Figuring household space in Ancrene Wisse and The Doctrine of the Hert

Figuring Household Space in *Ancrene Wisse* and *The Doctrine of the Hert*[1]

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This article addresses the notion of space by emphasizing the imagery of the household in two medieval religious texts. In *Ancrene Wisse*, household space is most often addressed literally: the anchoress is invited to configure her anchorhold by transposing to it some of the daily activities pertaining to a secular household. At other moments, the image of the household is used for the shaping of her inner self, and therefore participates in the construction of the devotional household. Such a model, influenced by confessional practice, is developed in greater detail in *The Doctrine of the Hert*, in which the devotional household is used as a spatial category for the shaping of the inner feelings. This study demonstrates that the use of space as a historical category offers a new perspective on the study of medieval religious literature.

I. Introduction

Following the pioneering work of scholars such as Eric Dobson, Bella Millett, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Elizabeth Robertson, among others, *Ancrene Wisse* and its associated texts are nowadays raising the interest of the medieval academic community at large with, as a result, the "canonization" of some of its parts in recent anthologies of English literature, and their insertion into collections of writings for medieval women. In addition to philological and manuscript studies – which still have much to yield in terms of the origin and circulation of those texts

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[1] This paper forms the third part of a triptych with two other pieces of related interest (see references, under Renevey). I am grateful to David Spurr, whose acceptance of my conference proposal has led me to investigate more deeply those two texts on the theme of household space. Jacqueline Jenkins's close reading of a draft of this piece has contributed to a clarification of its argument and style. All remaining errors and infelicities are my sole responsibility.

–, cultural, feminist, and anthropological approaches to religious and anchoritic culture provide new ways of reading those texts, either within a broader cultural tradition or through new theoretical perspectives that allow for the construction of new paradigms. Broader contextual approaches to anchoritism, with a study of the possible influences of, or parallels with, the continental female religious tradition, as well as the recent interest in the similarities between *Ancrene Wisse* and Latin continental preaching (Millett, "The *Ancrene Wisse* Group" 11), suggest, next to the influence of an insular tradition dating back to the Anglo-Saxon period, that of the continental literature of confession and sermon literature which developed as a result of Fourth Lateran Council (1215) decisions on pastoral reform. Hence, both traditions need to be taken into account for a discussion of the features of the early Middle English text. According to Millett, it is not impossible that Paris-trained preachers contributed to the revival of vernacular religious literature in the West Midlands, with the introduction of continental preaching practices fused with repackaged insular native preaching resources (Millett, "The *Ancrene Wisse* Group" 9).[2]

Such studies serve to address one of the issues covered in this paper, which offers a comparative study of the use of space in *Ancrene Wisse*, a South-West Midland text which participated in this revival of vernacular literature mentioned by Millett, and *De doctrina cordis*, a Latin continental devotional tract attibuted to the Dominican cardinal Hugh of St Cher (c. 1200-1263) and translated into Middle English in the fifteenth century. *De doctrina cordis* addresses a community of sisters and is, like *Ancrene Wisse*, influenced by sermon preaching practices and the new literature of confession to which it itself contributes. This relatively understudied text was a devotional best-seller in the medieval period, with more than two hundred manuscripts, examples of which are found in all major medieval European libraries, and including translations in French, Italian, Spanish, English, German and Dutch (Hendrix, vol. 1, xxviii). As its title suggests, the treatise offers guidance about how to prepare one's

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[2] Out of the seventeen manuscripts in which versions of, or extracts from, *Ancrene Wisse* are found, it is Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402, probably written no earlier than the 1230s, and definitely not before 1224, in the West-Midland area, which serves as my primary evidence. For reasons of space, however, references to *Ancrene Wisse* are to Savage and Watson's modern English translation of Tolkien's edition of this manuscript (see references).

heart in order to be brought into union with God (Renevey, "Household" 167-8). As an overall study of the uses of preaching and confessional techniques within those two works goes beyond the limits of this essay, I would like to confine my analysis to a detailed consideration of household space in those two treatises. Both belong to specific but parallel traditions which deserve special consideration.

This paper considers first the anchoritic tradition by pointing out textual evidence which helps construct a paradigm marked by the politics and the discourse of enclosure in *Ancrene Wisse*. It then deconstructs this idealized but overly confined image of the recluse by looking at passages dealing with the representation of space and topography of the household, highlighting how social networks marked the life of the anchoresses for whom *Ancrene Wisse* was written, even if this latter aspect is developed more extensively elsewhere (Renevey, "Early Middle English" 1-22). Textual imagery implying the larger Christian community also contributes to representing the anchoress in a central role, where she is compared to saints and virgin martyrs, the Virgin Mary or even Christ. But below this surface discourse which the author is keen to maintain throughout the text, other traces show that routine daily activities in the anchorhold depend on a set of social practices which require close surveillance and regulation if the attainment of a condition as close as possible to being dead-to-the-world is to be reached. However, the solitary life in *Ancrene Wisse* is not depicted in terms of complete physical isolation. Instead, significant social practices and networks permeate the life of the anchoresses. This form of spiritual solitude contributed to broadening the readership of the text to include both men and women, religious or lay, who were familiar with Latin or one of the vernacular languages spoken in medieval England.

II. The Politics and Discourse of Enclosure

The large number of manuscripts in which *Ancrene Wisse* circulated testifies to the surprising popularity of such an apparently specialized religious piece. Changes made to the original version speak for a reading public whose way of life and gender did not necessarily match those inscribed in the original. For example, it seems that a male, non-anchoritic public might have been attracted to this text, without any sense of incongruity in digesting passages specifically addressed to fe-

male virgins. The evidence provided by Wogan-Browne on the Anglo-Norman version of *Ancrene Wisse*, integrated into a large compilation called the *Compileison*, provides much information about the ways in which *Ancrene Wisse* was adapted for an audience which could have been broad enough to include monks, canons, friars of whatever kind, nuns, recluses, men or women of religion. Wogan-Browne also stresses how the Anglo-Norman compiler did not see the need to change the highly gendered passages dealing with enclosure in particular. Wogan-Browne's paper makes a strong case for the un-enclosing of *Ancrene Wisse* by a consideration of its adaptability outside specifically anchoritic channels. I would like to pursue this argument concerning the permeability of enclosure by looking first at internal textual evidence that specifically addresses enclosure, then at the description of the household, in order to argue that this concept serves the construction of a paradigm marked by circulation, exchanges, social practice and networks. However much the author of *Ancrene Wisse* deploys anchoritic enclosure as part of his overall textual strategy (see Barrat, "Anchoritic Aspects"), more careful attention to space as an historical category allows for evidence showing how anchoritic culture is based on systems of networks in which anchoresses are shown interacting with the world at large.

Although I concur with Cannon on the shaping influence of *Ancrene Wisse* as material book and the ways in which it determines how the anchoritic body is conceptualised in its rapport with spatial categories – according to the Russian dolls principle (Cannon 48) – I also contend that emphasis on interchange between those spatial containers which are the Christian community at large, the parish, the village, the anchorhold, the cell and the anchoress's body, reveals awareness on the part of the author about the necessity of permeability within anchoritic culture (Wogan-Browne and Erler). Also, one should point out that Guigo I's *Consuetudines* and the solitary model of the Carthusian which it constructs, which had a strong impact on the construction of the concept of solitariness in *Ancrene Wisse* (Barratt, "Anchoritic Aspects" 37-8), is based on the concept of an order which considered itself semi-eremitical, with relative importance given to social networks and practice. Given the Carthusian influence and the evidence provided in *Ancrene Wisse* itself, it is worthwhile paying additional attention to the question of permeability. Our desire for a past that is foreign, exotic, other, and therefore appealing, may have had too great an impact on the way we represent anchoritic culture in general. It may account for too rigid

an interpretation of some of the information found in liturgical manuals and manuscript illustrations, where notions of impermeability, enclosure and containment are treated formally and ideally. For instance, without wanting to deny the psychological importance of the recitation of the Mass of the Dead which marked the ceremony of enclosure, as is attested by liturgical manuals, we may have been blinded by the fact that, despite this psychological death, the anchoress had to interact with the world in several specific ways for her own physical survival.

Recent attention to the subject of female monastic and anchoritic enclosure shows that enclosure as a concept needs to be complemented by those of permeability and networks (Erler 27). The recent work of Mary Erler on ownership and transmission of manuscripts among female religious communities points to important relationships between nuns and their religious and blood families. The convent gate becomes a site from which exchange becomes possible. Evidence of book ownership among anchoresses is probably even scantier than that of nuns, but there one may suspect that blood families also played an important role in the purveyance of goods and commodities for solitary recluses or small communities of anchoresses. The defensive, guarded, tone of *Ancrene Wisse* and other anchoritic works towards the outside world occludes in part the necessary contacts which practical aspects of the anchoritic mode of life inevitably forced upon anchoresses. In fact, most passages dealing with enclosure, if read from the other side of the lens, read as evidence in support of this permeability and networking.

> Do not talk to anyone through the church window, but hold it in honor because of the holy sacrament that you see through it. And use the house window for talking sometimes with your women; for others, the parlor window. You should not speak except at these two windows.
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> Always, keep silence at meals; since other religious do this, as you know, you above all ought to do it. If anyone has a loved guest, let her have her maid entertain her fairly as though in her place – and she will have leave to open her window once or twice and make signs toward her with a cheerful face. The courtesy of some has turned to their harm. Under the appearance of good sin often lies hidden. There should be a great difference between an anchoress and the lady of a house. (*Anchoritic Spirituality* 74)

The anchorhold here appears as a space from which intensive circulation of information takes place: the church window allows the anchoress to become witness to the Sacred Host, hence participating with the Christian community in a significant devotional practice; the house win-

dow is a site from which, like the lady of a house, the anchoress can govern the behaviour of her servants; the third window, the parlor window, is used for exchange of information with approved visitors or guests. One becomes aware of the subtle modes of behaviour which distinguish an anchoress from the lady of a house. In fact, the text's content makes clear that the author is addressing a primary audience familiar with a noble or gentry household's practices and that a significant part of the textual strategy consists in attuning the noble ladies to a material space for which a new code of conduct is required. Yet the architectural space of the anchorhold, despite differences, makes another household for which practical regulations and networks need to be implemented. The acquisition and assimilation of those new paradigms by the anchoresses are a great concern of the author. They are shaped with reference to secular household practices.

III. The Anchorhold as Household

Although the anxiety-driven anchoritic background of *Ancrene Wisse* does not allow for a profuse and systematic use of household imagery, this imagery, when it occurs, holds several distinct functions. For instance, the last part of *Ancrene Wisse,* "The Outer Rule," contributes to the shaping of anchorhold activities by making repeated gestures towards secular household practices:

> Do not give any feasts, or attract any strange beggars to your gates. Even if there were no harm in it except for their immoderate noise, it would sometimes hinder heavenly thoughts. It is not appropriate for an anchoress to be generous with someone else's alms. Would one not laugh a beggar loudly to scorn who invited people to a feast? Mary and Martha were both sisters, but their lives were quite different. You anchoresses have committed yourselves to Mary's share, which our Lord himself praised: *Maria optimam partem elegit* (Luke 10:42) – "Martha, Martha!" he said, "you are much troubled. Mary has chosen better, and nothing will deprive her of her share." Being a housewife is Martha's share; Mary's is stillness and rest from all the world's noise, so that nothing may prevent her from hearing God's voice. And see what God said, that "nothing will deprive" you of this share. Martha has her office; leave it to her. You sit with Mary stone-still at God's feet and listen to him alone. Martha's office is to feed the poor and clothe them, like a lady of the house. Mary ought not to meddle in this. . . . Likewise, no anchoress ought to take more than moderately what she needs. How then can she be generous? She has to live by alms, as moderately as she can, and not accu-

> mulate things in order to give them away. She is not a housewife but a church-anchoress; if she can spare any poor scraps, let her send them quite secretly out of her house. Under the semblance of good, sin is often hidden. And how can those rich anchoresses who cultivate land or have fixed incomes give their alms to poor neighbours secretly? Let her not wish to have a reputation as a generous anchoress, nor become greedier to have more so as to give much away: for when greediness is at the root of such accumulation, because of bitterness all the boughs which sprout from her are bitter. To ask for something in order to give it away is not right for an anchoress. From an anchoress's graciousness, from an anchoress's generosity, sin and shame have often come in the end. (*Anchoritic Spirituality* 200-1)

The passage seems to have as reference a pious noblewoman following the model of Martha, leading an active life devoted to supporting the needy by feeding and clothing them. However praiseworthy this may be, the anchoress is asked to follow an altogether different, contemplative model, that of Mary, completely devoted to the contemplation of spiritual matters. Some of the comments above, the author states, do not address the original recipients, the three sisters the author knew as their possible confessor and/or spiritual guide. If, according to the *Ancrene Wisse* author, their behaviour is exemplary and modelled upon Mary, one cannot infer that such is the case for the other anchoresses the author has in mind. For example, following the well-known passage of the cat, the author continues with advice to anchoresses having other animals than cats:

> It is a hateful thing, Christ knows, when people in town complain about an anchoress' animals. Now then, if anyone has to have one, see that it does not bother or harm anyone, and that her thought is in no way fastened on it. An anchoress ought to have nothing which draws her heart outward. (*Anchoritic Spirituality* 201)

Servants, guests, and here animals make preservation of physical enclosure impossible. Anchoresses do have other animals than cats, people complain about them, and the author here seems to provide evidence of knowledge of an anchoritic way of life in England which not only speaks against the feasibility of applying physical enclosure, but shows in addition that anchoresses's contact with the outside world is sometimes subject to criticism. Hence, household imagery is used, firstly, to warn anchoresses against improper behaviour. Secondly, it serves also in the construction of a system of communities and networks, social and

spiritual, in which the anchoress plays an essential role (Renevey, "Early Middle English").

IV. Confession, Introspection and the Household

A third use of household space in *Ancrene Wisse* appears in the delineation of the inner feelings in the context of confession:

> Confession must be whole: that is, sins from childhood on must all be spoken to one person. When the poor widow wants to clear her house, she first of all gathers all the dust in a heap, and then sweeps it out. Then she comes back and heaps what has been left together again, and sweeps it out after. After that, if it is very dusty, she sprinkles water on the fine dust and sweeps it out after all the rest. In the same way, one who confesses must push out the small sins after the great ones. If the dust of light thought blows up too much, sprinkle tears on them; then they will not blind the eyes of the heart. (*Anchoritic Spirituality* 163-4)

As shown by the quote above, *Ancrene Wisse*'s adaptability at using concepts and images – elaborated from Alan of Lille's *Distinctiones* (*Anchoritic Spirituality* 389) – according to the genre which it incorporates for the fashioning of its eight parts, is well-demonstrated in the way household space serves in the confessional part for the description of a person's inner life. Georgianna, followed by Millett, has given ample evidence of *Ancrene Wisse*'s debt towards penitential literature, a genre for which the Friars became the strongest advocates and to whose composition and propagation they contributed in important ways. I would like to turn to *The Doctrine of the Hert*, a work that similarly shows influence of the increase in interest in self-introspection that marks penitential literature which flourished after the 1215 Canon 21 decision of the Fourth Lateran Council, a decision which imposed annual confession on all Christians. Compared to *Ancrene Wisse*, *The Doctrine of the Hert*, studied here in its fifteenth-century Middle English translation – and consequently pointing to *Ancrene Wisse*'s adaptation into a confessional and penitential context that is the French *Compileisun* – explores domestic imagery at greater length. It participates in the construction of what I wish to call the devotional household, a concept that becomes fashionable all over Europe in the late medieval period, with the development of a sophisticated allegorization of the heart or the conscience as household in need of minute attention (Jager, 120-56).

Household space conceived as a mental image in *The Doctrine* serves then exclusively as a means of configuring the believer's consciousness. The degree to which mental images in this treatise are developed bespeak a strong conviction concerning the pedagogical potential of such imagery, to be used as part of an inner preparation for the exercise of confession:

> Of oo þing beware, þou mayst neuer 3eve trew rekenyng in confession but 3if þou remembre þe long afor as a lordis catour þe whiche schal 3eve a rekenyng to his lord. First he rekenet by hym self. Ri3t so schuldist þou do er þan þou come to confession and reken þe defautes by þiself, how þou hast dispendid þi lordis gode þe whiche He haþ lent to þe, þat is, þe 3iftes of nature, þe 3iftes of fortune, and þe 3iftes of grace. Also þou wost wele 3if a catour schuld 3eue trew rekenyng he writeth both þe daies and þe causes in his boke how þat he haþ dispendid his lordis gode. So most þou do; rekene wele þe circumstances of þi synnes wher and how and by what cause þou hast synned and þan go to confession and 3eue þi rekenyng to þi lordis auditor, þat is, þi confessour sittyng þer in þi lordis name. (*The Doctrine* 8)

As a mental spatial representation, the house of your heart ("þe hous of þin hert"; *The Doctrine* 9) becomes a dominant image of the treatise, one that allows for a careful delineation of one's consciousness, and which makes possible further exposition of basic Christian concepts.

The metaphor of the household for the representation of consciousness is an extensive elaboration of the more general concept of the space of daily experience which "represents the inner side of a person's life and the inner circle of activities of persons in groups, the estate, the 'house,' or the 'room'" (Kleinschmidt 34). According to Kleinschmidt, that space of daily experience can be represented by a private household (Kleinschmidt 34). In the case of *The Doctrine*, the household is used solely for the conceptualization of the interiority of a person's life. It is an outstanding example of an extensive development of household space for the configuration of the inner feelings that developed in parallel to, or within the confessional context. Household space is exploited in minute details, with a stress on the significance of private, enclosed locations. So the house is easily appropriated as the figuration of the heart, the seat of consciousness, which does not stand as an abstract entity in the medieval period, but is corporeal. The force of the figuration can only be stronger when the household imagery is applied to interiority as physical habitation, the physical organ of the heart (Riddy

132). The use of the household as a space of exchange and busy negotiation for the interior life marks the latter as a site of bustling mental activity. Hence, the space of the household, understood as a site of social exchanges, contributes to shaping a mode of contemplation which feeds on an active engagement with household activities. In fact, interactivity is at the heart of the process of defining the self according to Christian paradigms regulated by circulation and exchange. The author of *The Doctrine of the Hert* therefore depicts household space as a site of social negotiations applied to the paradigm of the self, which must be kept under intense surveillance. Ways of cleaning the house are closely associated with confessional practice, as is the process of furnishing the household space with a bed, an eating table, a stool and a candlestick, each being associated, respectively, with inner peace, penance, judgement and self-knowledge. The devotional household becomes a site into which entry is carefully checked, with the first enclosure of the garden as the first guarded zone ("close gardyn," *The Doctrine* 12) against unwelcome guests. The dichotomy "close"/ "commune" (*The Doctrine* 13) addressing here the garden imagery, is an overriding structural paradigm of the treatise. It addresses the notions of private and public spaces and assumes particular, antinomic roles for the characters acceding to those specific spaces. Hence, the self inhabiting the space of the household, unlike the common garden or the common marketplace (*The Doctrine* 28), has a way of controlling the circulation of allegorical characters within this particular precinct. If the evidence provided by the treatise, prescriptive by nature, suggests firmly how that space should be filled, it nevertheless leaves the last word to the reader, who has actively to engage with her own self and decide on its own configuration. Unsurprisingly, control of one's own senses is a paramount aspect of both *Ancrene Wisse* and *The Doctrine*: the household participates in the presentation of inner feelings. In the former, the reclusorium as physical household in which the anchoress is enveloped – which echoes the way in which the textual structure *Ancrene Wisse* functions according to a similar pattern of envelopes – affects significantly the manner by which household space is used as imagery within the treatise. *The Doctrine*, less focused on the physical space inhabited by its readers, makes a more systematic and rigorous use of the representation of the moral household, so much so that it is possible to explore at great length household performances, especially those taking place in the kitchen (Renevey, "Household Chores" 176-7). So, while *Ancrene Wisse* resorts to a multiplicity of im-

ages (with the pelican, the *nictycorax* and the sparrow as the principal ones) for the discussion of inner feelings and how they should be guarded, *The Doctrine* proceeds differently, making use of household imagery by discussing the need to keep the gates (the five senses) of the household shut to unwelcome visitors (the seven deadly sins):

> Thow, þi hous, Sister, be þus yclensed and araied, 3it 3if Our Lord schalle dwelle þerin, þe 3ates þerof most be kept. The 3ates þat schuld be kept ben þi fyue wittes, þat is, tastyng, touchyng, seyng, hiryng, and smellyng. By þes fyue 3ates þe soule goth out to outward þingis and outward þingis cometh into þe soule. The kepyng of þes 3atis is noþing ellis but puttyng away of delectacions of þe fyue wittes. The soule goth outward by þe 3ates whan sche putteth hir to outward besynes þat longith to actif lif þe whiche schuld ben vsed with gret sadnes and grete drede. (*The Doctrine* 23)

Further, in the second chapter, keeping a vigilant eye out for the enemy's attacks is expressed in an even more defensive light, with an extension of the household imagery as a besieged castle, with emphasis on the activities of those engaged in the defense of the castle:

> Lo, Sistir, se and beholde what aduersary þou hast. Kepe þerfor þe castelle of þin hert fro suche an enmy þat so haþ besegid þe. Considere also and behold how sobirly alle þo þe whiche ben besegid in a castelle lyuen, how litel þei slepe and how selde, and with what drede and with how moche scleythe þei gon out of þe castelle whan þei haue nede, and how sone þei come a3en, how oft and how besily þei serche þe wardis of þe castelle, with what noyse and with what besynes eche of hem exciten oþer to bataile, and 3it allebeit þat þei ben þus sorowful and dredful þei syngen oþer whiles on hye vppon þe castelle walles by cause þat her enemys schuld be aferde. Thus schuldist þou do, Sistir, 3if þou wilt kepe wel þe castelle of þin hert. (*The Doctrine* 78)

However, unlike *Ancrene Wisse* and Grosseteste's *Château d'amour*, in which the besieged castle as architecture represents the inviolability of the anchoritic body in the former, and describes the invulnerability of the Virgin in the latter, this metaphor of the aristocratic household, which I perceive in *The Doctrine* as a refined variation of the household one, also emphasizes space as a social construction, a place of exchange and interaction, rather than the static and firm conceptualization of a physical object. The *Doctrine's* besieged castle is a place of interaction, full of men, women and children:

> But oo þing þou schalt wele know, a castelle may not be long kept 3if if it faile men for to defende it ant kepe it. Ri3t so þou maist no long kepe þin hert in trew rest fro þe fende but 3if þi þou3tes ben my3ty ant strong for to withstand hym. Thou wost wele 3if wommen or children be in a castelle þat is besegid þei ben sone sent out for þei mow li3tly discomfort hem þat ben within and also for cowardise and fayntise of hert bryng in with somme sotilte preuely her ennemys. (*The Doctrine* 83)

The easy transfer from household to castle space initially supports the ideology of (household) containment as being typically female and used by male clerical culture to occlude notions of oppression by those of sacrifice (Riddy, in Beattie 133). In addition, the statement that, according to Fresco, "the ultimate instance of female space imbedded in the closed world of the court is the woman herself" (Fresco, in Beattie 194) corroborates containment ideology. If, indeed, the moral household contributes to the representation of such ideology in both *Ancrene Wisse* and *The Doctrine*, one needs to be aware that later medieval adaptations of *Ancrene Wisse* and vernacular translations of *De doctrina cordis*, of which our version is an example, were also made for a male readership for whom the feminisation of devotional practices allowed for a deeper understanding of their inner feelings. In addition, *The Doctrine* is a good example of the complexity of the use of domestic space and its activities. The transition from household to castle space leads to a reference to the male world of armoury and horsemanship. Further on, being shaved by the barber serves as image to instruct male and female readers in the principle of obedience to a superior:

> It schuld fare by a cloisterer þat is vndir obedience as it doth with a man þat is schaue vndir a barbour is rasoure. Þou wost wele, he þat sitteth vndir a rasoure, he suffret þe barbour to torne his hede now to þat one side, and now to þat oþer side, and now he suffreth hym to open his mouth and now for to lift vp his chyn and alle þis he suffreth lest he be hurte of þe rasoure 3if he struglid. Ri3t so schuld a cloisterere do. As long as þou art vndir þe gouernançe of þi souereyne in religion so longe þou art vndir þe handis of a barbour for to schaue away þi synnes. (*The Doctrine* 134)

In this example, a male character is being checked in his movement by the barber. This image is a continuation in the deployment of containment ideology which household space carries in those treatises. It insists on subjection, obedience and sacrifice without making too forceful a use of gender difference to convey its doctrine.

V. Conclusion

Space, more particularly household space, is an important element in the configuration of the self in late medieval writings. It is also undeniable that the deployment of spatial imagery as a means of containment in writings initially addressed to female recipients is overwhelming. In *Ancrene Wisse*, the ambitious project of delineating both a physical and spiritual horizon makes heavy demands on the way with which household space has to be dealt. Although we have seen that the politics of enclosure and containment looms large in the authorial project, its practical application is rather revealing of permeability and exchange. On the other hand, *Ancrene Wisse*'s use of household and domestic imagery for the figuration of the inner state stresses containment ideology. A more systematic development of this politics is to be found in *Sawles Warde*, one of the Katherine Group texts associated with *Ancrene Wisse*. Household space is used for the development of ideas of subjection and obedience applied to the soul:

> Now Will the housewife, who was ever so wilful before, is all quiet, directed entirely by the guidance of Wit, who is the husband. And the whole household is quiet, which used to be wayward and obey Will their lady, not Wit. (*Anchoritic Spirituality* 221)

Ancrene Wisse being a multifunctional text, serving as an anchoritic rule of conduct, a liturgical treatise, a confessional manual, a spiritual treatise, a practical guide and an intimate epistolary text, it has to negotiate ways of applying the imagery of household space to each of its specific parts. That is one of the reasons why it cannot configure as steadily as does *The Doctrine* an interior landscape by means of the household. The devotional household becomes a central paradigm in *The Doctrine*, one whose space is more extensively explored than any other figuration in this Middle English version.

The study of imagined and represented household space that this essay attempts relies on the role of space as an active element shaping social practice (Beattie and Malaskovic, in Beattie 7). It infers therefore that imagined and represented household space hinges on an understanding that space has social significance, that it changes with time and that it is gendered. But what are the relationships between imagined household space and concrete architecture, and the ways in which the

real gendered household affects the representation of the devotional one? Although this essay does not offer clear answers, it nevertheless suggests, by its close application of space as an historical category to two religious texts, new lines of enquiry in the study of late medieval religious literature (Beattie and Maslakovic, in Beattie 1-8).

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[3] Several scholars working in the field of medieval religious literature have kindly let me have access to their conference papers, work in progress or forthcoming publications. Among those working on *Ancrene Wisse*, I would like to mention especially Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne. Bella Millett kindly let me have her forthcoming piece, "The *Ancrene Wisse* Group", which has given a more solid foundation to my own investigation. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne let me have a written copy of her talk, "Unenclosing *Ancrene Wisse*," given at the "Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs" Conference held at Gregynog Hall, Newton, 5-7 July 2002.

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