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English Wycliffite Sermons . Vol. 1 ed. by Anne Hudson
(review)

Russell A. Peck

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figures there listed appears in text notes; these two separate pieces of explanation could well be combined.

Finally, as I have noted, Harvey spends, speaking relatively, a good deal of time on the poet's meter. This information does not seem to me either accurate or well considered. In her editing of the text, Harvey seems to take any line with ten syllables as in effect metrical. And I think it very possible that the author was simply clumsy about the metrical form of the work. But in many cases I can see alternative ways of casting the lines into metrical form (in some lines by use of historically correct final *-e*, which Harvey claims the poet did not use); hence I am left unconvinced about the care or accuracy of the metrical analysis Harvey performed. Equally disconcerting are such statements as Harvey's claims that there are only two unambiguous headless lines in the poem (p. xviii) and that elision occurs only in a very limited set of instances (p. xix). Simply to take a single example, how does she scan (the undiscussed) line 693, which seems to me to read unambiguously [stress on italicized words] "*Pease thy chylde, and bryng mankynd to blisse*"?

This edition is very far from a bad job. Where Harvey in effect recognizes clearly that there is a task that needs doing, I think she performs very well indeed. But that sense of the task is not always as present as it might be, and a number of things which one might hope to discover in a 1984 edition of *The Court of Sapience* do not appear here or appear here only intermittently. Harvey is to be congratulated for closing off some areas of discussion, for example, the poet's use of his sources; some other areas, including basic matters like the text and the poet's metrical practice, must remain open for the present.

RALPH HANNA III

University of California at Riverside

ANNE HUDSON, ed., *English Wycliffite Sermons*. Vol. 1. Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, 1983. Pp. xi, 701. \$98.00.

This first volume of Anne Hudson's long-awaited edition of the English Wycliffite sermons, which will appear in four volumes, consists of 54

sermons on the Sunday Gospels and 55 sermons on the Sunday Epistles. When completed, the edition will include all 294 of the Wycliffite sermons. The purpose of the edition “is to produce a new text of the sermons, will full collation of all the manuscripts now known, and to study the content in which they were written and the light they shed upon the Lollard movement” (p. 6). The only publication of the complete English Wycliffite sermon cycles until Hudson’s new edition is Thomas Arnold’s *Select English Works of John Wyclif* (Oxford, 1869–71), the first two volumes of which included the Wycliffite sermons. Following MS Bodley 788 as his base text, Arnold divided the sermons into five sets: set 1: 54 sermons on the Gospels; set 2: 31 sermons on the Commune Sanctorum; set 3: 37 sermons on the Proprium Sanctorum; set 4: 120 sermons on the ferial Gospel readings; and set 5: 55 sermons on the Sunday Epistles. Hudson adheres to Arnold’s numbering of the sets in her discussion but does not follow the order of Bodley 788, which she shows to be not as excellent a manuscript as Arnold supposed. She chooses British Museum Additional 40672 as her base text. Although Arnold knew of nineteen other manuscripts, he did not attempt a systematic collation. Hudson has worked carefully with all thirty-one of the known sermon manuscripts. Her collations reveal information which, in addition to providing modern readers with an excellent text to study, will be particularly useful in reassessing the Wycliffite movement in its early stages.

Hudson’s 222-page introduction to this volume discusses the several schemes for arranging the sets in the manuscripts, describes the qualities and contents of the 31 manuscripts, and comments on the derivatives of the sermons, their presentation in the manuscripts (layout, headings and ornamentation, numbering system, rubrication, correction), the textual tradition of the sermons, and their initial production and editing. She does not discuss “obvious questions of authorship, date and purpose of the sermons” (p. 6); those issues will be considered in subsequent volumes.

In an earlier essay, “A Lollard Sermon Cycle and Its Implications” (*MAE* 40[1971]:142–56), Hudson noted that the sermons invariably appear in the manuscripts in sets. In her present introduction she now works out what the original order of the sets must have been. On the basis of internal allusions she concludes that the Sunday Epistle sermons (Arnold’s set 5) should follow those on the Sunday Gospels, the original order thus being 1, 5, 2, 3, 4. In fact, this arrangement is not found in any of the manuscripts, though several are ordered 5, 1, 2, 3, 4. But the internal allusions of what went before and what comes after imply a grand scheme

for the sermons, which apparently were published all at once rather than written and issued over an extended period of time, as E. W. Talbert and others have argued. The sets contain no odd insertions of sermons from other sources, no traces of casual copying or extracting of sermons from the sets into other manuscripts of sermons by other authors. As Hudson puts it, "The sets are autonomous and exclusive" (p. 35). One implication of this peculiarity is that the texts were copied at a center of some sort, perhaps a place such as the estate of Sir Thomas Latimer (one of the so-called Lollard knights), at Braybrooke in Northamptonshire, near the border with Leicestershire (p. 197). Most of the manuscripts are on parchment of good quality, often in folio with good-sized leaves on which minor tears have been repaired, which suggests that they must have been costly to produce. Their physical appearance, Hudson points out, is quite different from typical contemporary vernacular sermon manuscripts of a pocket size, written in a casual or unprofessional hand.

Some of the better manuscripts are in several hands. Frequently they have been carefully corrected, sometimes by the original scribe, sometimes by another, but often meticulously. Many have been rubricated to enhance facility of identifying and reading the scriptural passages. The headings are obvious, and punctuation is often designed to guide the reader to the sense. Such productions, Hudson concludes, "must point towards a movement with money, learning, and organization" (p. 196). It is, moreover, a self-conscious movement which seeks uniformity and accuracy, if the cross-checking and correcting of the manuscripts tells us anything. The manuscripts do, of course, contain errors. But the incidence of error is so sporadic and contradictory as to be useless for the constructing of a stemma. Hudson's collations lead her to conclude that traditional methods of stemmatics simply do not work in the classifying of the 31 manuscripts she has examined. It is conceivable, she suggests, that several were copied simultaneously, following the *pecia* system, where sections of texts were copied separately, then fitted together and checked and corrected. But the Wycliffite manuscripts are not fraught with gaps or compressed sections, the usual marks of *pecia* copying. Another possibility is that the manuscripts might have been copied according to the process of *pronunciatio*, where a reader dictated to a group of assembled scribes (p. 200), a method familiar in Prague among the Husites, who might possibly have been influenced by Wycliffite methods. The *pronunciatio* method could account for the randomness of some errors and also the uniformity of others.

The most interesting point, it seems to me, that devolves from Hudson's manuscript studies is her notion that these manuscripts appeared simultaneously in relatively large numbers, with all the marks of affluence and education about them. As she points out, the Lollard movement has traditionally been studied mainly through the documents of its opponents—chroniclers like Knighton or Walsingham, or judgments brought against the Lollards in the fifteenth century. Hudson argues from a new kind of evidence, evidence of their own making which offers quite a different view of the vitality and influence of the movement, evidence which is only beginning to be understood, but which Hudson charts intelligently and provocatively. Her conclusions strongly support the directions of thought taken by K. B. McFarlane in *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights* and Michael Wilks in his several essays on Lollards and the royal court. Initially the Lollard movement was not some grass-roots, populist movement, it would seem, but rather was systematically supported from influential places, in terms of both its intellectual integrity and its patronage.

What struck me most upon rereading the sermons in preparation for this review is the extent to which they comment upon language and problems of reading and interpreting texts. In my first encounter with the sermons in Arnold's edition several years ago, I was looking for Wycliffite protest. Some is certainly there, especially in the frequent charges of avarice and hypocrisy in a pharisaical clergy and in antipapal and pacifistic sentiments (what the homilist calls "blessed cowardice," which churchmen should advocate in times of warmongering). But compared with other Lollard literature, such as that which Hudson includes in her *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), the English Wycliffite sermons are tame—really quite orthodox in their doctrine. What is most impressive is the care of the homilist devoted to understanding aright the passages of Scripture upon which each sermon is based. Each sermon is headed with the appropriate Latin reading from the Gospels or Epistles for the given Sunday, and after a beginning which translates or paraphrases the lection at the outset of the sermon, the remainder explains the significance of the passage or its occasion.

The sermons explicate texts, and frequently they talk about such explication, defining terms and methods of hermeneutics as they proceed (e.g., "A parable is a word or story þat by þat huydyth a spiritual wit"—Gospel sermon 1, p. 223). In sermon 12 for the twelfth Sunday after Trinity the

text is Mark 7 on the healing of the deaf and dumb. The homilist introduces into the sermon the notion of fourfold reading (p. 269):

Hyt is seyð comunly þat holy writ haþ foure understandyngus; þe furste understandyng is pleyn by lettre of þe stori, þe secounde clepyd 'wit allegoric' whan men vnderstonden by wit of þe lettre what þing schal fallen here byfore þe day of doome; þe þridde vnderstondyng ys clepud 'tropologic' and hit techuþ how men schulden lyuen here in vertewes; þe fowrþe vnderstondyng is clepud 'anogogic' and hit telluþ how hit schal be wiþ men þat ben in heuene.

These principles of explication are, of course, so well known as to be commonplace, though it is unusual to see them expressed in English rather than Latin. But one must be impressed with the skill with which the notion enhances the idea of this particular sermon itself, where those who do not know how to fathom appropriately the different levels of meaning are the deaf and dumb, who are the subject of the lection. Ignorance of the hidden meaning is just such stupidity.

Often the homilist exhorts the reader to be alert to the hidden meanings of the text—the “spiritual wit,” which is the fruit, the true child, the Isaac rather than the Ishmael of Abraham (cf. Epistle Sunday 19, pp. 556–60, where the two children of Abraham are likened to the literal and allegorical senses of the text, the one to be cast out and the other to fulfill the birthright). The spiritual wit may be understood in many ways, however. Like Saint Augustine in *De doctrina christiana*, he encourages thoughtful interpretation and the discovery of various meanings, emphasizing that error is less the issue than seeking with a good intent. As he puts it, “Eche story of myracles of Crist may be moralisyd to a good witt. Ne hit is no perele to varien in suche wittis, so þat men varye not fro trewþe ne fro good lore, for þe Holy Gost, auctour of þese wordis, ordeynyth men to haue alle syche wittes; and he ordeyneþ þis tixt to meuen hem herto” (Gospel Sunday 23, p. 319).

The homilist regularly explicates numerical cruxes (usually according to geometrical and arithmetical criteria rather than following the usual patristic number glosses) and draws allegorical analogies (e.g., the healing of the palsy victim signifies healing sin-ridden man; waking equates with doing good works according to reason, while sin suggests being asleep; removing the stone signifies coming to a true understanding, etc.). He often explains perception through analysis of psychological faculties, dif-

ferentiating between knowing through feelings and the senses from knowing through forms and analogies, or through faith and love. He emphasizes that individual interpretation is crucial to the individual, that sects will be destroyed but individual persons saved. Repeatedly, he stresses the power of faith and the importance of love and mercy; e.g., Dives the rich man “was not dampned for extorcion or wrongys þat he dude to hys ne zbore, but for he faylede in werkys of mercy” (p. 226). He readily accepts diversity of interpretation from one individual to another providing they share one faith. If the individual has doubts about doctrine, he should send to Oxford for an answer: “Ne dowte we not how byleue may now be lesse and now be more, siþ þanne partis of byleue myzten gon away and come newe, and þanne þer were dyuerse byleues for dyuersite of partis. Syche dowitz we schulden send to þe scole of Oxenforde, and we schulden wyte wel by God þat dyuerse feiþus in a man, now on and now anoþur, makyn o feiþ in hym. — ze, zif þe tyme be dyuerse þat þis feiþ þus comþ or goþ” (Gospel Sunday 35, on Matt. 8 and Jesus’ calming the sea and walking on the water, p. 370). But he also warns against overinterpretation. For example, in discussing the multitude of fishes episode in Luke 5, he pauses: “Hit is no nede to depen vs in this story more þan þe gospel telleth, as hit is no nede to busyen vs to wyte what hiȝte Tobis hownd; hold we us payed on þe mesure þat God had zyuen vs and drewe we noht aboute new poyntis þat þe gospel leuyth, for þis is synne of curioustie þat harmeth more þan profiȝteth” (p. 241). But having said this, he then proceeds to gloss in great detail what the nets betoken.

Hudson’s edition of the *English Wycliffite Sermons* is a major contribution to medieval studies. Its publication is timely in view of the current interest in Wyclif studies and late-fourteenth-century thought and society in general. It will also be of interest to students of Middle English prose. The sermons are concise (on the average about 1,300 words long) and clearly written. The homilist is often quite lively in his use of idiom (homely colloquialisms such as something’s not being worth a fly’s foot (p. 562), the discussions of sour dough, or the allusions to football). But especially I look forward to Hudson’s discussion of the authorship and the audience of the sermons. For although much of such discussion must be conjectural, whatever determination of audience for the sermons could do much to clarify main currents in the Wycliffite penitential movement among well-placed civil servants like the so-called Lollard knights—educated men like Thomas Latimer, John Cheyne, Lewis Clifford, William

Nevill, and Richard Sturry, with their apparent desire for spiritual address in the vernacular.

RUSSELL A. PECK
University of Rochester

LYNN STALEY JOHNSON. *The Voice of the Gawain-Poet*. Madison, Wis.: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984. Pp. xix, 276. \$32.50.

This book, based on the author's Princeton thesis of 1973, stresses themes shared by the poems of MS Cotton Nero A.x. Art. 3 such as cyclical form, regeneration, human failure and inadequacy, and the need for penitence. Biblical allusions and analogues are given ample space.

A great deal of what this book has to say is not so much untrue as it is either too general or too much a matter of consensus to be worth saying at such length, or repetitive of what others have put better or of what the author has already said a few pages back. Rather a lot of space is devoted to telling the stories, and all four chapters (each dealing with a separate poem) end with a summary. Too often we are faced with platitudes which, even in context, do not suggest new thoughts about the poems: for example, of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* we read that 'the process includes failure because failure is an integral part of growth' (p. 70); of *Pearl* that the poem 'teaches a new understanding of love; it demonstrates resurrection.' The book has a predilection for the analogue: Gawain is like Aeneas, the *Pearl* maiden and its narrator are like Christ and Mary Magdalene on Easter morning. Johnson is right to stress the importance of penance in the late fourteenth century (although, again, the perception is hardly new) and the Magdalene is indeed a most compelling figure in the writings of that era. But her specific connection with *Pearl* is not secured by Johnson's rather ponderous comparison. It is not surprising that the author reiterates Singleton's remark that 'there is only one drama enacted many times, the drama of reversal, of salvation.' This is potentially, no doubt, one of the great profundities. But finally, a diet of nothing but such vast ideas and patterns, in which everything is very much like something else, unless handled with rigorous theoretical care, fails to nourish.