disciplined affective meditation to facilitate a more effective devotional experience. Like Anselm, Bernard espoused a progressive approach in reaching the 'naked convictions of the soul,' moving in stages from self-love to self-knowledge, thus to love

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<sup>39</sup> Hennessy 2004, 217.

<sup>40</sup> Hennessy 2004, 217.

<sup>41</sup> R.W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages*, Hutchinson House: London 1953, 226.

<sup>42</sup> Southern 1953, 227.

and knowledge of God.<sup>43</sup> The most effective method for this enterprise was meditation on the humane aspects of Christianity, chiefly the earthly life and physical body of Christ but also the human figures close to him (such as the Virgin and Mary Magdalene), through whose examples of humility and obedience the divine mysteries became more direct and accessible. Giles Constable terms this development the "mysticism of the historical event," a combination of an ardent concentration on the human life of Christ with an effort to personalize and internalize his experience on earth.<sup>44</sup>

There were strong visual cues embedded in the texts, encouraging readers to look, behold, and see the objects of their meditation, to make themselves more than mere spectators, but witnesses. An added responsibility was implicit in this shift from static to dynamic devotion, as readers were obliged to respond to the meditative scene in an appropriate way. Bernard in particular emphasized the cultivation of compassion (*compassio*) for Christ's sufferings, a response that was exemplified by Mary. Like Mary, the reader/listener watched and experienced the events in an immediate rather than an abstract way, which in turn brought forth a genuine emotional response. The notion of the direct connection between Christ's passion and Mary's compassion was reinforced by the affective mysticism of the Franciscans and the concept of the transformative power of compassion, so that the power of Mary's love for her son transformed her into his very image.<sup>45</sup> Thus in sharing Christ's pain so closely, Mary became one with him in spirit. This complementary *passio-compassio* imagery was amplified within the larger framework of the shared humanity of Mary and Christ, the fulfillment of the mystery of the incarnation. In his introduction to the *Mirror's* passion account, Love explains that to feel compassion at Christ's suffering is not simply an emotional reaction, but an act of comprehension and acceptance of the reality of his humanity in the greater context of his divinity:

Pere beþ many so blynde[t] gostly by vnresonable ymaginacion of þe  
miht of þe godhede in Jesu, þat þei trowe not þat any þinge miht be  
peynful or sorouful to him as to a noþer comune man þat haþ onely

<sup>43</sup> Southern 1953, 229; Etienne Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard*, Sheed and Ward: London 1955, 156.

<sup>44</sup> Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1995, 203.

<sup>45</sup> Otto G. von Simson, 'Compassio and Co-redemptio in Roger van der Weyden's "Descent from the Cross"', *Art Bulletin* 35:1 (1953), 9–16, at 13; Donna Spivey Ellington, *From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul: Understanding Mary in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Catholic University of America Press: Washington, D.C. 2001, 91.

þe kynde of man. And þerfore haþ þei none compassion of þe peynes þat he suffrede supposyng, þat for als mich as he was god þere miht noþing be azeynus his wille or dere him... [To] haue trewe ymaginacion & inwarde compassion of þe peynes & þe passion of oure lorde Jesu verrey god & man we shole vnderstande þat as his wil was to suffre þe hardest deþ & most sorouful peynes, for þe redempcion of mankynde so by þe self wille he suspendet in al his passione þe vse [of] þe miht of þe godhede fro þe infirmite of þe manhede, nomore takyng of [þat miht] for þe tyme þen haþ anoþer tendere & delicate man, onely after þe kynde of manne.<sup>46</sup>

Thus meditation on and devotion to the humanity of Christ, through imagining the passion and crucifixion, are not simply spiritually beneficial pursuits, but necessary components for the proper worship of God. Indeed, Bonaventure (to whom the *Meditationes* were originally attributed) described devotion to the crucified Christ as the death of the temporal self, the final stage of a spiritual journey in which the deeper, eternal self was awakened and united with God.<sup>47</sup>

As meditation occupied an intermediate space between reading and contemplation, so devotion occupied the middle ground between public and private faith. Like meditation, devotion was relatively unfettered by formal rules or structures, and was defined by its objects rather than its forms.<sup>48</sup> Liturgical religion was marked by a sense of sacred time, while contemplative religion was marked by the effort to transcend time and place; devotional religion incorporated aspects of each, by venerating the sacred spaces and objects that made space holy. Objects set in particular places in the home, for instance, defined otherwise profane space as sacred, at once rooted in and transcending the material world.<sup>49</sup> In the scene of Mary Magdalene's conversion, Love illustrates the potential of the devotional object to take on special spiritual significance: "Wiþ grete drede of hir vnworþinesse þat hir teres shold touche oure lordes fete she wiped hem with hir her, deuoutly, for she brouht no þinge with hir so precious to wipe hem wiþ... As she hade before vsed it in pride & vanite þan she wolde put it to þe vse of mekenes & deuocion."<sup>50</sup> Thus an ordinary, material object may

<sup>46</sup> *Mirror*, 159, ll. 8–22.

<sup>47</sup> Ewart Cousins, 'The Humanity and Passion of Christ,' in Jill Raitt ed., *Christian Spirituality 2*, Routledge: London 1987, 375–391, at 389.

<sup>48</sup> Leclercq 1986, 419; Richard Kieckhefer, 'Major Currents in Late Medieval Devotion,' in Jill Raitt ed., *Christian Spirituality 2*, Routledge: London 1987, 75–108, at 76.

<sup>49</sup> Kieckhefer 1987, 81.

<sup>50</sup> *Mirror*, 89, ll. 8–14.

be recast as an object of devotion through its use. As meditative devotion gained further popularity in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, both within the monasteries and outside of them, the objects and aspects which put practitioners 'in mind' of their faith became more specific. Devotion to the passion and crucifixion were the most popular and direct, manifested in the late-medieval period in devotion to Christ's wounds and the instruments of his passion (*arma Christi*), but the fifteenth century saw an increasing interest in the entire sequence of events of Christ's life, from the nativity up to and after the resurrection.<sup>51</sup> The *Mirror* (and the *Meditationes* before it) was a product of this interest, resulting in the "translation," to employ Sarah Beckwith's useful analogy, of the cosmological import of the before and after of the incarnation into linear time,<sup>52</sup> with a beginning and anticipated end to which ordinary Christians could relate and respond. As the source for the life of Christ, scripture transcended itself as a tool for prayer, the physical source for meditation and devotion and the means by which practitioners moved beyond the physical. Thus the word of God was the ultimate object of devotion, the means for loving and moving toward him.

Love's most explicitly drawn references to the 'devotional present' are in the *Mirror's* passion narrative, where readers are urged to participate in the drama as though they "were þere bodily present"<sup>53</sup> at the events, working and praying alongside Mary and the disciples, stirring new compassion and love in their meditation: "And fort gete þis astate of þe soule... it behouede [him] to sette þerto alle þe sharpenesse of mynde, with wakyng eyene of herte, puttyng awaye & leuyng alle oþere cures & businesses for þe tyme, & makyng him self as present in alle þat befelle aboute þat passion & crucifixione, affectuesly, bisily, auisily, & perseuerantly."<sup>54</sup> Through its advocacy and encouragement of inner conversion through meditative devotion, the affective asceticism of the *Mirror* exemplifies the aims of both monastic and devout secular readers. By using the text as a devotional object, both religious and secular practitioners could exercise their potential to interact with God.

### ***Reception, response, and reciprocity***

From the outset, the *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* was directed to an audience of "symple and deuoute soules," designed to provide

<sup>51</sup> Kieckhefer 1987, 85.

<sup>52</sup> Beckwith 1993, 53.

<sup>53</sup> *Mirror*, 188, ll. 2–3.

<sup>54</sup> *Mirror*, 160, ll. 24–8.

a model for meditative devotion that could easily be adapted to suit the needs of individual readers/hearers while still falling within the bounds of orthodoxy. Nicholas Love's references to 'simple souls' have usually been understood as references to the laity in general, but recent scholarship on the *Mirror* has indicated that its audience was consistently and considerably mixed throughout the centuries following its composition, including nuns, monks, and clerics ("pei þat bene religiose"), as well as men and women from the aristocracy, gentry, and mercantile and professional sectors.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, while Love contrasts his target audience with "ghostly folk," he explicitly and implicitly refers to readers from both spheres, including a few possible allusions to the Carthusians, while his Latin marginal notes are relevant only to those who can understand and make use of them.<sup>56</sup> Thus, a reasonable portion of the *Mirror's* readership would have been at least partially literate in Latin, so that in this case 'simple' does not have to mean illiterate or ignorant. The *Mirror* is not an introduction to the points of faith, but a narrative that assumes a certain degree of scriptural and spiritual familiarity in its readers, while reinforcing and building on that familiarity. Similarly, Love's choice of English does not have to be interpreted solely as a popularizing device. Thomas Bestul has convincingly shown that the rise in vernacular devotional literature from the thirteenth century may more properly be viewed as a sign of the continued vitality of the Latin tradition rather than its decline, and that the multi-lingual nature of the devotional corpus reflects the social variations in its audience.<sup>57</sup> Such conclusions acknowledge the varying social, economic, political, and geographical conditions that dictated a text's readership more comprehensively than the traditional binary of "lerede" and "lewede." In light of this, Love's choice to translate and adapt the *Meditationes* into English might be better understood as a way to ensure its easy transmission rather than to facilitate it. Moreover, in addition to direct copies, the *Mirror's* influence was further extended through adaptation into other texts and forms, the N-town *Mary Play* being a prominent example.<sup>58</sup> Dramatic performance could explicitly demonstrate themes and practices outlined by texts such as the *Mirror*, linking spectators through their collective observation of and engagement with the actions on stage. As in the meditative exercise, audience members were made participants as well as viewers, and were implicated in the action of the play through their presence.

<sup>55</sup> Sargent 2005, 53; Meale 1997, 20, 34.

<sup>56</sup> Sargent, 2005, 40–1, 53.

<sup>57</sup> Bestul 1996, 68.

<sup>58</sup> Beadle 1997, 1.

The evidence of surviving copies of the *Mirror*, such as marks of ownership and the quality of the materials, suggests that its initial popularity was among the lay and religious élite before it gained wider circulation among the gentry and other groups through more affordable or second-hand copies.<sup>59</sup> The interest of these groups in the *Mirror* is consistent with the late-medieval fashion among the wealthy for cultivating an austere, quasi-monastic spirituality. Cicely of York and Margaret Beaufort are frequently cited as examples in this regard, but in a broader context the secular appreciation for more private, ascetic spirituality is evident in a number of ways. By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Books of Hours, psalters, and devotional handbooks had become popular and practical books among the religious and laity that could be used at any time, both in private and in public. The owners of such books personalized them through regular use, particularly by making marginal notes and other markings, or by passing the books on as legacies or donations. In addition to constituting a starting-point for meditative devotion, these books could fulfill a further symbolic function as kinds of reliquaries, as they contained images and words of faith that were powerful remnants of the human Christ, and central to the devotional exercise.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, they served to transmit the thoughts and beliefs of their users as well as their authors, so that people from often highly varying backgrounds all contributed to a communal enterprise through composition, ownership, and use of a text.

On a larger scale, more visible pious practices help to contextualize the sentiments expressed and illustrated by devotional texts. The establishment of private chapels and oratories by wealthy laypeople was increasing by the end of the fourteenth century, as was the demand for private confessors.<sup>61</sup> This rise in private worship is often seen as a sign of separation from or dissatisfaction with official church practice, but private chapels could in fact serve to preserve, rather than erode, the links between an individual or family and the larger Christian community, maintaining beliefs and rituals at home as well as at church.<sup>62</sup> The foundation or patronage of particular monastic houses was another popular practice; the Carthusian houses in England were largely royal or aristocratic foundations, and their prosperity was closely tied to the political climate in England. More affordable gestures included the sponsorship of individual cells or bequests to anchorites and

<sup>59</sup> Sargent 2005, 92; Meale 1997, 20, 26–7.

<sup>60</sup> Kathleen Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages: Image, Worship and Idolatry in England, 1350–1500*, Palgrave: New York 2002, 160.

<sup>61</sup> Andrew D. Brown, *Popular Piety in Late Medieval England*, Clarendon: Oxford 1995, 205.

<sup>62</sup> Brown 1995, 207.



hermits, and while the desire of pious laypeople to be buried within or near churches and monasteries was at times a controversial issue within religious institutions, it may also be taken as a sign of dependence and cooperation between communities.<sup>63</sup>

Carol Meale has stated that the *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* "re-inscribes a potential for social diversity amongst those who encountered it" by virtue of its being accessible to individuals and communities representative of virtually every social level.<sup>64</sup> As such, the *Mirror* constitutes undeniable evidence of a socially diverse enthusiasm for devotional forms and practices in late-medieval England, equally available to all by virtue of their broad dissemination. In light of this, it is possible that monastic audiences were influenced by devotional texts that were composed by secular writers for secular readership in the same way that secular audiences were influenced by religiously-oriented works. Margery Kempe provides a case in point. The manuscript of the *Book of Margery Kempe* was in fact preserved by the Carthusians, and at least two of its four sets of annotations were likely made by monks at Mt. Grace.<sup>65</sup> All four annotators were mainly concerned with correcting and editing the manuscript, but their comments indicate that they read the *Book* with more than just practical interest. Two of the hands in particular testify to monastic recognition and approval of the *Book's* distinctly affective tone: the earlier hand (fifteenth-century) has rubricated and organized the text to make it more accessible to monastic readers, while the later hand (sixteenth-century) glosses the text with references to other well-known devotional writers, such as Rolle, and makes comments and personal observations that are in accordance with Margery's affective experience.<sup>66</sup> This evidence of Carthusian reception and interaction with a major source for lay religiosity points persuasively to monastic recognition and acceptance of the contents of extra-religious devotional texts. The annotators, and so presumably subsequent readers, have personalized and interiorized the *Book* in the same manner as they would a text of clerical-monastic origin. They identified aspects of Margery's book that they could relate and respond to, and so kept it for their continued use and edification. Thus, the features of lay religiosity at times found favour with monastic practitioners just as readily as monastic constructs were

<sup>63</sup> Hennessy 2002, 334, 339; Brown 1995, 206.

<sup>64</sup> Meale 1997, 20.

<sup>65</sup> Lynn Staley, introduction to *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Medieval Institute Publications: Kalamazoo, Michigan 1996, 3; Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia 1991, 8.

<sup>66</sup> Staley 1996, 4–6; Lochrie 1991, 209–12.

adapted for the laity, and texts such as Margery's *Book* and Love's *Mirror* reinforce the argument that the constitution of devotional culture represents a mixture of religious, clerical, and lay initiatives.<sup>67</sup>

Of the issues relating to monastic and secular interaction in the devotional context, one of the most pertinent is the question of influence. The English Carthusians were prominent in the composition, acquisition, translation, and circulation of some of the most well-known devotional and religious texts of the late-medieval period, including works by Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton, the *Horologium sapientiae*, the *Imitatio Christi*, the short version of the *Shewings* of Julian of Norwich, the *Book of Margery Kempe*, and Love's *Mirror*.<sup>68</sup> English charterhouses, such as the parallel houses of Syon and Sheen, frequently borrowed books from one another, and also collaborated in the circulation of English works to the continent.<sup>69</sup> Sargent highlights the literary character of Carthusian spirituality as the key factor in their influence in this regard, and their major role in the active preservation and dissemination of vernacular religious literature has been called "literary monasticism for the lay reader."<sup>70</sup> Vincent Gillespie has also commented on the liberal use of the vernacular by the Carthusians, as well as their possession of a significant number of catechetical and pastoral materials.<sup>71</sup> This evidence would seem to support the argument that the movement of devotional themes and ideas was very much directed from the monastery to the secular world. The *Mirror* itself was always intended for circulation outside the order, and indeed few of the surviving manuscripts bear any marks of Carthusian ownership.<sup>72</sup> However, all of the practices outlined above constituted, indeed depended upon, a certain degree of partnership between the spiritual and secular spheres, a mutuality of thought which tied religious and lay together through faith and devotion. Discussions of "spiritual capital" and "ambition," while persuasive, tend to reduce the possibility of spiritual sincerity through their emphasis on the commercial qualities of charitable customs.<sup>73</sup> The relationship between the temporal and spiritual was indeed one of exchange, but in the devotional context that

<sup>67</sup> Kieckhefer 1987, 101.

<sup>68</sup> Sargent, 'The Transmission by the English Carthusians of some Late Medieval Spiritual Writings', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 27:3 (1976), 225–240, at 228–39.

<sup>69</sup> Sargent 1976, 231–2.

<sup>70</sup> Sargent 1976, 239; Nicole R. Rice in Hennessy 2004, 226.

<sup>71</sup> Vincent Gillespie, 'Cura Pastoralis in Deserto,' in Michael G. Sargent ed., *De Cella in Seculum: Religious and Secular Life and Devotion in Late Medieval England*, D.S. Brewer: Cambridge 1989, 161–82.

<sup>72</sup> Sargent 1976, 230.

<sup>73</sup> Nicole R. Rice, 'Spiritual Ambition and the Translation of the Cloister: *The Abbey and Charter of the Holy Ghost*', *Viator* 33 (2002), 222–260.

exchange was rooted in the mutual pursuit of transcendence and salvation, the achievement of which erased material concerns.

### *Conclusions*

That the remote spirituality of the Carthusians should engage so closely with a type of religiosity traditionally associated with the secular sphere is indicative of the nature of meditative devotion in two ways: most obviously in its monastic origins, but more intriguingly in the capacity it held for emulation and elaboration by those who practiced it, and the potential for mutual imitation that was implicit in devotional practice, literature, and imagery. In this context, texts such as the *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* provide compelling evidence of a cooperative effort in which the construction of a personalized devotional programme could be carried out by men and women from any order or level of society, obscuring the boundaries between, and within, the religious and lay spheres to reflect the activity of the Christian community as a whole. Through the transformative power of the love of Christ, expressed both through the body and through the mind, and the maintenance of such a love through devotional practices, monastic and lay practitioners hoped to transcend their worldly state by forming an internal locus of faith and understanding. For such readers, the *Mirror* provided an important means for imaginative meditation, illustrating how it was possible for the spiritual and the secular to accommodate and involve one another. Love's treatment of the life of Christ typifies the devotional aims of both his order and his secular audience, integrating them into a single spiritual enterprise.

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