CODEX ASHMOLE 61

A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse

Edited by
George Shuffelton



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Middle English Texts Series

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Dr. Bruce Barker-Benfield granted permission to publish an edition of Ashmole 61, and the staff of Duke Humfrey's Library patiently answered questions and lugged the awkward manuscript out of storage far more often than they would have liked.

This edition could not have been made without the work of Lynne Blanchfield. Her dissertation and published articles remain an essential guide to Ashmole 61, and I have been lucky to follow in her tracks. Dr. Blanchfield offered enthusiastic support of the edition and made valuable comments on the general introduction. In the edition's early stages, Myra Seaman's own interest in Ashmole 61 helped confirm the idea that an edition might be useful and she graciously allowed me to read unpublished work on the manuscript.

Friends far and near agreed to read selected pieces of the edition. I would like to thank Lianna Farber, Robert Lewis, Bobby Meyer-Lee, Susie Phillips, and Emily Steiner for help of this kind. Bob Lewis was also very generous in lending me his collation notes and unpublished materials on the little-known *Stimulus Consciencie Minor*. Jessica Brantley, Traugott Lawler, and Jackson Bryce gave timely help to the work on several texts. Former Carleton student Katie Newell-Thompson made a useful study of *Saint Margaret*, and Rachel Carroll assisted with the completion of the glossary.

For enduring my preoccupation with this edition and for her willingness to hear my occasional complaints about its difficulties, I am particularly grateful to my wife, Michelle Martin.

INTRODUCTION

PREFACE

Since its rediscovery by nineteenth-century scholarship, Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 61 has never been ignored, though it has also not gained a great deal of notoriety beyond the scholars of Middle English romance.[1] Several accounts have made passing notice of the eccentricities of the scribe, who signs his name "Rate" after nineteen of the manuscript's forty-one items and who draws curious sketches of fish, flowers, and other designs on many of the volume's leaves. But the manuscript has also been singled out as an example of the reading material popular with middle-class English families in the later Middle Ages, and it is for this reason that the present edition has been made.[2]

Though all of the manuscript's contents have been printed at least once, these texts have been scattered in hard-to-find nineteenth-century collections or in the collation notes of modern editions. It is hoped that the present volume will encourage study of the entire manuscript as a valuable witness to the devotional habits, cultural values, and popular tastes of late medieval England.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION, DATE, AND PROVENANCE

Ashmole 61 is a long, narrow paper book made up of 162 folia, two end leaves of seventeenth-century paper, and three modern end leaves.[3] The manuscript measures approximately 418mm by 140mm, and was last bound in 1986 in off-white leather. The earlier, seventeenth-century binding (including boards and clasps), in a style common to other items in the collection of Elias Ashmole, has been kept separately since the 1986 rebinding. The tall, narrow format of Ashmole 61 has occasionally lead it to be classified among "holster books," the narrow books supposedly carried in saddle bags by itinerants, especially minstrels.[4] But the theory that minstrels owned these volumes has been convincingly debunked by Andrew Taylor,

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[1] The manuscript has received more attention in recent years, largely through the efforts of Lynne Blanchfield, who has examined Ashmole 61 extensively in her dissertation and two published essays. The present editor is profoundly indebted to her work.

[2] See, for example, Parkes, "Literacy of the Laity," p. 569.

[3] Several previous studies have described the physical makeup of the manuscript and its contents. Among the most useful of these accounts are Lynne Blanchfield's "Rate Revisited" and Gisela Guddat-Figge's entry in her *Catalogue of Manuscripts*, pp. 249–52.

[4] Guddat-Figge discusses the history of this claim in her *Catalogue of Manuscripts*, pp. 30–35.

and there are other, more convincing explanations for the format of Ashmole 61.[5] Some of the surviving medieval ledgers used by merchants or guilds for entering accounts resemble Ashmole 61, and if (as the evidence suggests) the scribe was an amateur used to keeping such accounts rather than copying literature, this resemblance is not a coincidence.[6]

There are two sequences of foliation. One, in a modern hand of the last two centuries, appears in the top right corner of each folio. Though this modern foliation numbers 161 leaves, it counts two folia as fol. 30, an error noticed during the 1986 collation, when these two leaves were renumbered fol. 30a and fol. 30b. Since many earlier descriptions of the manuscript rely on the mistaken foliation, these folio numbers have been used for this edition. An earlier sequence of foliation skips the first eight folia and counts 160 leaves, making a leap from 150 to 160, instead of 150 to 151, at our fol. 159.[7] This foliation appears in the top center of each folio, and the hand may be that of the scribe or another early user.

At the time of the manuscript's rebinding, an attempt was made by Bruce Barker-Benfield to reconstruct the original quiring of the manuscript; the physical evidence of the quires has been obscured by resewing in the seventeenth century and by pasting by nineteenth- or twentieth-century conservators.[8] Barker-Benfield's hypothetical collation is as follows: I^{8} II^{10} III^{12} IV^{16} V^{12} VI^{10} (missing leaves 9 and 10, with a loss of text between fols. 65–66) VII^{12} $VIII^{14}$ IX^{13} (leaf 8 canceled, with no loss of text) X^{16} XI^{16} XII^{14} $XIII^{16}$ (missing leaves 12–16, with a loss of text after fol. 161).

The scribe has written catchwords at the end of each quire except for quires XII and XIII. Since one text runs across the break between quires XII and XIII, this suggests that the present arrangement of the manuscript's contents conforms to the original arrangement, and that the manuscript was not compiled as a set of discrete "booklets." Indeed, texts run across the other eleven of the twelve quire boundaries; only the first quire stands apart as a unit. Even this quire, since its contents are included in the scribe's table of contents (see below, Contents and Arrangement), must have been in its present position soon after the manuscript's completion. All of this evidence suggests that the scribe did not attempt to fit texts neatly into quires but rather added new quires as his copying demanded.

Quires I, II, and IX use paper without watermarks. Three kinds of watermarked paper are used for quires III–V, VI–VIII, and X–XIII, roughly corresponding to Briquet's numbers 694, 11159, and 10116 respectively, though only the last is a very close match.[9] The dates of these watermarks would suggest that the manuscript was copied after 1479, and the last quire dates from some point after 1488.[10] Since the scribe's hand seems unlikely to date from any later than the first decade of the sixteenth century (see below, Scribe), this suggests

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[5] A. Taylor, "Myth of the Minstrel Manuscript."

[6] Blanchfield briefly discusses the resemblance to account books and notes a similarly shaped volume containing accounts of the church of St. Mary de Castro in Leicester ("Idiosyncratic Scribe," p. 18). See also Collins, *Glimpse into the Past*, pp. 27–29.

[7] For a possible explanation of the fact that the early foliation skips the first quire, see p. 7, n. 30 below.

[8] Barker-Benfield's collation notes, as well as beta-radiographs of the watermarks and other discussions of the manuscript's physical makeup, have been preserved in the Bodleian in a file labeled REFS LXXIV.27.

[9] Briquet, *Les Filigranes*.

[10] See Halmann, "Watermarks of Four Late Medieval Manuscripts."

that the manuscript dates from either the last decade of the fifteenth century or the first decade of the sixteenth; no date more precise than "c. 1500" can be assigned with any confidence.

The original ownership of the manuscript is uncertain (see below, Scribe). The few sixteenth-century pen trials and marginal notes leave little evidence of post-medieval ownership, though a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century note on the top margin of fol. 161v, "It*em* to me from M. Austin of Hook norte[?] on Thursday 2 couple of Rabbitts the Thursday following 2 couple more Thursday the 15 of August 2 couple more" may place the manuscript near the Oxfordshire town of Hook Norton at some later date. A note in another sixteenth-century hand on the top margin of fol. 106v, "Delivered d dame Elizabeth [*sic*]," may record the name of a later reader or owner, but this name offers little help in establishing provenance.[11] Though the paper has become somewhat brittle with age, there are few other signs of wear and little to suggest that the volume was much read by its later owners. It is not known when the manuscript came into the collection of Elias Ashmole, the seventeenth-century collector of curiosities and books.[12] The manuscript was mistakenly catalogued with the same summary catalogue number as Ashmole 60, and overlooked until noticed by Samuel Brydges in 1814.[13]

SCRIBE

The scribe, who signs his (or possibly her) name after nineteen texts as "Rate," cannot be confidently identified, but a series of clues allows some educated guesses.[14] Early attempts to identify the scribe with the Scots author David Rate, the supposed author of the didactic work *Ratis Raving*, were subsequently and decisively disproved.[15] Other attempts to identify the scribe on the basis of the frequent drawings of fish and flowers have also failed. Though it is tempting to interpret these drawings as a rebus signature hinting at the scribe's family or birthplace, none of the possible interpretations (e.g., "Fishrose") has proven satisfactory.

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[11] This same hand makes another note on fol. 98v, "I reade that wee late off thy god father." This is an imperfect copy of line 1113 of *The Northern Passion* (item 28), the first line of text on this leaf. The last four words of the marginal note differ from the text, and may (or may not) indicate that this later reader struggled to interpret Rate's handwriting. Other marginalia, which may well be in either Rate's or a very early owner's hand, include boxed crosses used as *nota* marks on fols. 63r, 65r, 79r, 124v, and 125r. Pen trials in later hands, nearly always faint or illegible, appear on fols. 65v, 79v, 105r–106r, and 150v–151r.

[12] For an introduction to Ashmole's collecting and antiquarian interests, see the entry by Michael Hunter in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 2, pp.661–65.

[13] Brydges and Haslewood, *British Bibliographer*, vol. 4, pp. 17–18. For the history of the cataloguing and rediscovery of Ashmole 61, see Blanchfield, "Rate Revisited," pp. 209–10.

[14] The scribe uses the spelling "Rathe" on one occasion; see item 30. F. J. Furnivall, who printed texts of items 3, 4, 7, and 8, mistook the initial capital and transcribed the name as "Kate." However, from the evidence of the scribe's capitals throughout the manuscript the letter is clearly an "R."

[15] The suggestion was first made by John T. T. Brown, "Poems of David Rate." Girvan, in his edition of *Ratis Raving*, demonstrated the impossibility of this connection, based in part on the dialect of Ashmole 61 (pp. xxxiii–xxxvii).

The first genuine clue to the identity of "Rate" is his dialect, located by the *Linguistic Atlas of Later Middle English* in northeast Leicestershire.[16] His dialect features a preponderance of northeast Midlands forms. For example, the third person plural pronoun is *thei* or occasionally *they*; present tense verbs in the third person singular and plural end in *–ys*; Old English *I* has been lengthened in open syllables to long *e* in words such as *evyll, mekyll*, *sekyr*; "though," "but," and "church" are usually spelled *thoff*, *bot*, and *chyrch*; participles usually end in *–yng*, but Rate often leaves *–and* endings from northern exemplars "untranslated." When he encounters them, Rate also lets other northern forms stand unchanged, but usually substitutes midland/southern words for less familiar northern vocabulary. All this supports the location of the scribal dialect in northeast Leicestershire, a border region between the dialects of the northeast Midlands and the North, where some of Rate's copy-texts seem likely to have originated.

The last name Rate (or its variants, Rathe, Ratte, Rotte, Rot, etc.) is not common in Leicestershire or elsewhere in late medieval England, but Blanchfield found several records of two William Rattes in the records of the city of Leicester.[17] A William Ratt left a will dated 1522 that is now preserved in the Leicester Record Office's Register Book of Wills for 1512–26 (fols. 152 and 157v).[18] In the 1509–10 list of the free citizens of Leicester, it is presumably the same man entered as William Ratt, son of William.[19] A William Rotte rented a building from Leicester's powerful Corpus Christi Guild in 1494–95, perhaps the same William Rot registered in the guild of ironmongers in 1480.[20] It remains impossible to say which of these William Rat(t)es were the same man, or whether one of them was the scribe of Ashmole 61.[21] But the conjecture that the scribe was a middle-class tradesman in Leicester would certainly explain many of the features of Ashmole 61 (see below, Use and Historical Context).[22]

The best explanation to date of the fish and flower drawings adds further evidence connecting the scribe Rate to the city of Leicester. In her dissertation, Blanchfield suggests

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[16] See the linguistic profile (#71) in vol. 3 of *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*, pp. 233–34.

[17] Blanchfield, "Idiosyncratic Scribe," pp. 159–60.

[18] The will is indexed in *Calendars of Wills and Administrations Relating to the County of Leicester*, p.10.

[19] *Register of Freemen of Leicester*, p. 61.

[20] *Records of the Borough of Leicester*, vol. 2, pp. 349 and 464.

[21] In the course of preparing this edition, a William Race was found in the ordination lists of Bishop Russell of Lincoln (a very large diocese that included Leicestershire). In a 1491 ordination in Leicester, a William Race of "Estthorpe" was listed among those of "primam tonsuram" and the unbeneficed acolytes. These are the clerics in minor orders, not yet ordained as priests; William Race never appears again in subsequent ordination lists, and presumably never advanced to the priesthood. Though there are many examples of the family name "Ros" in this area, the occasional confusion of "t" and "c" in medieval scripts makes this man another possible candidate. Easthorpe was a hamlet adjoining Bottesford in northeast Leicestershire, precisely where the dialect of the scribe originates.

[22] Other possible candidates among the late medieval Rat(t)es and Rottes of the northeast Midlands include a John Rote of Croyland, Lincolnshire (*Calendars of Lincoln Wills*, p. 12), and an Elizabeth Rote of Norton, on the western edge of Leicestershire (*Calendars of Wills and Administrations Relating to the County of Leicester*, pp. 41 and 46). Neither candidate matches the dialect or the date of the manuscript as well as the various William Rat(t)es.

that the drawings bear some connection to the badge of Leicester's Corpus Christi Guild.[23] One surviving depiction of this badge features a chalice with a six-petaled flower on its stem and a fish used as a flourish over the letter *I*. The connection remains highly conjectural, but given the other information connecting Rate to the Corpus Christi Guild of Leicester, Blanchfield's explanation of the fish and flowers remains the most persuasive. The fish do not appear to be heraldic symbols of any known English family, and the flowers do not seem to have any direct connection to Tudor roses. It remains entirely possible, of course, that Rate has simply drawn these fish and flowers without intending to evoke any symbolism whatsoever.[24] The fish resemble pike (or possibly salmon), and are often drawn with a toothy grin; on a few occasions Rate has combined the motifs and has drawn a fish with a stem of flowers in its teeth. The flowers are generally five- or six-petaled, and are too vaguely drawn to be identified as either roses, daisies, cinquefoils, or any other specific type.

In addition to his fish and flowers, Rate has added a circumscribed hexafoil design on fol. 17v (at the end of item 6), and a heraldic shield with a cross and five suns representing the five wounds of Christ at the end of item 29 on fol. 106r. But his idiosyncrasies are not limited to his doodles. His hand is an unusually conservative Anglicana, with no Secretary forms other than the single-chambered *a*; the hand most closely resembles hands from the middle of the fifteenth century, i.e., fifty years before Ashmole 61 was copied. Rate's peculiar habits, as well as his relaxed attitude towards error and his tendency to carelessness, suggest that he was not a professional scribe but rather a reasonably proficient amateur copying for his own use.

Previous editors of Ashmole 61's texts have noticed, if not fully understood, Rate's eccentric scribal habits and patterns of revision, and they have usually dismissed readings from Ashmole 61 as unreliable. Ashmole 61 preserves an unusual amount of textual variants and unique versions of other texts. Rather than attempting to explain these variants by assuming that Rate had access to a remarkable number of unique copy-texts, it is much easier to assume that Rate habitually revised the texts he copied. Though it is often difficult to guess at the reasons for Rate's revisions, he frequently replaces hard or unfamiliar words, and often expands or abridges his material to suit his own ends.[25] He regularly changes the beginnings and endings of his texts, and omits material that appears elsewhere in the manuscript. When his copy-texts preserve northern dialect forms, sometimes he keeps them, but other times he alters them as he goes along, with varying effects on the rhyme and sense of the revised lines. He also revises to correct for his own mistakes; for example, rather than going back to correct a missed rhyme word, Rate often rewrites the following line or lines to cover up the defective reading. This kind of "rolling revision" occasionally results in strained syntax or even

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[23] Blanchfield, "Idiosyncratic Scribe," pp. 151–57.

[24] It is worth comparing Rate's fish to the fish sometimes drawn by other scribes to enclose catchwords; see, for example, fols. 11v, 23v, 35v, etc. in Oxford, Merton College MS 66, a fourteenth-century copy of Duns Scotus's commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. Blanchfield suggests that Rate's fish and flowers may represent breaks in the copying, since many of them appear in the lower margins of leaves and others appear in between texts.

[25] *Ypotis* and *The Northern Passion* (items 27 and 28) best demonstrate Rate's habits of abridgment; in these texts he omits many couplets and some entire sections, presumably because he felt they went beyond his purposes or (as in the case of the Resurrection scene of *The Northern Passion*) because he duplicated this material elsewhere in the manuscript. In copying *Maidstone's Seven Penitential Psalms* (item 32), Rate truncates all of the stanzas of Psalm 129. Rate's additions range from single lines (often ignoring meter and rhyme scheme) to entire stanzas.

nonsense, but Rate seems to have had a ready supply of stock phrases to help him rewrite lines as he went along.

In a few texts, Rate works around larger errors (or possibly defects in his copy-text), including the transposition of lengthy passages. At other points, he anticipates a later moment in the text or alters his approach to a difficult passage in the midst of copying it.[26] Though this edition does not attempt to chart or explain all of Rate's scribal patterns, important variants are discussed in the Text section of the introduction to each item in the explanatory notes.

Though professional scribes in fifteenth-century London and other urban centers produced the bulk of surviving Middle English manuscripts, amateur productions like Rate's are by no means uncommon in this period.[27] Robert Thornton, a Yorkshire landowner, wrote out two collections of Middle English texts for his own use, and the "Findern" manuscript seems to have been copied piecemeal by an entire family.[28] Members of the urban merchant classes also began compiling their own collections in this period, and Rate's collection shares some resemblance to the work of the Londoners John Colyns and Richard Hill in the early decades of the sixteenth century.[29] Exactly why these amateurs chose to spend the time compiling their own collections rather than purchasing booklets copied by professionals is not known, but producing their own manuscripts allowed for complete control over the finished volumes.

CONTENTS AND ARRANGEMENT

Following the descriptions of the manuscript made by Guddat-Figge and Blanchfield, this edition numbers the contents 1–41. But the number is misleading. Item 11 is in fact two distinct texts; item 14 is merely a repetition of the first few stanzas of item 6, with only minor variants; items 35a and 35b are two distinct texts that have been fused together by Rate, much to the confusion of some previous editors.

There is every reason to believe that the manuscript followed the present arrangement of the contents from a very early date. The early foliation skips the first quire (containing items 1–4), and this quire may have been added last. But the mutilated leaf at the front of the manuscript features a table of contents drawn up in Rate's hand, and this includes the items in the first quire, so they must have been placed in that position shortly after the

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[26] For a likely example of mistaken anticipation, see *The Feasts of All Saints and All Souls* (item 25), line 233; for a clear example of an "on-the-fly" revision, see *Sir Orfeo* (item 40), line 551.

[27] Only one piece of evidence argues against the view of Rate as an amateur scribe copying for his own use: the colophon to the *Stimulus Consciencie Minor* (item 33) asks that the scribe be paid for his work. It seems easier, however, to consider this a borrowing from an exemplar or a recollection of a familiar scribal jingle than to throw out all the other evidence that suggests that Ashmole 61 is a homemade production.

[28] For Robert Thornton and his manuscripts, see J. Thompson, *Robert Thornton*. See also *The Thornton Manuscript (Lincoln Cathedral MS 91)*. For the Findern manuscript, see Harris, "Origins and Make-Up." See also Hanna, "Production of Cambridge University Library MS Ff.i.6."

[29] For the makeup and context of these London miscellanies, see Parker, *Commonplace Book in Tudor London*. See also Meale, "Compiler at Work."

manuscript's completion.[30] As stated above (Physical Description, Date, and Provenance), the contents appear to have been copied sequentially, with the possible exception of items 9–11, which may have been added later to fill in a leaf.

How Rate acquired his copy-texts is uncertain, but he clearly drew on regional networks of circulation. Many of the manuscripts that resemble Ashmole 61 most closely were produced in the northern midland counties and Yorkshire.[31] It shares six texts with Cambridge, University Library MS Ff.2.38, a miscellany copied by another Leicestershire scribe around the time Rate was at work on Ashmole 61.[32] Besides the texts it shares with Ashmole 61, CUL MS Ff.2.38 also contains other tail-rhyme romances, a version of the seven penitential psalms, several *exempla*, and John Mirk's *Life of St. Margaret*. The "Pilkyngton" manuscript, Cambridge, University Library MS Ff.5.48, was probably compiled in Lancashire and also shares six items with Ashmole 61.[33] Similarly, the "Heege" manuscript, National Library of Scotland MS Advocates, 19.3.1, dates from this same period, was copied in either Nottinghamshire or Derbyshire, and shares two texts and many analogues with Ashmole 61.[34]

Several texts in Ashmole 61, such as the *Stimulus Consciencie Minor* (item 33), appear to have circulated only within this region: all the surviving manuscripts of that text derive from Yorkshire or the Midlands. *Sir Isumbras* (item 5) was likely first composed in the east or northeast Midlands in the first half of the fourteenth century; Rate's copy is a witness to the regional popularity of this text over a century and a half later. Just how these kinds of regional networks operated remains a subject of study, but it seems likely that Rate drew from the texts available locally, and did not have to resort to extraordinary means to obtain his material.[35] Some of the unique texts, such as *The Debate of the Carpenter's Tools* (item 16),

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[30] Blanchfield offers a logical explanation for the unfoliated first quire and the torn leaf containing the abandoned opening of *Saint Eustace* (item 1) and the table of contents: "After copying *Edward* (41), Rate began to re-copy *Eustace*, realized half-way down that he already had this text, cut the bifolium in half, wrote out the contents of the finished volume on the bottom of the spoiled copy, and placed it at the beginning with the first quire. Subsequently, this leaf and the first quire became displaced, and were only discovered when the manuscript was eventually foliated. They were then returned to the beginning of the manuscript, their proper place as indicated by the contents list and by the catchword which was added before the foliation" ("Idiosyncratic Scribe," p. 24).

[31] Though he does not discuss Ashmole 61, Thorlac Turville-Petre examines other manuscripts in this region in "Some Medieval English Manuscripts in the North-East Midlands."

[32] See the introduction by McSparran and Robinson to their facsimile edition; the six texts it shares with Ashmole 61 are *How the Wise Man Taught His Son*, *The Erle of Tolous*, *The Lament of Mary*, *Stimulus Consciencie Minor*, *The Adulterous Falmouth Squire*, and *The Wounds and the Sins* (items 3, 19, 30, 33, 35b, and 38).

[33] The six texts are *A Prayer to Mary*, *The Incestuous Daughter*, *The Northern Passion*, *The Lament of Mary*, *The Sinner's Lament*, and *The Wounds and the Sins* (items 15, 23, 28, 30, 35a, and 38).

[34] See the useful introduction by Phillipa Hardman to her recent facsimile of this manuscript, *The Heege Manuscript*. The shared texts are *Sir Isumbras* and *The Sinner's Lament* (items 5 and 35a). MS Advocates 19.3.1 also contains *The Little Children's Book* (a possible source of *Dame Courtesy*, item 8), the usual version of *Stans Puer ad Mensam*, a prayer for the Mass (not unlike item 17, *A Prayer at the Levation*), other romances, gospel paraphrases, and visions of the afterlife. For further discussion of this MS, see Shaner, "Instruction and Delight."

[35] For an introduction to the topic, see the essays collected by Felicity Riddy in *Regionalism in Late Medieval Manuscripts and Texts*.

may have been local productions, the work of Rate himself or of another Leicester figure. Though printers were making editions of many of Ashmole 61's texts around the time the manuscript was compiled, none of its texts appears to have been copied from a printed text.

No definitive scheme of organization governs the arrangement of Ashmole 61's texts; instead, the manuscript seems to be arranged in small groups of related texts. The particular relationships between each text and its immediate neighbors are discussed under Manuscript Context in each item's introduction in the explanatory notes, but a few general patterns can be observed here. Rate has joined together some texts on the basis of shared subject matter or similarities of genre. *How the Wise Man Taught His Son* (item 3) is followed by *How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter* (item 4), two independent texts that share a very similar subject. *The Short Charter of Christ* (item 29) and *The Lament of Mary* (item 30) quite naturally follow immediately after *The Northern Passion* (item 28). However, some logical sequences are broken up by items that do not appear to be directly related: *The Debate of the Carpenter's Tools* (item 16) interrupts a series of prayers, and *The Dietary* (item 31) appears amidst pious works, whereas we might expect it to appear in the conduct material among the manuscript's first eight items. Rate may simply have copied items as they became available to him — an unpredictable process governed by the relative scarcity of copy-texts — or he may have only sporadically planned the volume as a whole.

Though the texts range across a variety of verse forms, Rate does not significantly tailor his layout to fit any particular item. All appear in a single column. He often draws rhyme brackets, but not always with careful attention to the lines he has copied. The lines per page vary from as few as forty-four to as many as sixty, and Rate does not always rule his lines. He usually separates his items with either the colophon "Amen quod Rate" or drawings of fish or flowers, and uses small titles on several occasions. In general, the manuscript is quite plain: even the fish do not seem to be intended as decoration, and the only color added to the ornamentation is a dull yellow wash applied to some capital initials and drawings, probably Rate's usual dark brown ink diluted with water.

GENRES

Romance

Among the narrative texts of Ashmole 61, the romances are the best known and the most studied. Four of these, *Sir Isumbras, The Erle of Tolous, Lybeaus Desconus,* and *Sir Cleges* (items 5, 19, 20, and 24), are written in tail-rhyme stanzas, one of the most popular verse forms for Middle English romances, particularly those originating in the Midlands.[36] Tail-rhyme stanzas in these romances follow an *aabccbddbeeb* rhyme-scheme, with four-stress lines in the *a, c, d,* and *e* lines and three-stress lines in *b* lines, a form that likely aided recitation but that also produces a jog-trot rhythm memorably lampooned in Chaucer's Tale of Sir Thopas.

Tail-rhyme romances take up a considerable variety of subject matter and themes, a range well-represented by those in Ashmole 61. *Sir Isumbras* borrows much of its narrative form from saints' lives (especially *Saint Eustace* [item 1]), and Isumbras's heroism involves as much penitential suffering as martial prowess. The romance celebrates the Christian family

[36] For a survey of tail-rhyme romances and a discussion of their Midlands origins, see Trounce, "English Tail-Rhyme Romances." See also Tajiri, *Studies in the Middle English Didactic Tail-Rhyme Romances,* pp. 3–26.

— converted, baptized, and finally triumphant over persecuting nonbelievers — and piety trumps chivalry as the text's central value. *Sir Cleges* shares much of this piety, but it involves little in the way of combat and the violence it does portray is comic rather than chivalric. *The Erle of Tolous* and *Lybeaus Desconus* conform more closely to what modern readers expect of romance, offering heroes who triumphantly rise from positions of outlawry or exclusion to honor and happy marriage. But the two are very different in other respects. *The Erle of Tolous* switches between perspectives as it depicts court intrigue, deception, and disguise; all the events demonstrate the essential virtue of *trewth* (loyalty and the upholding of promises). *Lybeaus Desconus* closely follows its titular hero, and is nearly picaresque in its episodic form and its celebration of raw bravado above all else. In short, the tail-rhyme romances of Ashmole 61 encompass much of the variety of the romance genre as a whole, with a homely style and unpretentious vigor that made them popular reading matter for a very wide range of English audiences.

Only one of Ashmole 61's romances is written in a form other than tail-rhyme: *Sir Orfeo* (item 39) probably dates from the same decades in which *Sir Isumbras*, *The Erle of Tolous*, and *Lybeaus Desconus* were written, but it is written in four-stress couplets. *Sir Orfeo* is exceptional in nearly every other sense as well. Its treatment of a classical subject, its interest in the Celtic fairy world, and its refinement distinguish it from most Middle English romances.

Saints' Lives and Legends

Another group of Ashmole 61's narratives treats exclusively religious subjects but often employs narrative techniques and language borrowed from (or shared with) chivalric romance. These are the saints' lives and gospel legends, including *Saint Eustace*, *Saint Margaret*, *The Northern Passion*, and *The Legend of the Resurrection* (items 1, 37, 28, and 36). *Saint Eustace*, like its close partner *Sir Isumbras*, is even written in tail-rhyme, further emphasizing its kinship with romance. *The Northern Passion* and *The Legend of the Resurrection* shape gospel accounts and apocryphal legends into stirring narratives that portray the life of Christ as a daring adventure. Both derive primarily from French originals. *The Feasts of All Saints and All Souls* (item 25) might be grouped with these other texts, as it fuses legendary material with an adventurous journey to heaven and hell. *The King and His Four Daughters* (item 26) fits less comfortably in this category, since it is an allegorical debate (and not, strictly speaking, a narrative), but since it treats the heroism of Christ's incarnation and crucifixion as a matter of feudal justice (and has a French source), it might best be considered alongside these other pious legends.

Exempla and Comic Tales

A third group of narratives derives from medieval preaching's use of short moral tales to reach an audience: *The Knight Who Forgave His Father's Slayer*, *The Jealous Wife*, *The Incestuous Daughter*, and *The Adulterous Falmouth Squire* (items 18, 22, 23, and 35b).[37] These *exempla* feature simple, quickly-drawn characters whose behavior (good or bad) earns its just reward. Despite the severity of their narrative logic, these stories often reveal a tender sense of human

[37] For bibliography and a brief discussion of *exempla*, see the introduction to *The Knight Who Forgave His Father's Slayer* (item 18).

frailty and kindness, as in the weeping, penitent heroine of *The Incestuous Daughter* or the gentle, devout husband in *The Jealous Wife*. Nor is the theology of these *exempla* crude or unforgiving: *The Incestuous Daughter* demonstrates that the scope of divine mercy is beyond the grasp of the Church's own rites of confession and penance. All derive from Latin sources and have numerous analogues among the many surviving *exempla* in Middle English and other vernaculars.

The final group of narratives have little in common with each other except their humor. The rhyme scheme of *Sir Corneus* (item 21) is a form of tail-rhyme and it shares an Arthurian setting with many Middle English romances, but it lacks any other resemblance to romance. The source of its comedy, Guinevere's adultery and women's lechery more generally, invites comparisons between this text and moral *exempla* on the same subject, but the difference in genre is all-important. *King Edward and the Hermit* (item 41) is also written in tail-rhyme, and opens much like other romances, with a hunt followed by a chance encounter between a knight and a stranger in the depths of the forest. It relies on well-worn comic material — the disguised king and the bumptious commoner — but applies a surprisingly light touch. *The Debate of the Carpenter's Tools* (item 16) is not a narrative at all and shares only its comic spirit with these other texts. It is something of an oddity within Ashmole 61 and in the body of surviving Middle English poetry. It bears signs of being an occasional poem (i.e., written for performance to a particular audience), but the uncertainty of its original context makes its generic status more difficult to determine.

Didactic Texts

The non-narrative works in Ashmole 61 appear in a variety of verse forms and derive from a mixed set of sources. One closely-related group of didactic texts includes *How the Wise Man Taught His Son*, *How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter*, *Stans Puer ad Mensam*, *Dame Courtesy*, and *The Dietary* (items 3, 4, 7, 8, and 31). All of these address the rules of polite behavior, religious duty, and hygiene, and most are addressed (often explicitly) towards children or young adults. These texts freely mix moral commands with practical concerns; two other texts take up only one of these strands. *The Ten Commandments* (item 6) serves as the religious bedrock upon which all these other moral strictures rest, while *The Rules for Purchasing Land* (item 10) concerns only the practical side of life. *Ypotis* (item 27) sits less obviously with this group, since its form (dialogue) and source material (a hodgepodge of biblical facts and ancient lore) make it unlike the homely advice of the conduct manuals. But despite its origins in erudite monastic riddle-books and ancient philosophy, *Ypotis* looks like a catechism, a review of information educated laymen felt obliged to know.

Prayers, Meditations, and Lyrics

The diversity of religious works in Ashmole 61 is not uncommon in late medieval English miscellanies; audiences in this period could choose from an enormous range of religious literature in their native tongue. Even the liturgy and the Bible, traditional areas of Latin's dominance, were partially accessible through Middle English texts. Private prayer had long been given over to the vernacular, and Ashmole 61's prayers — *An Evening Prayer* and *A Morning Prayer*, *A Prayer to Mary*, and *A Prayer at the Levation* (items 12, 13, 15, and 17) — could be memorized for daily use and serve as functional elements of unpretentious lay devotion. All of the manuscript's meditative works seem calibrated for a lay audience, or at least an

audience outside the religious orders. The *Stimulus Consciencie Minor* (item 33) offers a kind of beginner course in meditative piety, describing simple images and ideas for the devout to contemplate, without introducing theological cruxes or wildly original rhetoric. *Maidstone's Seven Penitential Psalms* (item 32) makes greater demands on its audience. The shifts of speaking voices (the penitent sinner, Christ on the cross, etc.) and richly figurative language might pose genuine difficulties for many audiences, but Maidstone's interpretive paraphrase aims to make these less problematic. The familiarity of the psalms, read during church services throughout the year, must have also provided some context for a late medieval lay audience. *The Stations of Jerusalem* (item 34), though it might belong among the pragmatic works of instruction (as a guidebook), seems more likely meant to encourage meditation on the Passion and the deeds of the Apostles. Its exact function remains something of a mystery.

For lack of a better term, a final group of non-narrative works can be considered together as lyrics — short poems in a variety of stanzaic forms. *The Short Charter of Christ, The Lament of Mary, The Sinner's Lament, The Wounds and the Sins*, and *Vanity* (items 29, 30, 35a, 38, and 40) all belong squarely within the mainstream of Middle English religious lyric, assuming other voices (Christ, Mary, a dead sinner, etc.) to encourage mankind's contemplation of its debt to God and the inevitability of death. *Right as a Ram's Horn* (item 2) follows an equally well established secular tradition of complaint. Although it is the one poem in Ashmole 61 to address (explicitly) contemporary social conditions and politics, it was probably six decades old at the time Rate copied it, and its critique of disorder is timeless.

THEMES

Family Life

With forty-two texts in a variety of genres, Ashmole 61's contents naturally cover a very wide range of interests; nevertheless, a few generalizations can be made about the particular interests suggested by Rate's compilation. Since Rosemary Ginn's unpublished edition of *Sir Cleges*, scholars have noted that a strong interest in domestic life, both its duties and its joys, runs throughout the manuscript.[38] Other English miscellanies from this period contain more practical material for the maintenance of a household — recipes, home remedies, household accounts, etc. But the contents of Ashmole 61 seem perfectly suited for the spiritual nourishment and entertainment of a household. Works like *How the Wise Man Taught His Son* (item 3) and *How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter* (item 4) emphasize duty to God and patience with one's spouse — the latter counseled to both future husbands and future wives. The adaptation of Lydgate's *Stans Puer ad Mensam* declares that "To tech chylder curtasy is myn entente" (line 9), and *Dame Courtesy* announces that "This boke is made for chylder yong" (line 147). Most of the *exempla*, including *The Knight Who Forgave His Father's Slayer, The Jealous Wife, The Incestuous Daughter,* and *The Adulterous Falmouth Squire* (items 18, 22, 23, and 35b), hinge upon family relationships, whether between husband and wife, father and son, or father and daughter. The Marian lament that follows *The Short Charter of Christ* (item 29) is directed at mothers, an unusually specific audience for a Passion lyric. *The Debate of the Carpenter's Tools* and *Sir Corneus* (items 16 and 21) rely on two familiar sources of medieval humor: drunken husbands and lecherous wives. There are, by this editor's count, seven reunited families in seven different texts in Ashmole 61.

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[38] Ginn, "Critical Edition of the Two Texts of *Sir Cleges*," pp. 82–85.

Ashmole 61's portrayal of family life is hardly unified or simplistic, in part because it emerges out of many different texts in different genres. The depictions of family bliss, especially those in *Saint Eustace, Sir Isumbras,* and *The Jealous Wife* (items 1, 5, and 22) center on the nuclear unit of husband, wife, and children. In *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Cleges* (items 39 and 24), the bond between husband and wife suggests a love nearly equivalent to the divine love between God and humanity, and several other texts depict sacrifice for (or with) one's family as the noblest deed imaginable. Love, rather than genealogy, hierarchical obligation, or shared property, ties these idealized families together.

But in contrast to these touching scenes of family intimacy, many of Ashmole 61's texts are relatively unsentimental in their depiction of family life. *The Lament of Mary* (item 30) warns mothers not to place love of their own children above their love for the Son of Man, and *How the Wise Man Taught His Son* (item 3) and *Vanity* (item 40) contain strong reminders that the joys of domestic life are transitory. If *Sir Orfeo* (item 39) celebrates the marriage bond as worthy of the highest imaginable sacrifice, it also reveals the vulnerability of that bond. *Sir Corneus* (item 21) cynically (or comically) dismisses fidelity, while *The Adulterous Falmouth Squire* (item 35b) recognizes the seriousness of breaking wedlock. For each text that insists on familial obligations, there are those that emphasize the moral limits of such obligations (such as *The Knight Who Forgave His Father's Slayer* [item 18]). All of these qualifications make Ashmole 61's collective portrait of family life a complex one.

The Passion

In the course of his catechism in *Ypotis* (item 27), Emperor Hadrian asks Ypotis how man can protect himself from the devil. Ypotis's answer is simple: "Thynke on Chrystys Passyon. / Man, thynke onne Hys wondys smerte, / And have His Passyon in thyn herte" (lines 420–22). The answer aptly characterizes Ashmole 61's larger interest in contemplation of the Passion and wounds as a spiritual cure-all. This is not unusual; fifteenth-century devotion, both learned and popular, lay and religious, centered around the Passion and the suffering body of Christ to a degree never equaled in Western Christianity before or since. Several interrelated trends contributed to this emphasis, including the Church's insistence (hardened after years of heretical dissent) on the Eucharistic transubstantiation of the host into the body of Christ and the development of an affective piety which encouraged heartfelt contemplation of the Passion.

Rate has selected works that treat the Passion as a human drama (*The Northern Passion*, *The Legend of the Resurrection* [items 28 and 36]), as an allegory or metaphor (*The King and His Four Daughters*, *The Short Charter of Christ* [items 26 and 29]), and as a visual icon (*The Lament of Mary* [item 30]). In *The Stations of Jerusalem* (item 34), Rate has chosen a text that reimagines the Passion as a guided tour. Rate has also selected works that emphasize the Passion in ways that their equivalents in the same genres do not. Among the various translations of the seven penitential psalms that circulated in the vernacular, Maidstone's paraphrase is especially rooted in the Passion. Many poems denounced the seven deadly sins and provided remedies for them, but *The Wounds and the Sins* (item 38) is among the few that involve a comparison to the Passion.

The Passion texts of Ashmole 61 rarely achieve either the inventiveness of Richard Rolle's work or the emotional intensity manifested by famous devotees like Margery Kempe. In readings of *Maidstone's Seven Penitential Psalms* (item 32) and the *Stimulus Consciencie Minor* (item 33), contemplation of the Passion may have been primarily intended as a means of prepara-

tion for confession, typically performed during Lent. While other texts may have been used for daily meditation on the Passion, none seem likely to be part of a fully ascetic or "mixed" life of lay mysticism.[39] Instead, the texts in Ashmole 61 indicate how fully ingrained — even commonplace — some of the most striking images of the Passion had become by the end of the fifteenth century. By this point, imaginative techniques and figurative leaps that had been revolutionary in the fourteenth century had been fully incorporated into the spiritual life of a wide variety of English audiences.

The Afterlife

Whether, as Jacques Le Goff has claimed, purgatory was "invented" in the twelfth century, or whether it was a much older idea, by the late fifteenth century the terrain of purgatory, heaven, and hell had been mapped extensively.[40] Ashmole 61 reveals the complexity of the elaborate economy of punishments and rewards that connected life in this world to the fate of souls in the next. *The Feasts of All Saints and All Souls* (item 25) imagines purgatory and heaven as close reflections of earthly existence. Divine order arranges the societies of both purgatory and heaven into hierarchical estates much like those on earth, and communal ties forged by the Universal Church connect the living and the dead. By way of contrast, *The Sinner's Lament* (item 35a), *The Adulterous Falmouth Squire* (item 35b), and the *Stimulus Consciencie Minor* (item 33) describe hell as terrifyingly isolated from earth, God, and heaven. The damned may still be able to see the bliss of heaven, but this only increases their torment. This vision of hell as painful isolation reappears indirectly in *Sir Orfeo* (item 39), where the Fairy King's captives suffer a timeless living death, cut off from their former companions. For medieval audiences, consideration of the next world necessarily prompted contempt for this world, an impulse that appears in *Vanity* (item 40), the *Stimulus Consciencie Minor*, and even in *How the Wise Man Taught His Son* (item 3).

Courtesy, Property, and Religious Duty

The idea of courtesy covered a much wider range of values in the later Middle Ages than it does today; modern definitions only obscure the complex meanings of the Middle English term. The quaint associations of courtesy with the world of courtly refinement and French romance are only a little less distracting. Lines 5–10 of *Dame Courtesy* demonstrate the governing role of courtesy in the world of Ashmole 61:

Clerkys that cane the scyens seven	*know the seven sciences*
Seys that curtasy came fro heven	
When Gabryell Owre Lady grette	*greeted*
And Elyzabeth with her mette.	
All vertus be closyd in curtasy,	*encompassed*
And all vyces in vilony.	

[39] For a useful introduction to these various forms of lay devotion in England, see Hirsh, *Revelations of Margery Kempe*.

[40] For Le Goff's claim and the development of the idea of purgatory, see the introduction to *The Feasts of All Saints and All Souls* (item 25).

Imagined in these terms, courtesy incorporates not only polite behavior or social rules but an entire mode of conduct. Courteous conduct recognizes obligations and hierarchies, both human and divine, and it requires a precisely understood sense of humility. The fanciful attribution of the origin of courtesy to the encounter between Gabriel and the Virgin at the moment of the Annunciation hints at this connection between courtesy and humility, a connection made clearer in those texts, such as *An Evening Prayer* (item 12), which refer to "curtas Crist" (line 8). The phrase "curtas Crist" recognizes his voluntary submission on behalf of mankind and resembles the *buxsomnes* required of young wives in *How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter* (item 4). In *The Stations of Jerusalem* (item 34), the narrator claims that the oxen and asses in the manger "dyde curtasy" (line 667) to the infant Jesus, an example that further associates courtesy with humility and deference rather than refinement (the latter virtue being rarely embodied by barnyard animals).

As defined by the didactic material in Ashmole 61, courtesy involves an acute sense of duty. The first duty is to God, observed by attending Mass daily and performing other regular devotions. The other duties vary according to social standing and circumstance, but they involve a constant awareness of social hierarchies. Serving superiors, whether they are lords, (guild) masters, husbands, or fathers, requires diligence from morning to night, inside and outside of the house. As Rate's version of *Stans Puer ad Mensam* (item 7) indicates, even when the *soveryn* goes to fetch late-night refreshment or begins to take off his shoes, the courteous man must be close at hand, ready to serve. This does not imply that superiors need not be considerate of their social inferiors; the plot of *Sir Cleges* gleefully punishes Uther Pendragon's uncourteous officers for their nastiness to an unrecognized poor man. The texts in Ashmole 61 present generosity and humility, rather than social class, as the signs of true courtesy.

In this larger sense, Ashmole 61's courtesy literature properly includes those texts that detail the regular duties of the faithful. These include daily routines, such as the prayers for morning and night, *A Prayer at the Levation* (item 17), and the instructions for daily devotion contained in *How the Wise Man Taught His Son* (item 3) and *How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter* (item 4). The necessity of giving alms, going on pilgrimage, and regular confession reappear throughout the romances and *exempla*, further defining the duties of the fifteenth-century laity.

Ashmole 61's contents comment on other (more secular) conceptions of duty and obligation; among the most frequently discussed are the duties and risks surrounding the ownership of property, perhaps a subject closely related to the manuscript's interest in family life. *The Rules for Purchasing Land* (item 10) set out the practical difficulties, and works such as *Vanity* (item 40) lay out the moral risks inherent in worldly goods. Middle English romances often involve the loss and recovery of property, a theme present (in varying ways) in *Sir Isumbras, Sir Cleges, The Erle of Tolous, Lybeaus Desconus* (items 5, 24, 19, and 20), and the romance-influenced *Saint Eustace* (item 1). The stewardship of property and the value of labor are also central concerns of *How the Wise Man Taught His Son* (item 3) and *How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter* (item 4).

USE AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Readers will judge for themselves Ashmole 61's coherence as a collection, and many interrelations between the contents have only been briefly touched upon under the subheading Manuscript Context for each text. However, the dominant interest of the manuscript is not in any one particular theme or idea, but in the two literary values posed by Chaucer's

Host, "sentence and solas" (*Canterbury Tales* Prologue I[A]798). Instruction — moral, religious, or practical — and entertainment, in roughly equal proportion, seem to be the principal motives behind Rate's compilation of the contents. Naturally, many texts could provide both: romances might be valued for their moral import, and saints' lives for their entertainment. The comedic diversions could offer lessons in conduct, and there seems no reason to believe that medieval audiences were incapable of finding the grotesque punishments of hell described in *The Adulterous Falmouth Squire* (item 35b) titillating, or at least morbidly fascinating.

Put another way, the manuscript confirms Felicity Riddy's suggestion that "Good manners, right conduct, and the claims of the next world . . . seem to have been the abiding concerns of the fifteenth-century readers of romances."[41] Ashmole 61's mixture of genres and subjects has its own idiosyncrasies, but it also can be read as a representative example of a large class of fifteenth-century miscellanies that share similar combinations of romances, conduct literature, pious legends, and religious doctrine. Two of these miscellanies have already been mentioned as especially close to Ashmole 61 in both spirit and place of origin: Cambridge, University Library MS Ff.2.38, from southwest Leicestershire, and Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.3.1, a compilation owned by a family in neighboring Nottinghamshire or Derbyshire. Many other manuscripts might be added to this group, including several known to have been owned by bourgeois or provincial gentry families.[42]

One way to identify the defining features and intended use of Ashmole 61 is to consider what it is not, i.e., what it leaves out. The manuscript was clearly not intended as a reference work: the extremely rudimentary table of contents and absence of any indexing techniques make this clear. English history of the preceding two centuries, as well as the politics of Henry VII's reign, receives scant attention, as do specialized subjects of higher learning (medicine, law, etc.). No strand of late fifteenth-century humanism — neither the reformist learning of Colet or Erasmus nor Italian classicism — leaves any trace. Ashmole 61 cannot be considered very worldly, both in the sense that it shows relatively little interest in practical information and in that its tastes are hardly cosmopolitan.

Ashmole 61 also does not include any prose; by the end of the fifteenth century, a large quantity of Middle English prose circulated among a variety of audiences, making this exclusion from a collection of this size somewhat unusual. Since much Middle English prose consisted of mystical devotions, the absence of prose suggests a relative lack of interest in private contemplation. The complete dominance of verse also suggests that Ashmole 61 was intended for public reading. Reading aloud remained a very common pastime at the close of the Middle Ages, perhaps even the primary form in which texts were encountered by their audiences. Verse, particularly the simple four-stress lines used by most of Ashmole 61's texts,

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[41] Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory*, p. 23.

[42] Ashmole 61 shares four texts (items 7, 28, 30, and 31) with Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson C. 86, a London miscellany from the last decades of the fifteenth century; on this manuscript, see Boffey and Meale, "Selecting the Text." It also shares four texts with Lincoln Cathedral MS 91, one of the two manuscripts produced by the Yorkshire nobleman Robert Thornton (items 5, 19, 35a, and 35b). For the Lincoln Thornton MS, see n. 28 above. Though the provenance of British Library MS Cotton Caligula A.2 is unknown, it too seems likely to have been owned by a family, possibly with connections to London; see Thompson, "Looking behind the Book." Ashmole 61 and Cotton Caligula A.2 share four texts (items 5, 20, 27, and 31) as well as differing versions of *Stans Puer ad Mensam* (item 7).

is easier for listening audiences to follow than prose.[43] Many of the texts here ultimately derive from preaching material, including homily cycles and collections of *exempla*, and they retain signs of having been intended for oral delivery. Some texts, particularly item 14, *Ten Commandments* (False Start), appear to have been altered specifically for this purpose.

If Ashmole 61 was intended to be read aloud, it provided a calendar of texts that might be read at appropriate occasions throughout the year. *Sir Cleges* (item 24) would make an ideal reading for a Christmas feast; the penitential texts such as *Maidstone's Seven Penitential Psalms* (item 32) might be read in Lent, as part of the preparation for yearly confession. *The Northern Passion* (item 28) could be read during Holy Week before Easter, and *The Legend of the Resurrection* (item 36) could be read on Easter or at any point during the Easter season. *Saint Margaret* (item 37) could be read on her saint's day (July 20), as could *Saint Eustace* (item 1, September 20); another natural fit would involve a public reading of *The Feasts of All Saints and All Souls* (item 25) on November 1 and 2. The various texts that consider mortality and the pains of hell might be read during Ember days, three days of fasting repeated during each of the four seasons. Church ales and guild feasts might have been the occasion for some of the lighter material (such as *King Edward and the Hermit* [item 41] and *The Debate of the Carpenter's Tools* [item 16]). Clearly such a list leaves out much material that might be appropriate any day of the year — e.g., the conduct material — and any claims about how Ashmole 61 was used must remain speculative. But this may be the best explanation of its particular combination of texts.

Ashmole 61 offers popular reading in the most genuine sense of the word. The term "popular" must be defined and defended, if it is to be used at all. "Popular literature" is not used here as a synonym for "folk literature" or as part of an imagined "mass culture."[44] Though much of Ashmole 61's material derives from folk wisdom and folk tales, it has been shaped by learned writers. Though England had arguably acquired forms of "mass culture" with the introduction of printing in the decades before Ashmole 61's composition, that term poorly suits a unique artifact shaped by contingency and choice rather than the market.[45] Nor is "popular" intended as a condescending or belittling evaluation of the quality of these texts. Ashmole 61's material is popular in the same way Nicola McDonald describes some romance as popular "in its capacity to attract a large and heterogeneous medieval audience, as well as in its ability to provide that audience with enormous enjoyment."[46] Undoubtedly, some of these texts had greater appeal to specific groups, particularly the middle classes of urban tradesmen and provincial landowners. But unlike Latin theology, French romances, or technical works in Middle English, the texts here could be understood and appreciated by nearly everyone in late medieval England. This edition aims to make them readily accessible once more.

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[43] The best and most recent discussion of this topic is Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public*. See also Bradbury, *Writing Aloud*.

[44] For useful examinations of the term "popular" as it relates to the type of material presented here, see the introduction by Putter and Gilbert to *The Spirit of Medieval Popular Romance*, pp. 1–38.

[45] As mentioned above, none of Ashmole 61's texts appears to derive from a printed book. Nevertheless, one index of these items' popularity is their early appearance in print. Versions of Lydgate's *Stans Puer ad Mensam* and *Dietary*, as well as *St. Margaret*, were in print by 1500, and *Sir Isumbras* was printed in approximately 1530 (see *STC* 14280.5). Many other early printed texts closely resemble Ashmole 61's texts in both spirit and genre.

[46] McDonald, "Polemical Introduction," in *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England*, p. 2.

EDITORIAL PRACTICES

Because this edition is meant to present the texts of Ashmole 61 and does not claim to serve as a critical edition for any of these texts, they have been conservatively emended. Generally speaking, when a manuscript reading makes plausible sense, even when somewhat strained or difficult, it has been retained. The texts have not been emended to correct for rhyme or meter. However, this edition is intended for use by readers who wish to study popular late fifteenth-century Middle English verse, not simply for the study of Ashmole 61 itself. Therefore, when readings present such difficulties or are so manifestly defective that the sense is lost, they have been emended. Wherever possible, these emendations have been made on the basis of the texts of the most closely-related manuscripts. Again, this often involves settling for something other than the "best" reading according to the standards of modern editing.

All emendations are recorded in the Textual Notes to each item. Major emendations, as well as significant variants, omissions, and additions, are discussed in the Explanatory Notes to each item. In the introduction to each item, the status of the text (i.e., the number of other surviving manuscripts, the relationship of Ashmole 61 to those of other manuscripts, and any peculiarities of Rate's copying) is discussed under the subheading Text.

The texts have been edited to conform with the standards of the Middle English Text Series. This includes altering the pronoun *the* to *thee* and adding an accent mark to long final *e* when it has full syllabic value (e.g. *cité*), for easier recognition. Capitalization and the letters "thorn," *u/v*, and *i/j* have been regularized to conform with modern practice. The letter "yogh" has been changed to *y* when it appears in initial positions or between vowels, and to *g* or *gh* when appearing in final position or before an *h*. Rate's doubled *ff*, when appearing in initial positions, has been altered to *f* to conform to modern practice.

All abbreviations have been silently expanded, but Rate's curious practices make this somewhat difficult. Many of his suspension marks alter their meaning depending on context, and are often (but not consistently) otiose. His superscript tailed *a* can signify *u*, *ur*, *er*, *re*, *r*, *or*, or *oure*. His macrons often indicate a suspended *n* or *m*, but on other occasions these appear to be otiose. On occasion, he uses a reverse curl after the end of final *g* to indicate a suspended *n* before it (as in the participle ending *-yng*), but on other occasions he uses the same reverse curl when the *n* is already written out. Early editors who used Ashmole 61's texts, particularly Carl Horstmann, interpreted all of Rate's flourishes as suspension marks, adding a final *e* after each barred double *l*, and every *t*, *r*, *d*, or *g* with a final curl. This edition, following more recent practice, has interpreted such strokes as otiose. Rate's macrons have been expanded as *n* or *m* as needed to indicate vowel length, but not when otherwise unnecessary.

Rate's other abbreviations have been expanded to conform with his regular spelling (when that can be ascertained) and according to context; *þi* has been expanded to either *thei* or *thi*, depending on function; *þs* becomes *this* or *these*; *þu* becomes *thou*; and *þr* becomes *ther*. Similarly, *ws* becomes *was* and *wr* becomes *were*.

Rate uses no form of punctuation whatsoever. All the punctuation used here is editorial. Line numbers count only the lines of Middle English text present in Ashmole 61, and do not take into account missing or omitted lines. Latin lines (quotations, subtitles, colophons, etc.) incorporated into the Middle English verse are numbered as (e.g.) 27a, 27b, etc., with numbers corresponding to the preceding line of verse.

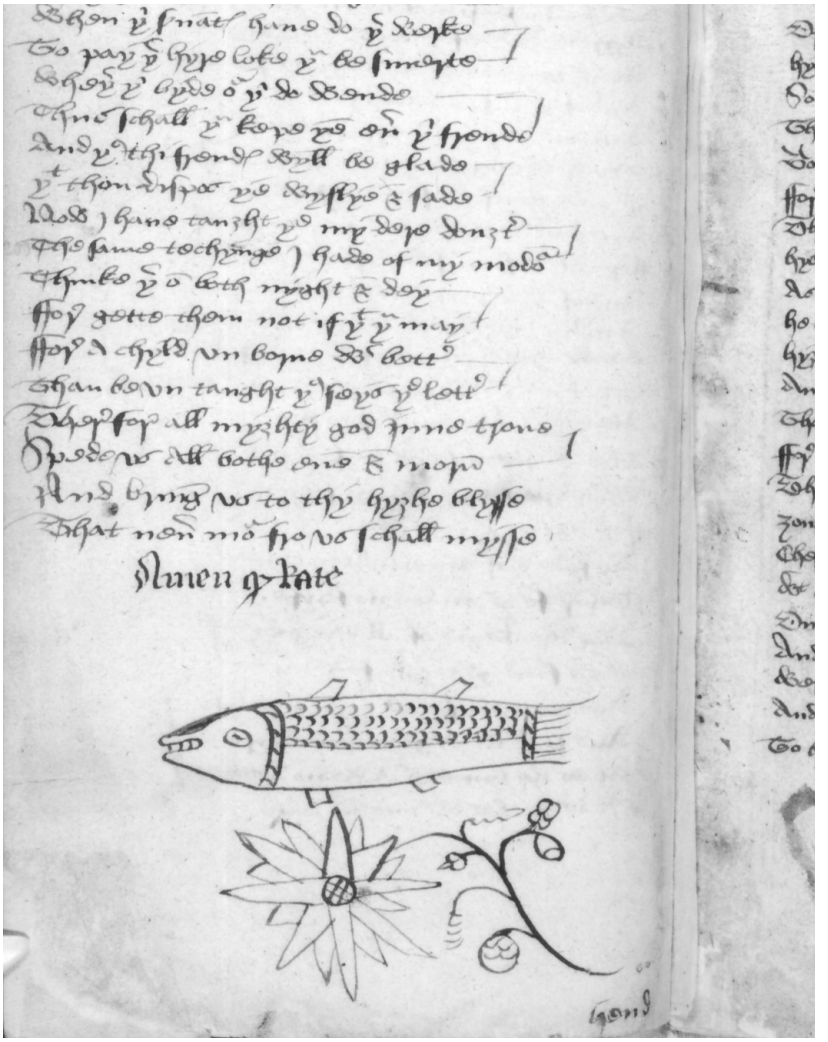


Figure 1: MS Ashmole 61, fol. 8v detail. The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

1. SAINT EUSTACE

fol. 1r Seynt Ewstas
All that be on Godys lore, *in God's religion*
Lytell, mykyll, lesse and more, *great*
Lystyns to me a stound *Listen; while*
Of a knyght of hethenes *heathenness*
That mych had of werldys blysse, *had much of the world's (worldly) bliss*
Of gold and penyes round. *pennies*

Hys name hyght Placydas; *was called*
Wyth Tracyan the emperoure he was *Trajan*
Ryght wyse man of rede. *[A] very; counsel*
Wyth the pore he was wele gode,
And wyth the rych myld of mode, *manner*
And gode in every dede.

Of fre huntyng he couth inoughe, *noble; knew enough*
In holte and under the wode boughe, *In woods*
And in the wyld felde.
He rode on huntyng on a dey;
A hert he found ther he ley, *hart (male deer)*
Well feyre under the lynd. *under a linden tree*
Of many hertys and bestys also,
Of more and lesse ther were moo, *large and small; more*
He was the feyrest of all.

The gretyst hert fled hys wey.
The knyght rode after all a dey *after [it] for a day*
By hymselffe alone
In tyll anodor kynges lond. *Into another*
Ther gane the hert to wythstond *began; hold firm*
Upon a roche of stone. *rock*

The hert turned hys hornes hyghe
Ther he stod under the wode lynd *under a (linden) tree*
And seyd, "Syr Placydas,

Thow arte a knyght of huntyng fre; *noble*
Thow me foloys and I thee fle — *You follow me*
Ryde softer thy pace. *more gently*

"Betwene my hornes that are so hyghe,
To me and thou wold cast thyn eyghe, *If you would cast thine eye upon me*
Well sone than myght thou see
The feyrest syght that may be thought,
Or yn thys werld that may be wroght, *made*
Or ever in erthe may be.

"Jhesu Cryst onne crosse iwys, *certainly (indeed)*
That hath thee broght in all thys blys, *into*
Thou huntys after thys tyde. *occasion*
The truthe wele son thou schall se,
If thou wyll tourne thy face to me,
For ferther thou may not ryd."
The lyght of hevene in a leme, *flash (ray)*
Bryghter than is the sone beme,
Upon that hert gan lyght. *began to fall*
fol. 1v The hert spake as a man it were, *as if it were a man*
So fayre to the knyght ryght there,
And seyd to hym wyth ryght:

"Placydas, I sey to thee
That thi name changyd schall be,
And Crystindom underfonge. *And [you shall] receive Christianity*
It is Jhesu Cryst of heven
That spekys to thee with myld steven; *voice*
Ne duell thou not to long. *Nor wait; too*

"Thou take thi chylder and thi wyfe, *children*
And wend all withouten stryffe, *go; hesitation (resistance)*
And crystyn you betyme. *christen; promptly*
For oftyn tyme you schall be lede, *tempted*
Wyth sorow and care ye schall be fedde,
For love of me and myne."

"Leve Lord," seyd he, *Dear*
"My Crysten name thow gyff to me, *Christian*
Or that I hens wend." *Before I go hence (from here)*
"Now thou hyght Placydas; *are called*
Thow schall hyght Syr Ewstas
In werld withouten end."

Homeward he went fast anone *immediately*
And told it to hys wyffe at home;

They thankyd God dey and nyght.
"Syr," sche seyd, "we wyll gon,
And becom cristynd anon *christened immediately*
In the name of God allmyght."

He toke his chylder and his wyffe,
And went forthe withoutyn stryffe *argument*
To the font ston. *[baptismal] font*
Ther thei were crystyn tho, *christened then*
His wyffe and his childer two,
Ne was he not alone. *Nor was he alone*

Som tyme he hyght Placidas, *Once he was called*
Now he hyght Syr Ewstas;
Blyssed be God Allmyght.
Betwen the undron and the none, *mid-morning and noon*
I wote this dede it was done, *believe*
Ne was it not be nyght. *Nor; by night (in secret)*

To the wodde thei went anon,
Als so swyth as thei myght gon, *As fast*
Ne restyd thei no stound. *Nor did they rest a moment*
As thei went under the wodde bowe, *branches*
Of god tydyngys ther cam inow, *good ; enough*
Fro hevene to them on grownd.

An angell seyd, that was full bryght,
"Syr Ewstas, Godys knyght,
Blyssyd mote thou ben. *may thou be*
fol. 2r Thiselve, thi chylder, and thi wyfe
Schall in joy lede your lyfe,
And hevens blys schall sene. *shall see*

"Thoff thou les both lond and lede, *Though you lose; people*
Halle and bowre, palfray and stede, *home, horse and steed*
Ne be thou not sorye.
Now thou hast Crystindom understond, *accepted*
The fend wyll yern thee for to fond, *fiend; yearn to tempt you*
Now thou arte made holye.

"Wend ye forthe into your waye, *Go; on your way*
And kepe your saulys nyght and daye,
And do as I you rede. *advise*
All ye schall, for sothe iwys, *truly indeed*
For the love of swete Jhesus
In marterdom be dede." *be killed*

Syr Eustas went hym home
Al so swyth as he myght gone, *As quickly*
Wyth wyfe and childer two.
He found his schepe in fold were betyn, *sheep in their fold were struck (down)*
And thonder his hors to deth had smyten; *lightning [thunder]; smitten*
On fote must thei go.

All that hym lovyd went hym fro,
Bot his wyfe and his childer two; *Except; children*
Son thei must wende. *Soon; depart*
Erly or it was any daye, *Early before it was day*
Stylly thei stalkyd away *Quietly; slipped*
By a woddys ende. *the outskirts of a forest*

To a water thei gan gone, *went*
A schype thei found sone anon;
Thei went ther tyll. *thereto*
Into the schype thei went tho, *then*
His wyfe and his chylder two; *children*
The water was sterne and ylle. *stormy and dangerous*

The schypman byhold that ilke knyght *shipman (captain) beheld that same*
And that lady that was so bryght;
He thought hyre fare and schene. *fair and beautiful*
To hym he seyd after than,
"Wher hadyst thou this feyre woman? *Where did you get*
Sche schall be myn, I wene." *I think*

Out of the schype he drew hym tho, *then*
And his yong childer two;
Full woo was hym therfore.
The lady cryed and mad gret dynne, *made great din*
And fro hyr lord was loth to twyn, *loathe to part*
And weppyd and syghed sore.

The knyght sett hym don apon a ston,
And se hys wyfe was fro hym go, *saw; gone*
Takyne fro hym wyth wrong. *wrongly*
He seyd alas that he was born,
Hys wytte fro hym nyghehond was lorne; *nearly was gone*
Hym thought hys lyf to longe. *too*

fol. 2v After the schype his eye he caste;
Out of his syght than was sche paste.
He beheld hys chylder two:
"Me thinke my herte wyll all to-bled. *bleed to death*

How schalle I you moderles fede? *raise*
Now was me never so wo." *I was never so miserable*
So long forth his way he toke, *further*
Tyll that thei com unto a broke,
Ther over thei must fare.
Wade thei muste. The water was scheld, *shallow*
By ether syde the wyld feld; *field*
Well mekyll was hys care.

He toke hys o chyld in his arme — *one*
The other he wend schuld have no herm —
He bare hym over to the lond.
Soune he seyd in hys mode: *in his mind*
"Godys grace," he seyd, "is ever more gode —
That I understond.

"Sytt now styll, son myn,
Tyll that I fett brother thyn, *Until I fetch*
And thou schall have thi mede. *reward*
I schall com to thee anon,
Als so sone as I may gon,
Ne make thou no dred." *Do not be afraid*

Into the water he went agayn,
Tyll that he com to the myddys strem, *middle (of the)*
And lokyd hym bysyde.
A wyld lyon he saw ther gone;
He toke his yonge sone anon; *He (the lion) seized;soon*
On hym he gapyd wyde. *him (the child); opened [his mouth] wide*

That lyon bare that child with hym,
That was both gret stoute and grym,
Ne was he never so wo. *Nor was he (Eustace) ever so miserable*
Than was Syr Eustas sorye, *(see note)*
For both his childer were born awaye;
He fell in swounyng tho. *then*

Bot when he fro swonyng rose,
He lokyd up and forth he gose;
His wytt was neyghe hym fro. *nearly (gone) from him*
Bot ever he thought onne Jhesu Cryst, *But he continually thought about*
On his deth and his up-ryst. *resurrection (see note)*

"Jhesu Cryst in Trinyté,
Allmyghty God, thou comforth me!
To thee I make my mone
Of my wyfe that was so trew,

So feyer a woman of hyde and hew, *skin and complexion*
So wo is me alone.

"Of my chyldren that be forlorn,
With wyld bestys awaye born,
I may now sey alas.
Tyll uncouthes londys I wyll go; *To unknown*
How long schall I lyve so?
That ever I born was! *(i.e., Alas, that I was ever born)*

fol. 3r "On Job I wyll bethink me, *be mindful*
That ever had in blysse be *Who had always been in bliss*
And sethen fell in care. *then*
Lord, for the love of thee,
Ne wyll I never to sory be, *I will never*
How so ever I fare.

"I have wepyn all my fyll — *wept*
Tho bade no man me yit be styll — *Though no man commanded*
For Goddys helpe is nyghe."
Ther come an angell fro heven,
That spake to hym with myld steven, *voice*
From Cryst that woneth one hyghe: *dwells on high*

"Blyssed be thou, Syr Eustas:
In heven is made thi mery place,
Ther thou schall blyth bene. *you shall be blithe*
Thiselve, thy chylder, and thi wyfe *children*
Schall haven that merye lyfe, *have*
And all that joy sene." *see*

So long he went forth in hys wey,
His bedys bedande nyght and dey, *prayers praying*
To toune tyll that he came. *Until to town*
Suynkyng and suetyng he muste tho, *Working and sweating; then*
For his spendyng was all go. *money was all gone*
To worche he must than, *work; then*

With bow and arowys and with horn,
For to kepe other mens corn, *crops*
By dey and eke by nyght. *also*
Weddys to take and bestys to pynd — *Pledges (guarantees); pen*
That was hym not comyn of kynd. *common habit (see note)*

Fyftyn wynter he was ther,
Or men wyst whens he were, *Before men knew from whence*
His mete for to eyren. *to earn his food*

The Emperor dyd hym to seche, *ordered him to be sought*
With men that ware myld of spech,
Knyghtys bothe styff and sterne. *stalwart and fierce*

Over that corne comen thre *field*
Riding men of one ble; *appearance*
With hym ther they mette.
The knyghtys rydyn on horsys hye; *tall*
With wordys myld, feyre and sclyghe, *gracious*
That heyward fare thei grette. *hayward fair(ly) they greeted*

For he was wardan over that corn,
The heywerd stod and blow his horn;
Ther wedd he bade them yeld. *Their pledge he bade them provide*
He askyd what thei soughtyn ther,
And why thei went over so ferre,
Over that hyghe felde.

fol. 3v "Syr," thei seyd, "be not dysplesyd,
We knaw that we have yow dessesyd, *disturbed*
For we seke after a man.
We ben the Emperares consylerys;
We have hym sought both ferre and nere,
Bot fynd hym nought we canne.

"A nobull knyght for soth he was,
Hys name was callyd Syr Placydas.
On huntyng oute he fared, *went*
Never sethyn come home, *since*
Ne no tydyng from hym come,
That no man sethen of herd. *since heard of*

"Here we have foundyn thee,
By a wound that I se,
On thee that stondys here.
One thy nose ther is a wound,
Whereby we have thee here found,
And thou schall ben owre fere." *companion*

"Nay, seres, so mote I then, *so may I prosper*
I may not your feloy ben; *be your companion*
I ame a pore man."
"Thou must with us to the Emperowre *must go*
For to have thy honour
That thou were wonte to hane." *wont (used) to have*

Syr Eustas se that he muste nedes — *saw*
For to go forth with thes knyghtys,
Unto the kyngys courte.
He toke hys leve at grete and smalle, — *from*
At man and wyfe and gentylles alle; — *From*
Thei wer loth to departe.

Forthe he went with them all thre
With the Emperour for to be;
To the kyngys courte he came.
Ther was joy and blysse inoughe; — *enough*
The Emperour onne hym lowghe, — *smiles*
And knyghtys, squyre, and grome. — *groom[s]*

He told hys lord of his care,
In strange lyffe his herd fare, — *difficult*
Fro begyning to the end:
Bothe of hys swynke and of hys suete — *toil; sweat*
Of his treuthe and of hys byhete — *constancy; loyalty*
Of all that God hym send.

It was therafter longe
That ther come a werre strong — *war*
Upon the Emperour.
Theder wente many a knyght, — *There*
Well armed, I you plyght, — *promise*
To save hys honour.

Theder went knyghtys two, — *There*
And thei were to fyght also,
With hors and hernes gode. — *gear*
Ther was non in all that playe, — *combat*
With spere and suerd that ilke dey, — *sword; same*
That ther dynte ne withstode. — *blow*

fol. 4r When thei hade foughten all the deye,
And scomfet the other syde aweye, — *defeated*
Thei went bothe to one inne. — *an inn*
Ther gode feloys thei become, — *good companions*
As thei hade ben queynted at home, — *As if; acquainted*
By grace of God, I wene. — *I believe*

Togeder thei dyde syte at mete, — *at the meal*
And both of one dyssche thei ete, — *out of one dish*
And maden them full blythe. — *were joyful*
After met thei told talys — *After the meal*

Of aventures and herd batayles, *fierce*
And of all ther lyfe.

The yonger man of the two
Son askyd the other tho *Soon*
Of what kyne that he were. *family*
He satte styll and syghed sore,
And seyd lytell and thought more,
With a wele sad chere. *very solemn face*

"Syr, wyll thou my counsyll hylle *will you keep my secret*
If I thee telle of my wylle, *intent*
And also of my care?
A riche man my fader was;
His name hyght Syr Placydas — *was called*
God gyffe hym wele to fare.

"My fader was a doughty knyght,
And my moder a lady bryght,
And ruddy of all hew. *freshly red*
We were yong sones two:
My yonger broder and I also,
In halle and boure of stone. *building*

"My fader toke us alle thre,
My moder, my broder, and me —
Thorow the grace of God Allmyght — *Through*
And lede us to a founte ston, *[baptismal] font*
And crystind us ther anon, *christened*
Ne was it not by nyght. *Nor was it at night (in secret)*

"Sethyn, I understode me, *Then, as I understand*
We felle into poverté,
And wenten oute of lond. *went*
Over a water we schuld have gone;
Oure moder ther fro us was tane, *taken*
With falsyd born onne hond. *With falsehood carried away*

"My moder was a feyr woman,
Lyke in this werld was non
That onne water fare. *went over water*
The schypman toke her us from,
Withouten law or other dom; *right*
Than wexed new all our care. *waxed (grew)*

"We went throghe a wyldernes; *through*
With wepyng and with soroufulnes

We come to a strem.
My fader me toke and over me bore, *carried*
And my broder he left ther,
Tyll that he come ageyne.

"A wyld lyone ther gan gon, *began to go*
And cought me in his mouthe anon, *immediately*
And bore me fast aweye.
The schypherdys with ther schepe *shepherds; their sheep*
When thei hym se, thei dyd hym mete,
fol. 4v And schrewydly dyd hym freye. *harshly; fight*

"Thus fro the lyon I was tane. *taken*
And broght me up with bourde and game — *entertainment and sport*
Thanke be God allmyght —
A riche man of that lond.
All that nedyd, he me fond, *All that I needed, he provided*
And dubyd me a knyght."

"A! Broder, late me tell thee,
A wolf ther came and caught me,
And bore me in hys mothe. *mouth*
Plowmen that syght thei se,
And to hym fast thei dyd hyghe, *run (hasten)*
Stronge men and welle thei cowthe. *well they were able*

"The wolfe for fere doun me leyd, *fear*
And sethyn a lady me hath fedd, *afterwards; raised*
And dubyd me a knyght.
Sche me fond palfrey and sted, *provided me*
Helme, habyrion, and odour wed, *Helmet, coat of armor, and other clothes*
Spere and swerd full bryght."

Ther modour all this herd,
Ther as sche was in a yerde; *yard (garden)*
Sche wepe all for blysse.
To hyr bowre sche went anon, *room*
Also swyth as sche couthe gon,
With full mykill gladnes.

Ther came ryding Syr Eustas,
Ther that lady inne was, *To where that lady's dwelling was*
The knyghtys to sekyn swythe. *To seek the knights quickly*
Sche beheld that sembly knyght, *seemly (handsome)*
And he that lady that was so bryght,
With chere fayre and blythe. *joyful*

"Dame," he seyd, "tell thou me,
What men here at inne be, *are at [this] inn*
At this nexte howse?" *house*
"Syr, I knaw ther knyghtys two: *know*
Well thou schall them know also.
Wellcome, my lefe spowse! *dear*

"My lord, well I knaw thee *know*
By a wond that I se, *wound*
Upon thy nose is sene. *[can be] seen*
A! Lord, I had herde fare, *hard going*
And lede my lyve in mykyll care; *lead; great*
I tell yow now bydene: *certainly*

"Fro thee I was take with a schypman, *From you; taken by a shipman*
And wened I schuld have be his leman; *[he] thought; sweetheart*
He was not of my laye. *religion*
A knyght ther was in that schyppe,
That fro the schypman he dyde me helpe, *from*
And brought me safe awaye.

"Suete lord, wyll ye gone
To this nexte hous anone? *house now*
Your chylder ther they be! *children are there*
And make grete joye in that house
And thanke owre Lord, suete Jhesus,
And God in Trinyté."

Both thei wente theder anon, *there immediately*
Also swyth as thei myght gon, *As quickly as they might go*
And come into the halle.
fol. 5r And when that thei ther sones se, *(see note)*
Thei thankyd God in Trinyté,
And also suet Seynt Palle. *sweet St. Paul*

The two knyghtys ther fader knew,
And sone onne kneys doune thei flewe, *knees; fell*
And thankyd God Allmyght.
For joye that they togeder were mette, *together*
All fowre full faste thei dyd wepe, *strongly they wept*
And so dyde many a wyght. *a person*

Syr Eustas gane to tell tho *then*
Of his joy and of hys wo
That he had ben inne.
Than ther was none at that bord *table*

That fore wepyng myght speke a word,
Nor none in that inne.

So glad of odour ichon thei ware; *So happy for the other each of them was*
Thei kyssed and mad gode chere,
And fylled the wyne anone,
And told how thei were crystinde, *christened*
And thought ther care was withstond, *endured*
And sorow was fro them gon. *gone from them*

The Emperoure herd telle of this,
How thei were in joy and blysse,
And crystinde that thei were. *christened*
He sente knyghtys sone anon *immediately*
To seke theme up everychone, *each of them*
That thei founden were. *[So] that*

When thei were befor hym brought,
Them to scle it was his thought, *His plan was to slay them*
And so for sothe he dyde.
For Allmyghty Godys sake
The deth to them thei wold take, *They would accept their deaths*
What deth as he them bedde. *Whatever death he prescribed for them*

He dyd them in a panne of brasse, *pan (vessel, cauldron)*
Al so hote as ever it was, *As hot as*
And made fyere abowtyne.
All fowre therin he brente; *burnt*
Ther saulys onto heven went.
Of payn thei were withouten. *They were without pain*

Beseke we all Seynt Eustas *[May] we all beseech (beg)*
That he graunte us all grace
To heven for to wend. *In order to go to heaven*
To Jhesu, Seynt Mary sone, *Jesus, Saint Mary's son*
And ther withouten end to wone *to dwell*
God that grace us send. AMEN. *[May] God send that grace to us*
EXPLICIT VITA SANCTI EUSTACHII *Here ends the Life of Saint Eustace*

2. RIGHT AS A RAM'S HORN

fol. 5v Thus Ryghtwysnes do now procede, *Righteousness*
And sytyht lyke a gay emprece. *sits; empress*
Law hath lorn all maner of mede, *forfeited; bribe*
And settyht up Treuth als hyghe as God is. *sets*
Gode Feyth hath outelauwed all doubylnes, *deception*
And Prudens setys all thingys beforne, *governs above all else*

Kepyng the ordour of perfyte stabulnes, *stability*
Conveyd by a lyne ryght as a rammys horne. *Directed by (written by)*

Princes of custom, thei wyll maynten non wrong, *support no one in the wrong*
And Prelatys lyve in holynes. *Prelates (churchmen)*
Knyghthod wyll maynten no falsyd among, *falsehood*
And Prestehode hath refused all ryches.
And Relygion of verrye holynes
With perfyte lernyng up beth borne. *is supported*
Envy in cloyster hath non entres, *entrance*
Conveyed by a lyne ryght as a rammys horn.

Merchandys of lucre thei take non hede, *Merchants; no heed*
And Usry lyth fetered in destres. *Usury; fettered in distress*
To carpe of our werke of Womanhede, *To speak of the work of our women*
Thei have banesched away all strangenes. *banished; novelty*
Servantys doth allway there bysenes
That of the dey non owre be lorn; *[So] that; no hour is lost*
With suete and traveyll thei pute awey Idelnes, *sweat and labor*
Conveyd by a lyne . . .

Out of this lond — els God forbede — *[that it be] else (otherwise)*
Is baneschyd Symonye and Falsed also. *Simony and Falsehood*
Yonge and eld hathe takyn sadnes them to. *seriousness unto themselves*
Women hath loste pride and take them to mekenes,
Whos pacyens is gode both at even and morn;
Ther tonges hath no talent to schrewdnes, *inclination to shrewishness*
Conveyed by a lyn . . .

Crysten Cowrte ther correccions do spred, *Ecclesiastical courts; discipline*
More for soule helth than for symony, as I gesse; *souls' health*
Right schall be reseyved withouten any mede. *received; bribe*
Ther schall no pounde be ther penance, *(i.e., no bribe; see note)*
And Sumoners wyll sofere no synne in ther offyce; *allow*
Thei travell for the treuth, ther clothes be torne, *strive*
Ther may no mede make them hold ther pece,
Conveyd by a lyn . . .

Schyrifes of chyres, thei take so gode hede *Sheriffs of shires*
That babys and burges schall no man overpresse,[1]
Nor thei wyll not endyte a man for any mede, *indict; reward*
Bot Ryche Men be mersyfull to more and lesse.
Leders of the law, thei have refusyd ryches,
Questemonggers on bokys, thei wyll not be forsuorn; *False witnesses*

[1] *So that no man shall oppress children or townspeople*

Thes men perchas tham heven expresse, *earn for themselves heaven directly*
Conveyd by a lyn . . .

Mynstrels make men myrth for no mede, *give men entertainment*
Bot for soule helth to sette men in sadnes. *soul's health; seriousness*
Treuly thei do ther almys dede
To the pore pepull that lyves in destres,
And when thei mete togeder, there at festys es, *ease (joy)*
The more the meryer; therfor thei wyll not mourne.
When thei feyle felyschyp, than be thei in hevynes, *lack company; sadness*
Conveyd by a lyn . . .

Princes, remembyr you, and prudently take hede
How Vertues over Vyces is wexen a duches. *has become a duchess*
fol. 6r Owre Feyth holdys not bot byleve in his Crede; *holds nothing but*
The Ryght Beleve he beryth wytnes,
The Scribes and Fareseys hath left ther frewardnes *Pharisees; obstinacy*
And wedyd the cokyll clen oute of the corn. *weeded the cockle (tares)*
Thus be we governed, for soth as I gesse,
Conveyed by lyn . . .
AMEN.

3. How the Wise Man Taught His Son

Lordyngys, and ye wyll here *Gentlemen, if you will hear*
How a wyse man taught hys sone,
Take god hede to this mater, *good*
And fynd to lerne it yf ye canne. *try to learn*
This songe for younge men was begon
To make them trew and stedfaste;
For yerne that is evyll spon, *yarn that is badly spun*
Evyll it comes out at the laste.

It was a wyse man had a chyld
Was fully fiftene wynter of age, *[Who] was*
Of maneres he was meke and myld,
Gentyll of body and of usage. *behavior*
Bycause he was his faderes ayer, *father's heir*
His fader thus on this langage *in these words*
Taught his sone wele and feyre,
Gentyll of kynd and of corage. *nature; disposition*

And seyd, "Son, have this worde in herte,
And thynke theron when I ame dede:
Every dey thi fyrst werke — *duty*
Loke it be don in every sted — *situation*
Go se thi God in form of bred, *in the form of the Host (the Eucharist)*

And thanke thi God of his godnesse,
And afterward, sone, be my rede, *by my advice*
Go do thi werldys besynesse.

"Bot fyrst worschype God on the dey,
And thou wyll have to thi mede *reward*
Skylfully what thou wyll praye. *Justly*
He wylle thee send withouten dred,
And send thee all that thow hast nede, *all that you have need [of]*
Als ferre as mesure wyll destreche. *As far as moderation will allow*
Luke mesurly thy lyfe thou lede, *See that you lead your life moderately*
And of the remynant ther thee not reche. *And that you do not overreach*

"And, son, thi tonge thou kepe also,
And tell not all thyngys that thou maye, *can [speak of]*
For thi tonge may be thy fo.
Therfor, my son, thynke what I sey,
Wher and when that thou schall praye,
And be whom that thou seyst owht; *to whom you say anything*
For thou may sey a word todey,
That seven yere after may be forthought. *regretted*

"With love and awe thi wyfe thou chastys, *fear (reverence); chastise*
And late feyre wordys be thi yerd; *stick*
For awe it is the best gyse *way*
For to make thi wyfe aferd. *afraid*

"Sone, thi wyfe thou schall not chyde,
Ne caule her by no vylons name; *call her by no shameful name*
For sche that schall ly by thy syde,
To calle hyr wykyd, it is thy schame.
When thou schall thy wyfe defame,
fol. 6v Welle may another man do so;
Bot sofer, and a man may tame *But be patient*
Hert and hynd and the wyld ro. *roe (small) deer*

"Sone, be thou not gelos by no weye, *jealous in any way*
For if thou fall in gelosye,
Late not thi wyfe wyte be no weye; *realize it in any way*
For thou mayst do no more folye.
For if thi wyfe myght ons aspye
That thou to her wold not tryste, *have faith in her*
In spyte of all thi fantysye, *delusion (longing)*
To wreke hyr werst, that is herre lyste. *To do her worst, that will be her desire*

"Son, unto thi God pay welle thi tythe,
And pore men of thy gode thou dele. *share your goods with poor men*

Ageyn the devell be stronge and styfe, *Against; resolute*
And helpe thi soule fro peyne of helle.
Thys werld is bote fantesye fele, *only a glorious illusion*
And dey by dey it wylle apare. *diminish*
Therfor beware the werldys wele: *world's riches*
It farys as a chery feyre. *goes past like a cherry festival*

"Many man here gederes gode *gathers goods*
All hys lyfe tyme for odour men,
That he may not — be the rode — *by the cross*
Not have tyme to ete a hene. *hen*
When he is dolven in his den, *buried in his grave*
Another schall come at the last ende,
And have hys wyfe and catell than; *goods then*
That he has sparyd another wyll spende. *What; saved*

"For all that ever a man doth here
With bysenes and travell bothe, *labor*
All this is, withouten were, *without doubt*
Not bot for mete and drynke and clothe;
More getys he not, withouten hothe. *without doubt*
Kyng ne prince whether he be, *Whether he is either*
Be he lefe or be he lothe, *Whether he wishes or not*
A pore man schall have als mych as he.

"Therfor sone, be my counselle,
More than inowghe thou never covete. *enough*
Thou wotyst not when deth wylle thee asayll; *know not*
This werld is bot deth and debate. *struggle*
Loke thou be not to hyghe of state. *too proud*
By ryches here sette thou no price; *set you no value*
For this werld is full of deseyt;
Therfor purchasse paradyce.

"For deth, my chylde, is, as I trow, *as I trust*
The most ryght serteyn it is; *certain [thing] there is*
Nothing so unserteyn to unknow, *Nothing so unknowable and uncertain*
As is the tyme of deth, iwys. *indeed*
And therfor sone, thinke onne thys,
And all that I have seyd beforne,
And Jhesu bryng us to his blysse,
The chyld that was in Bedlem borne." *Bethlehem*
AMEN QUOD RATE

4. How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter

fol.7r	Lyst and lythe a lytell space,	*Listen and attend a little while*
	I schall you telle a prety cace:	*pleasant account*
	How the gode wyfe taught hyr doughter	
	To mend hyr lyfe and make her better.	
5	"Doughter, and thou wylle be a wyfe,	*if you will*
	Wysely to wyrch in all thi lyfe,	*[And] to work wisely*
	Serve God and kepe thy chyrche,	*attend*
	And myche the better thou schall wyrche.	
	To go to the chyrch lette for no reyne,	*do not be hindered by any rain*
10	And that schall helpe thee in thy peyn.	
	Gladly loke thou pay thy tythes,	
	Also thy offeringys loke thou not mysse.	
	Of pore men be thou not lothe,	*contemptuous*
	Bot gyff thou them both mete and clothe;	*food and clothing*
15	And to pore folke be thou not herde,	*hard*
	Bot be to them thyn owen stowarde;	*steward*
	For wher that a gode stowerde is,	
	Wantys seldom any ryches.	*Seldom is wanting*
	When thou arte in the chyrch, my chyld,	
20	Loke that thou be bothe meke and myld,	
	And bydde thi bedys aboven all thing.	*say your prayers*
	With sybbe ne fremde make no jangelyng;[1]	
	Laughe thou to scorn nother olde ne yonge;	
	Be of gode beryng and of gode tonge.	
25	In thi god beryng begynnes thi worschype —	*good behavior; respect*
	My dere doughter, of this take kepe.	*take heed*
	If any man profer thee to wede,	*offers*
	A curtas ansuer to hym be seyde,	
	And schew hym to thy frendys alle.	*introduce him*
30	For anything that may befawle,	*No matter what may happen*
	Syt not by hym, ne stand thou nought	
	In sych place ther synne mey be wroght.	*where sin might be done*
	What man that thee doth wedde with rynge,	
	Loke thou hym love aboven all thinge.	
35	If that it forteyn thus with thee,	*it happens to you*
	That he be wroth and angery be,	
	Loke thou mekly ansuer hym,	
	And meve hym nother lyth ne lymme,	*cause him to stir neither body nor limb*
	And that schall sclake hym of hys mode;	*slake his anger*
40	Than schall thou be hys derlyng gode.	
	Fayre wordys wreth do slake;	*calm wrath*
	Fayre wordys wreth schall never make;	
	Ne fayre wordys brake never bone,	

[1] *With neither kin nor strangers make any chatter (gossip)*

Ne never schall in no wone. *in any place*
Be fayre of semblant, my der doughter; *mild of expression*
Change not thi countenans with grete laughter,
And wyse of maneres loke thou be gode.
Ne for no tayle change thi mode,
Ne fare not as thou a gyglot were, *harlot*
Ne laughe thou not lowd, be thou therof sore. *lest you be sorry for that*
Luke thou also gape not to wyde,
For anything that may betyde.
Suete of speche loke that thow be,
Trow in worde and dede — lerne this of me. *Truthful*
fol. 7v Loke thou fle synne, vilony, and blame, *shame*
And se ther be no man that seys thee any schame. *says shameful things to you*
When thou goys in the gate, go not to faste, *you go*
Ne hyderward ne thederward thi hede thou caste, *Nor look around everywhere*
No grete othes loke thou suere;
Byware, my doughter, of syche a maner.
Go not as it were a gase *as if you were a foolish person*
Fro house to house to seke the mase. *idle diversion*
Ne go thou not to no merket
To sell thi thryft; bewer of itte. *To lose your earnings*
Ne go thou nought to the taverne,
Thy godnes for to selle therinne. *to lose*
Forsake thou hym that taverne hanteth, *haunts*
And all the vices that therinne bethe. *are therein*
Wherever thou come at ale or wyne,
Take not to myche, and leve be tyme, *leave promptly*
For mesure therinne, it is no herme,
And drounke to be, it is thi schame.
Ne go thou not to no wrastlyng,
Ne yit to no coke schetyng, *cock-shooting*
As it were a strumpet other a gyglote, *As if you were a strumpet or a harlot*
Or as a woman that lyst to dote. *likes to be foolish*
Byde thou at home, my doughter dere,
Thes poyntys at me I rede thou lere; *from me I advise you learn*
And wyrke thi werke at nede, *do your work as necessary*
All the better thou may spede.
I suere thee, doughter, be heven kyng,
Mery it is of al thyng.
Aqueynte thee not with every man
That inne the strete thou metys than;
Thof he wold be aqueynted with thee,
Grete hym curtasly and late hym be.
Loke by hym not longe thou stond,
That thorow no vylony thi hert fond. *tempt your heart*
All the men be not trew
That fare speche to thee can schew.

For no covetys no giftys thou take; *covetousness*
Bot thou wyte why, sone them forsake. *Unless you know why [they are given]*
For gode women with gyftys
Men ther honour fro them lyftys, *removes*
Thofe that thei were all trew
As any stele that bereth hew; *steel*
For with ther giftys men them overgone, *overcome them*
Thof thei were trew as ony ston.
Bounde thei be that giftys take;
Therfor thes giftys thou forsake.
In other mens houses make thou no maystry, *control (preeminence)*
For dred no vylony to thee be spye. *[that] no shame be seen upon you*
Loke thou chyd no wordys bolde *chide*
To myssey nother yonge ne olde; *insult*
For and thou any chyder be, *For if*
Thy neyghbors wyll speke thee vylony.
fol. 8r Be thou not to envyos,
For drede thi neyghbors wyll thee curse.
Envyos hert hymselve fretys, *consumes*
And of gode werkys hymselve lettys. *hinders*
Houswyfely wyll thou gon
On werkedeys in thine awne wone. *dwelling*
Pryde, rest, and ydelleschype: *idleness*
Fro these werkys, thou thee kepe.
And kepe thou welle thy holy dey,
And thy God worschype when thou may,
More for worschype than for pride,
And styfly in thy feyth thou byde. *staunchly*
Loke thou were no ryche robys, *wear*
Ne counterfyte thou no ladys; *imitate; noble women*
For myche schame do them betyde,
That lese ther worschipe thorow ther pride. *reputation*
Be thou, doughter, a houswyfe gode,
And ever more of myld mode.
Wysely loke thi hous and meneyé; *oversee; staff (household servants)*
The beter to do thei schall be.
Women that be of yvell name,
Be ye not togeder in fame. *reputation*
Loke what most nede is to don,
And sett thi men therto ryght sone.
That thing that is befor don dede, *accomplished*
Redy it is when thou hast nede.
And if thy lord be fro home,
Lat not thy meneyé idell gone.
And loke thou wele who do hys dede;
Quyte hym therafter to his mede. *Repay; according to his merits*
And thei that wyll bot lytell do,

Therafter thou quite his mede also.
A grete dede if thou have to done,
At the tone ende thou be ryght sone. *At one end (I.e., Take up a part)*
And if that thou fynd any fawte, *fault*
Amend it sone and tarrye note. *do not delay*
Mych thyng behoven them *Many things*
That gode housold schall kepyn.
Amend thy hous or thou have nede, *before*
For better after thou schall spede.
And if that thy nede be grete,
And in the country corne be stryte, *grain is in short supply*
Make an houswyfe on thyselve: *of yourself*
Thy bred thou bake for houswyfys helthe.
Amonge thi servantys if thou stondyn, *If you stand amidst your servants*
Thy werke it schall be soner done.
To helpe them sone thou sterte,
For many handys make lyght werke.
Bysyde thee if thy neghborys thryve,
Therfor thou make no stryfe,
Bot thanke God of all thi gode
That he send thee to thy fode. *sustenance*
And than thow schall lyve gode lyfe,
And so to be a gode houswyfe.
At es he lyves that awe no dette — *At ease; owes*
It is no les, withouten lette. *It is no lie, without fail*
fol. 8v Syte not to longe uppe at even, *too long awake in the evening*
For drede with ale thou be oversene. *overcome*
Loke thou go to bede bytyme; *early*
Erly to ryse is fysyke fyne. *medicine*
And so thou schall be, my dere chyld,
Be welle dysposed, both meke and myld.
For all ther es may thei not have,
That wyll thryve and ther gode save. *hoard*
And if it thus thee betyde,
That frendys falle thee fro on every syde, *fall [away] from you*
And God fro thee thi chyld take,
Thy wreke onne God do thou not take; *anger*
For thyselve it wyll undo,
And all thes that thee longys to. *these [things] that belong to you*
Many one for ther awne foly
Spyllys themselve unthryftyly. *Ruins; incompetently*
Loke, doughter, no thing thou lese, *waste*
Ne thi housbond thou not desples.
And if thou have a doughter of age,
Pute her sone to maryage;
For meydens thei be lonely,
And no thinge syker therby. *secure*

Borow thou not, if that thou meye,
For dred thi neybour wyll sey naye.
Ne take thou nought to fyrst, *Nor buy anything on credit*
Bot thou be inne more bryste. *therein more damaged*
Make thee not ryche of other mens thyng,
The bolder to spend be on ferthyng. *by one*
Borowyd thing muste nedys go home,
If that thou wyll to heven gone.
When thi servantys have do thi werke,
To pay ther hyre loke thou be smerte, *prompt*
Whether thei byde or thei do wende; *stay or whether they go*
Thus schall thou kepe them ever thi frende.
And thus thi frendys wyll be glade
That thou dispos thee wyslye and sade. *seriously*
Now I have taught thee, my dere doughter,
The same techynge I hade of my modour.
Thinke theron both nyght and dey,
Forgette them not if that thou may. *these lessons*
For a chyld unborne were better
Than be untaught — thus seys the letter. *the book*
Therfor, Allmyghty God inne trone *enthroned*
Spede us all bothe even and morn,
And bryng us to thy hyghe blysse,
That never more fro us schall mysse." *from us shall depart*
AMEN QUOD RATE

fol. 9r **5. SIR ISUMBRAS**

Isombras

Hende in halle and ye schall here *Nobles; if you will hear*
Of elders that beforn us were,
Ther lyves how thei dyde lede.
I schall yow telle a wonder case. *wonderful matter*
Frendys, herkyns how it was: *listen*
Ye schall have heven to mede. *as reward*

I wyll you telle of a knyght
That was both herdy and wyght, *brave; stalwart*
A dughty mone he was; *doughty*
Syr Isombras was his name,
A nobull knyght of ryall fame *excellent reputation*
And stronge in every cas. *circumstance*

He was a feyre man and strong
With schulderes brod and armes longe
That sembly was to se. *pleasant*
He was large man and hyghe, *tall*

All hym loved that hym seyghe, *saw*
So hend a man was he. *noble*

Mynstrels lovyd he welle in halle,
And gafe theme rych robys of paule *fine cloth*
And gyftys of glytering gold.
Of curtassye that knyght was kynge
And of his mete not sparynge; *food*
Ther goth none syche on molde *goes [now] none like him on the earth*

He had the feyreste ladye
That any man myght se with ee, *eye*
Under Oure Lady of heven, *Except for*
And thei hade fayre sones thre;
They were all feyre as thei myght be,
With tonge as I you neven. *as I tell you*

Bot inne hys herte a pride was browght:
Of Godys werkys he goffe ryght noght. *(cared) nothing*
Hys mersye he sette nott byghe. *His (God's); did not consider*
So longe he lyffed inne that pride
That God wold no lenger byde, *delay*
Bot sente hym sorow inne hyghe. *great sorrow*

For it befelle upon a deye
The knyght wente forth for to pleye
Hys feyre foreste to see.
As he lokyd hym besyde on hye,
He herd a byrd synge hym nye *near him*
Hyghe upon a tre.

And seyd, "Abyd, Syr Isombras. *Stay*
Thou haste forgette what thou was *have forgotten*
For pride of gold and gode. *goods*
The Kynge of Heven gretys thee soo; *so*
Yonge other olde thou schalt have woo: *Either in youth or in old age*
Chese thee inne thi mode." *Choose; mind (heart)*

With carfull herte and syghyng sore, *anxious; sighing*
On his kneys he felle doune thore *there*
And both his handys uphelde.
"Werldys welthe I wyll forsake
And to Godys mersye I wylle me take;
To hym my selve I yelde. *surrender*
fol. 9v In youth I may both ryde and goo;
56 When I ame olde I canne not so,
My bones wyll wex unwelde. *become feeble*

Bot, Jhesu, if thi wylle it be,
In youthe poverté thou sende me,
And welthe in myn elde." *old age*

Than the byrde toke hys flyght;
Alon he left that drery knyght *dreary (sorrowful)*
And so fro hym he wente.
When he of that bryd hade no syght,
Hys sted that was so strong and wyght *swift*
Dede under hym was bentte. *Dead; destroyed*

Hys haukys and hys hondys bothe *hounds*
Wente to the wode as thei were wrothe, *crazed*
Iche onne dyverse weye. *Each in various directions*
What wonder was if he were wo?
On fote hymselve he muste go;
To peyn turned hys pley.

As he came by a lytell schawe, *grove*
A lytelle chyld anon he sawe *soon*
Came rydinge hym agene.
Welle wers tydingys he hym tolde, *worse news*
That brynte was all his bygingys bolde, *burnt; buildings*
Hys bestys were all slayn.

"Lord, ther is nowght lefte on lyve
Bot thy chylder and thy wyffe,
The soth I wylle thee seye." *truth*
"Whyle that I may on lyffe se
My wyffe and my chylder thre,
Full glad I ame this deye." *day*

As he went by hymselve alone,
He mette hys herdmen everychon *every one of them*
With a drery chere. *(see note)*
"God that sent me all this wo
Hath sente me joy and blys also,
And yet joy mey I here."

A dolefull syght it was to se
His wyffe and hys chylder thre
That fro the fyre were flede.
Al so naked as thei were borne, *As*
He fownd them sytyng under a thorn *thornbush*
Fled oute of ther bede.