Beware of the Bee: Lollard Women and the
Fifteenth-Century Heresy Trials in the Diocese of
Norwich, England

Kristy Edmonds

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work that has not been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Kristy Edmonds
Abstract

This thesis considers the roles and nature of the participation of women in the Lollard movement of early fifteenth-century England. It examines the experiences, religious beliefs and textual practices of two fifteenth-century lay-women caught up in Bishop Alnwick’s 1428–1431 campaign of prosecutions in the diocese of Norwich.

The historiography of fifteenth-century England and Lollard dissent has, in the most part, failed to consider the involvement of ordinary Lollard women in a comprehensive or meaningful way. For those scholars that have taken an interest, the contributions of ordinary women tend to be regarded as ‘lesser’, ‘secondary’ or ‘marginal’ in comparison to those of their male counterparts. For historians, indicators of the subordinate status and peripheral role played by women derived from their physical and intellectual ties to the home and to feminine and familial-based roles, as well as from their poor literacy and education levels. This study shows that, far from being a source of marginality, inferiority and limitation, ordinary women’s roles in and relationships to feminine and familial and household-based spaces and activities were both an important source of theological meaning and identity, and the means by which Lollard women performed important roles within the movement. This study also challenges ideas about female illiteracy as a sign of women’s relegation to the periphery of Lollard activity.

The primary sources for this thesis are the 1977 publication of documents relating to the trials, translated and edited by Norman P. Tanner, and John Foxe’s 1563 Book of Martyrs, which also provides an account of some of the proceedings. These sources provide a body of material in which the words, beliefs and actions of these Norwich Lollard women and their community, while mediated, may be accessed. Applying techniques of close textual analysis to the primary sources reveals important aspects of the practices and beliefs of the Lollard women. These sources also provide evidence of a level of anxiety and interest held by the Norwich community and its
Orthodox Church leaders, which shaped the textual and religious activities of the women.

This study argues that the nature of the religious participation and textual practices of the two women analysed was intensely experientially based and that it derived meaning and understanding from the everyday, ordinary feminine and familial spaces and roles that the women occupied in the community. The implication of their religious beliefs and activities is that they reveal individuals intimately, directly and personally engaged with Christ and the Bible; deriving and shaping the meaning of both based on their own experiences and understandings of the world. The danger for Orthodox Christianity and Church leaders was that in this independent relationship with Christ and the Bible, the Church no longer had an intermediary role to play.

This thesis contends that the two fifteenth-century female subjects discussed here were not marginal or insignificant. Rather, they made meaningful and valuable contributions to the Lollard movement and to their own religious experiences, and are subjects worthy of greater and more considered historical focus.
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Introduction: Two Fifteenth-Century Lollard Women

Between 1428 and 1430, Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone appeared before the court of the Norwich diocese on charges of heresy. The charges against them stemmed from activities associated with the keeping, use and transportation of illegal religious books, the staging of sometimes women-only conventicles within their homes, the harboiring of known heretics and repeated acts of proselytising within the Norwich community. The proceedings against these two women provide a basis for considering the religious practices and beliefs of those women involved in the Lollard movement of fifteenth-century England. While scholars in the disciplines of both history and literary study have, since the late 1960s, been interested in this topic, meaningful consideration of and sensitivity to the context in which these proceedings occurred, and reflection upon the historical methods for studying ‘illiterate’ women, has been lacking.

At its core, this thesis is a study of women and heresy and how to read the evidentiary material relating to both. Although this particular focus is not new in the field of medieval studies, in considering women’s roles and participation within the heretical movement, this study brings methods and ways of reading the available documents that make sense of Hawisia Mone and Margery Baxter in new ways. Using the central court-related documents produced in relation to the Norwich Lollard trials, this research will deconstruct and refigure what the documents reveal about Lollard women and their religious and textual practices at that time. Source material of the period, particularly relating to ordinary women’s experiences, is scarce. However, by applying the considered and appropriate methodologies and techniques of close textual and historical document analysis to the available sources, female experiences can be revealed, allowing meanings within the documents to be discussed.

By the early fifteenth century, clerical and secular English authorities had adopted a defensive posture towards those individuals, groups or ideologies that opposed them or threatened their continued authority. Building on developments from the
Gregorian Reform movement of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which sought to sharply delineate the distance between laity and clergy,¹ state and ecclesiastical leaders increasingly used the charge of heresy to maintain their authority against the rise of ascetic religions, heterodox religious movements and the growing proliferation of lay confraternities, including the spread of Wycliffe’s teachings.² In 1416 for example, Archbishop Henry Chichele of Canterbury had convocation create important ecclesiastical mechanisms and legislative apparatus for the detection, apprehension and prosecution of religious dissenters. Bishops, archdeacons and commissaries were henceforth to:

‘inquire diligently at least once a year in the rural deaneries about persons suspected of heresy’, paying special attention to ‘secret gatherings and suspect books written in the common language of English’.

Archbishop Chichele’s declaration signalled the beginning of a nation-wide campaign designed to root out and quash religious and social dissidence. By the year 1428, an intensive persecution of Lollardy across the province of Canterbury had begun. The Archbishop himself was said to have ‘ridden for several days and nights hunting down suspects’.⁴ It was also the year when Bishop Fleming of Lincoln had what were thought to be John Wycliffe’s bones dug up, burnt and the ashes thrown into a stream.⁵

In the Canterbury province of Norwich, between September 1428 and March 1431, Bishop William Alnwick of Norwich (d.1449) conducted what the historian Norman P. Tanner described as ‘a determined and unusually well-documented campaign’

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⁵ Ibid.
against heresy and religious non-conformity in his diocese. For Tanner, Hawisia Mone and Margery Baxter stand out in the records of the trials that resulted from this campaign against heresy. Both women, known to each other and each charged with and convicted of heresy, are revealed as active participants and keen contributors to the East Anglian Lollard community. Remaining evidence from their trials attests to their direct and active involvement in dangerous heretical activities including continued acts of proselytising, the operation of prohibited schools of heresy in their homes, relapsed heresy and the hiding of a high-profile ‘outlaw’ Lollard figure within the family home. As Tanner notes, these two defendants ‘were no mere followers of their husbands’. Unfortunately for historians, the glimpses of the women derive from the records of the proceedings of the prosecuting authorities. Further, because of the nature of the court processes involved, the glimpses are almost always ‘tantalizingly brief—mere snapshots’ taken at the time of their court appearances.

Margery Baxter, wife of William Baxter, wright, of Martham in East Norfolk, is one of the women at the centre of this study. She was brought to trial in October 1428. By this time, her husband William had already been convicted as a heretic. She admitted to having transported contraband books belonging to the prominent Lollard teacher William White from Yarmouth and to hiding him and his books in her home for five days. She also admitted to having learned from White the six heretical articles with which she was charged. She abjured her errors and was sentenced to harsh, exemplary penance; four floggings at her parish church on successive Sundays, two more in the market place and to do ‘solemn penance’ with others in the Norwich Cathedral on the next Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday. Just six months later, in April 1429, she was again charged with heresy and brought before Bishop Alnwick. By this time, she and her husband were residing in Norwich. In

8 Tanner, ‘Lollard Women’.
9 Ibid., for details of Margery Baxter.
10 By 1407 it had been declared illegal to possess a Bible translated into English. See Jill C. Havens “As Englishe is comoun langage to oure puple”: The Lollards and Their Imagined “English” Community’, in Kathy Lavezzo (ed.), Imagining a Medieval English Nation, Medieval Cultures, vol. 37, Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 2004, p. 113.
11 Tanner, ‘Lollard Women’.
these proceedings, a record of the deposition made against her by her neighbour, Joan Clyfland, survives. After this no mention of Baxter can be found and it is not known what became of her.

The second woman at the centre of this study is Hawisia Mone, the wife of a prosperous shoemaker, Thomas Mone, of the town of Loddon, south-east of Norwich. Their household was a hub of Lollard activity involving, in addition to themselves, an adult daughter and three men who were, or had been, servants or apprentices to Thomas. Although ‘schools’ of Lollardy were held in the privy chambers of their house in both Thomas and Hawisia’s presence, in her husband’s absence, Hawisia arranged the ritual breaking of the Lenten fast, when she and others ate a meal of pork the day before Easter Sunday. Hawisia was tried and convicted for heresy in August 1430. Her abjuration, which was signed with a cross and set with her seal, took place a fortnight before that of her husband. Her husband, who by 1430 was in frail health, had his punishment suspended.

While this study is largely concerned with Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone, a third woman, Joan Clyfland, plays a significant role in this story and in our understandings of fifteenth-century attitudes towards Lollardy. This is due to the lack of source material available regarding Margery Baxter, with available documents being limited to the deposition of her neighbour, Joan Clyfland, who was a witness against her. Clyfland provides testimony of several heretical acts committed by Baxter. Most significantly she testifies to Baxter having visited her home and, while ‘sitting and sewing by the fire’, having engaged Clyfland and her two teenage servants, Joan Grymle and Agnes Bertham, in a lengthy conversation in an attempt to influence them. Clyfland’s deposition paints for the courts a picture of heretical proselytising and attempted indoctrination occurring among women, within the space of the family home designated for ‘domestic’ household activities such as cooking and sewing, in the absence of Clyfland’s husband.

12 See Ibid., for details of Hawisia Mone.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., for details.
15 Ibid., for details.
16 Ibid., p. 44.
It is unclear whether Joan’s deposition was motivated by genuine concern at what was told to her by Baxter or whether she herself had been a potential Lollard convert or sympathiser who in an act of self-preservation turned informer. Interestingly non-Lollards were rarely used by the prosecuting authorities to accuse individuals of heresy. The accusation and/or evidence of heresy tended to come from those within the movement already charged and convicted of heresy themselves. This makes the deposition of Clyfland, a woman for whom there is no record of ever having being charged with heresy, and who presents herself as an Orthodox Christian, even more interesting to this study.

It is easy to initially dismiss the 1429 statement made by Joan Clyfland to the Norwich courts as the gossippings of an overly nosy neighbour, perhaps prone to concerning herself with the activities of her friends and neighbours. However, the figure of Joan Clyfland and the role she played in the court process is important. Through Joan’s statement to the court the historian has access to the words of someone within the Norwich community who was not a Lollard, a cleric or a community leader. Access is also gained to the comments of an individual who, because of her status and gender, is not typically represented in official records. Her statements are valuable, as it is likely that some of her beliefs, values and concerns were common to, or shared by sections of the Norwich community. The primary difficulty in interpreting Clyfland’s deposition is the question of whether her statements reflect her own beliefs or whether she told the authorities that which she believed they wanted to hear. While it is possible to speculate on the motivation for Clyfland’s deposition, the truth cannot be known. There is no evidence regarding Clyfland’s relationship with the Baxter family or whether she had a personal grudge against Margery Baxter. As such, the extent to which the deposition can be regarded as an accurate account of Margery Baxter’s activities is open to debate. In any case, for the arguments of this thesis, the ‘accuracy’ and ‘truthfulness’ of the deposition has little bearing; it remains an important source. Clyfland’s deposition reveals much about how Lollardy was viewed in her community and her utterances offer an insight

19 See Havens, ‘As Englishe is comoun langage to oure puple’, p. 118.
into some of the beliefs of those living in fifteenth-century Norwich at the time of the prosecutions.

In reading the Clyfland deposition, the central starting position of this study is that our language and words (regardless of their truthfulness) often reveal our dominant anxieties and concerns, or reflect those of the community at the time and place in which they are expressed. In this sense the Clyfland deposition can be approached as a ‘collaborative text’ and Clyfland herself is not regarded as the sole ‘author’ of this text. By this it is simply meant that Joan was part of a community and many of the beliefs and values that she conveys to the courts through her comments are either hers, and are shared by sections of the community, or are those of the authorities who bring her before the courts. When Joan responded to certain questions, her responses were not without motivation and influence and were in part a reflection of the authority’s views towards Lollardy and deviancy. The questions posed by the courts would themselves have reflected what the authorities understood or wanted Lollardy to be. Given the collaborative nature of the deposition, the ideas revealed in it are understood not simply as reflecting Joan’s own fears and values, as these are unknown, but as reflecting a view of Lollardy that existed within sections of the community at that time. This understanding shaped how, where and when Lollard women came to practice their beliefs.

Although the Norwich Heresy proceedings are typically referred to as ‘trials’ (a term that will be used in this research), they are more accurately understood as a series of court proceedings. The documentation from the trials relates to different stages of the various proceedings, including interrogations and examinations of the accused, witness depositions and respondent abjurations. Of those individual accused figures encountered in the documents, some were appearing for examination, perhaps for the first time, whereas others had been charged already and were appearing for final sentencing and abjuration. The documents also include what appear to be draft letters from the Bishop of Norwich to the parish priests of men convicted of heresy concerning their penance.

The trials themselves have long been known from the account of them given by the sixteenth-century chronicler John Foxe in his 1563 book, more commonly referred to
by scholars as *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*, rather than by its much fuller title typical of the period.\(^20\) Foxe’s book, which is concerned with Christian martyrs, English Protestants and proto-Protestants from the fourteenth century through to the reign of Mary I, includes a history of the Lollard and Wycliffite movements. The book contains valuable portions of text, transcribed, and in some places translated, into English from the original manuscripts, many of which have not survived elsewhere. While it is accepted by historians that in the course of translating and transcribing the material John Foxe also edited its content, comparison of his edited passages with those Latin passages still available elsewhere confirms the overall accuracy of his work and supports the use of the additional material available in his book.\(^21\) However, some aspects of Foxe’s translation and editorial process do pose a dilemma. In his translation of Margery Baxter’s reported claim to hold a ‘charter of salvation’, Foxe recorded the charter as residing in her ‘body’ as opposed to her ‘womb’. This may have been an editorial decision reflecting sixteenth-century sensibilities or a difficulty in identifying a suitable vernacular term. The revelation is important to this research and will be discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.

One of Foxe’s sources for evidence of the trials was a manuscript that is now held in the Westminster Diocesan Archives (MS B.2 in Westminster Diocesan Archives). In 1977, using the Westminster manuscript, Tanner published an edited volume of cases that appeared before the Bishop of Norwich. Tanner’s 1977 publication was the first time the manuscript had been comprehensively edited and its contents rearranged chronologically by the court dates involved. The result was a more useable source for historians concerned with fifteenth-century Lollardy. Sadly, somewhere between John Foxe’s transcription of parts of the original source

\(^{20}\) Josiah Pratt (ed.), *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, Vol. 3, London, The Religious Tract Society, 1877. The full title appears also as ‘Actes and Monuments of these latter and perilous days, touching maters of the Church, wherein are comprehended and described the great persecutions and horrible troubles that have been wrought and practised by the Romish prelate, specially in this realm of England and Scotland, from the year of our Lord 1000 unto the time now present; gathered and collected according to the true copies and writings certificatory, as well of the parties themselves that suffered, as also out of the bishops’ registers, which were the doers thereof; by John Foxe’.

manuscript and Tanner’s 1977 work, portions were lost. When this occurred is unknown.

It is widely accepted that the Westminster manuscript was written by a man called John of Exeter, who was Bishop William Alnwick’s registrar and court scribe throughout the trials. He was a notary public and cleric who had served as registrar to several bishops of Norwich, eventually dying a fairly wealthy widower sometime between 1445 and 1447. The manuscript is not taken to be the original minutes or official record of the proceedings, but rather consists of copies of original notations made by John of Exeter sometime after the events they describe. The manuscript was not part of the episcopal register where proceedings of this type were typically found, and neither the trials nor the manuscript are mentioned in the bishop’s register. The manuscript, which in 1881 was bound to several other unconnected manuscripts to form the volume MS B.2 Westminster Diocesan Archives, has folios missing, repeats folios and lacks any apparent order, chronological or otherwise. It is not known how the manuscript came to the Westminster Diocesan Archives other than it was there by 1881. The pages of the manuscript are all paper.

Whereas the Westminster manuscript provides records for only approximately 60 cases (51 men and nine women), John Foxe put the total number of cases heard during the trials at 120, some of which he translated. Foxe’s book includes important material not present in what remains of the existing manuscript and vice versa. In this regard, Foxe’s book can be considered as supplementary to the extant records. In the case of Margery Baxter, the deposition made against her by her neighbour, Joan Clyfland, has been reproduced by both Tanner and Foxe. No record of Hawisia Mone appears in Foxe’s book. The portions of the documents available relating to Mone and Baxter are a brief witness deposition and a slightly briefer abjuration. As was the practice of that period, the documents did not record the proceedings or the statements made verbatim, but were a single piece of third-person narrative penned.

22 Tanner, *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich*, p. 4.
25 Folio 103v and 104r, which relate to Hawisia Mone, is a repetition of the same material. It is not clear why. See Tanner, *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich*, pp. 142–144.
26 Ibid., p. 4.
by the court scribe. In total, the portions of text do not amount to more than several short pages.

With respect to the study of female piety, the period 1100 to 1500 has been the subject of considerable focus by historians. The reasons for this include that, owing to a number of factors, the period saw a great bourgeoning of female piety which in turn provides some of the richest documentation on the subject. The most prolific sources for our understandings of religious women have arguably been contemporary hagiographical texts or vitae about holy women. These texts relied upon male clerics to capture female stories and validate the spiritual authenticity of the subjects. The historian John Coakley and others have noted the extent to which the women involved were reliant upon sympathetic ‘male collaborators’ in the process of writing their stories. In this process the male clerics often ‘exerted a heavy editorial hand’ or even ‘‘ventriloquized’’ the women’s voice in an attempt to authenticate the piety of the subject. This situation makes the documents that are the subject of this study of two religious women even more valuable. Firstly, they capture something of women’s religious experiences of the period but are not of the hagiographic tradition. Secondly, the male cleric behind the documents had a much different relationship to the women involved. As will be discussed further in the following chapters of this thesis, his indifference to the female subjects increases the usefulness of this source when compared to the ‘sympathetic authors’ of female vitae.

To understand the religious beliefs and practices of Baxter and Mone, consideration first needs to be given to the theological framework and religious community in which they operated. That framework was ‘Lollardy’ and the Lollard community of Norwich, East Anglia. According to the historian Richard Rex, the first documented

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29 For these reasons, as outlined, this study does not consider Margery Kempe (c. 1373 – after 1438) or her book; The Book of Margery Kempe, which was written with the use of scribes. Although not typically considered a vitae, the manner in which her book was produced means Kempe is not a subject of this study. First, Margery Kempe did not identify as a Lollard and, second, her book was not produced through or as the result of a court process.
30 Ibid., p. 89.
31 Ibid., p. 90.
indication of Lollardy having reached East Anglia is found in Essex, where there was an abjuration in 1400; John Becket of Pattiswick, for preaching against the veneration of images, sacraments and clerical celibacy. The earliest documentation of heresy in the diocese of Norwich is found in the case against John Edwards, a Lollard chaplain from the Lincoln diocese who recanted on 12 April 1405. However, the real evidence of Lollardy having infiltrated the diocese comes in the 1420s, when the Lollard missionaries William White, John Waddon and Hugh Pye, fleeing Kent, sought refuge in the Norfolk community. Bishop Alnwick, who had come to the bishopric of Norwich in 1426, began the concerted and large-scale process of prosecuting the Lollards in his diocese between September 1428 and March 1431. The process was most concentrated in the months after September 1428 to some point in 1429. During this period, most of the suspects of any significance were rounded up and either brought to judgement immediately by way of either forced abjuration or execution, or safely locked away.

34 William White, a priest from Kent moved to Ludlam to preach dissent. He was thought to have been in East Anglia by 1428, given the royal letters of 6 July 1428 reproduced by Foxe, directing John of Exeter and the keeper of the Colchester Castle to arrest White and two other Lollard suspects. See Aston, ‘William White’s Lollard Followers’, p. 81. Along with his fellow Lollards Hugh Pye and John Waddon, White was executed in Norwich probably on 13 September 1428. See Aston, ‘William White’s Lollard Followers’, p. 81 and Tanner, Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, p. 8. Margery Baxter was present at his execution. White is credited by historians such as Margaret Aston as being the chief source of Lollard thought and teaching in Norwich. He was named as the heretic’s teacher in 16 of the 60 cases in Norwich (Aston, ‘William White’s Lollard Followers’, p. 88).
35 Of the sixty defendants in Norwich for which records survive, 51 were male and only nine were women. See Tanner, Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich. In Drees, Authority and Dissent in the English Church, pp. 182–184, Drees produces a table outlining the prosecutions of heresy and religious non-conformity that took place in Winchester from 1382 to 1546. Although this study does not focus solely on the prosecution of Lollardy, it does provide a fairly clear picture of the nature of the heresy trials at that time. Of the 71 prosecutions made, only seven were of women. See also Shannon McSheffrey, Gender and Heresy: Women and Men in Lollard Communities, 1420–1530, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995. McSheffrey provides a table of the prosecutions for Lollardy from 1380–1530. Of the 955 people suspected of Lollardy, 271 (28 per cent of the total) were women (p. 165). She also notes that:

Generally, the chronology of the cases presented before the courts indicates that ecclesiastical officials saw the heresy of women to be less dangerous than that of men. The example of the prosecution of the Lollards in Essex by Cuthbert Tunstall, Bishop of London, between March and July 1528 shows this clearly. The course of prosecution for men in Essex ran for several months in a geographical pattern. Most women, on the other hand, were brought before the court on a single day (p. 63).

Additionally, Tanner notes that:

The women were sentenced to the same kinds of punishment as the men, but on the whole they seem to have been treated rather more leniently. For example, the sixth person to be sentenced on 18 April 1430 was a woman, and she was ordered two floggings less than each of the five men (Tanner, Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, p. 24).
Most of the accused heretics pleaded guilty to all of the charges brought against them. With this, they would abjure and make a number of oaths to the effect that they would never again hold any heretical opinions or provide assistance to heretics, and would inform the authorities of any heretic they came to know of. They would also swear to solemnly perform the penances they were about to receive. The penances imposed varied significantly, although flogging was the most common punishment, featuring in over half the sentences recorded. The sentence often involved a combination of punishments including flogging, ‘solemn penance’ and fasting. There was usually a visible or ‘public’ aspect to the punishment such as the flogging occurring in the person’s parish church or cemetery on a Sunday during the procession of the parish, or in the market place on a market day. Interestingly, in the last, dying stages of the campaign, when the last recorded defendants appeared, most denied the charges and successfully purged themselves. The punishment for relapsed heresy was execution by burning, which, in Norwich, would have occurred at ‘Lollard Pit’, a site given its name after the executions there of White, Pye and Waddon. It was during the period of intense scrutiny that Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone were brought before the courts. According to some historians, including Richard Rex, Bishop Alnwick’s ‘vigorous prosecutions’ in the 1420s successfully ‘nipped a mass movement in the bud’.

In considering who the Lollards were and what Lollardy was in fifteenth-century England, a useful place to start is with the etymology of some of the terms involved. Although there is dispute among scholars as to the source of the term ‘Lollard’ and whether it emerged from the academic fire of Oxford University or was a term of abuse retroactively applied to dissenters, it is generally understood that the first datable use of the term ‘lollardi’ to refer to Wycliffite followers or descendants occurred in Oxford in 1382. As for the possible origins of the term ‘Lollardy’, the historian Richard Rex wrote that:

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36 Ibid., p. 6.
37 Ibid., p. 22.
38 Ibid., pp. 22–23.
39 Ibid., p. 8.
40 Rex, The Lollards, p. 67.
41 See Wendy Scase, “Heu! quanta desoratio Angliae praestatur”: A Wycliffite Libel and the Naming of Heretics, Oxford 1382’, in Fiona Sommerset, Jill C. Havens and Derrick G. Pitard (eds), Lollards
Catholic scholars in Late Medieval England fancifully traced it to the Latin ‘lolium’, meaning ‘tare’—in Christ’s parable the weed sown among the wheat, interpreted by Medieval exegetes as false teaching disseminated among the true. The *Oxford English Dictionary* more soberly traces its origins to Dutch words for mumbling. In terms of its original connotations, its links to ‘lolling’ the tongue, with its associations of stupidity and incapacity, and the onomatopoeic overtones of what is still obviously, if somewhat obscurely, a pejorative tell us all we need to know at this level.\(^{42}\)

Rex noted that in late medieval England, ‘lollard’ was not a proper noun, but a general one. It meant ‘heretic’ and ‘lollardy’ meant ‘heresy’. To some extent, ‘Lollard’ can be regarded as a general term of abuse, which in itself conveyed no sense of a particular school or sect.\(^{43}\) In his study of the detection of heresy in late Medieval England, Ian Forrest is careful to remind his readers of the legal context in which heresy occurred and which therefore shapes the meanings of the terms involved. He wrote that:

> The historiography and literary scholarship of heresy in medieval England has tended to focus on the beliefs, associations, and writings of the people who, I shall argue, are too uncritically called heretics and lollards. ‘Heresy’ and ‘heretic’ were legal categories of quite a precise nature, as well as being terms of social description, and we should do all we can to understand both usages.\(^{44}\)

Furthermore he notes that ‘the legal category of *heretic* was created only at the moment a suspect was condemned’.\(^{45}\)

In this study, the term ‘Lollard’ is taken to refer to that more coherent group of people who gave the term its primary meaning and general currency. The ‘Lollards’ knew who they were and knew one another. R.G. Davies observed their self-description of ‘known men’, reflecting the notion that the movement was less a matter of what they knew as of who they knew.\(^{46}\)

\(^{42}\) Rex, *The Lollards*, p. xii.

\(^{43}\) Ibid.

\(^{44}\) Forrest, *The Detection of Heresy in Late Medieval England*, p. 2.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., p. 60.

Questions about who the Lollards were, what Lollardy was, or even what they believed, are not simple ones. There is difficulty in using the terms ‘Lollardy’ and ‘the Lollards’ unquestioningly, or discussing them as stable, distinct concepts, as among historians they remain contested. The historian J. Patrick Hornbeck, who has closely engaged with the question of ‘what is a Lollard?’, notes that in the last two decades in particular there have been challenges to the very existence of Lollardy as a discrete phenomenon. For some recent historians, the earlier accounts of Lollardy exaggerated the role that it played in shaping Protestantism and the English Reformation and ‘Lollardy’ itself is viewed as a construction of medieval and Reformation propagandists such as the sixteenth-century Protestant chronicler John Foxe. These later historians argue that there:

may well have been individuals in late medieval England who resisted the theology and practice of institutional Roman Christianity, … but to call them lollards, particularly Lollards with an upper-case L, is to attribute to them far more coherence and significance than they deserve.

Hornbeck argues that the Lollard-label has dominated histories of late medieval English heresy and that its use by medieval Church authorities and earlier historians reflects certain assumptions about the nature of dissent; ‘namely, that heretics believed the same sorts of things and expressed their convictions in highly consistent ways’. The reality of medieval religious non-conformity was far more complex and nuanced than terms like ‘Lollard’ perhaps allow for.

During their trials, the accused heretics historians commonly refer to as Lollards identified themselves using descriptors such as ‘known man’ and ‘son of grace’. This suggests that they did not describe or necessarily think of themselves as Lollards or Wycliffites. When the term Lollard was used during the period, it was usually as a term of abuse directed both by religious nonconformists against their clerical opponents, and by the clerical authorities against dissenters. This has led some to suggest that its ‘semantic range is so wide as to render it highly problematic

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48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 For the purposes of this thesis the term “Orthodoxy” (capitalised) is used as a catch-all term, like “Lollardy”, covering multiple positions.
51 Hornbeck, What is a Lollard?., p. 9.
as an essentialist category’. The question for historians therefore is whether these terms can be used in a meaningful way, without risk of incorrectly creating an impression of a more coherent and uniform religious movement than existed, or of failing to capture the synergies that did exist, and tie ‘known men’ together. Hornbeck acknowledged this conundrum when he wrote that:

Insufficiently qualified, the use of a blanket term like ‘lollardy’ for all inhabitants of the religious margins of late medieval England seems to imply the existence of an organized, centrally governed group of dissenters. But if to retain the conventional use of the categories ‘lollard’ and ‘Wycliffite’ is to engage in serious oversimplification, to jettison those terms is equally unpalatable.

Thus, this represents a serious issue for historians wishing to engage with Lollardy without oversimplifying the complexities and divergences in beliefs, or focussing too greatly on them.

In this study, this issue has been examined and a number of points provide a resolution. Firstly, there are few alternate terms. To discuss those individuals encountered in the Norwich Heresy Trials using generic terms such as ‘heretics’ or ‘dissidents’ is to gloss over the connections and shared beliefs that tied them, at times, to one another as Lollards. It also creates the impression of a uniform ‘heresy’ in the medieval period. The second, and perhaps most important point, is that the individuals on trial in Norwich thought of themselves in a particular way. They spoke of like-minded neighbours with whom they communed, the activities that would bring them together, and how those activities and beliefs distinguished them from the ‘false’ priests and clerics of the Orthodox Christian Church hierarchy and the simple folk who followed them. For:

even though the majority of trial records show that dissenters did not think of themselves as Wycliffites or Lollards, they did think of themselves as part of a group outside the religious mainstream. They were acutely aware of which of their neighbours were and were not of their number.

Whether they were described as Lollards by their prosecutors, thought of themselves as Lollards, or were retrospectively labelled so by historians and propagandist Reformationists, there is much evidence that they were ‘closely bound up with one

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52 Ibid., p. 18.
53 Ibid., pp. 7–8.
54 Ibid., p. 8.
another’. I believe that with the necessary qualifications, the terms ‘Lollard’ and ‘Lollardy’ can, and should be used, as they allow us to recognise and discuss some of the common ideologies, principles and practices that bound together the individuals being considered.

In Norwich, as with other English communities in which Lollardy revealed itself, the ‘known men’ were brought together by a series of broad shared beliefs, common values and a similar view of their world. Historians have identified common tenets or principles that provide some (flexible) parameters to ‘the Lollard ideology’ and ‘the Lollard movement’. However, we still see variations from individual to individual and across geographical locales. The difficulties in discussing Lollard doctrine as doctrine have been noted. Hornbeck recently suggested that many ‘studies of lollardy have often been handicapped by attempts to reduce heresy to a set of theological propositions’. His ‘solution’ was to propose a model for thinking about Lollard ideology. Hornbeck applied Ludwig Wittgenstein’s theory and model of family resemblance to discuss the convergences and deviations between individuals in terms of their views towards the key tenets: salvation, the Eucharist, marriage and sexuality, the priesthood and the papacy. The significance of this approach is that it recognised divergence and commonalities between individuals. It admits to a level of ‘gradation, making it easier for students of lollardy to analyse individuals’ beliefs, the level of their commitment to those beliefs, and the level of their involvements in both dissenting and mainstream communities in terms of sliding scale’. While those within the Lollard movement often had a similar position toward, for example, issues of marriage, there was variation within that view. Generally, Lollards believed that an agreement between two people was sufficient for marriage and that no church ceremony was required. One defendant, however, argued that marriage should be abolished altogether.

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55 Ibid., p. 15.
56 Ibid. Hornbeck applies Ludwig Wittgenstein’s model of ‘family resemblance’ to the similar and divergent beliefs of various Lollards with respect to salvation, the Eucharist, marriage and sexuality, the priesthood and the papacy. The model assists Hornbeck in arguing for ‘subgroups and individual strands of thought within the broader category of lollard dissent’ (p. 14).
58 Ibid.
59 Tanner, Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, p. 91.
Without wishing to be unnecessarily reductive or to over-simplify the shared beliefs common to Lollard movements, this research takes the view that Lollardy, in practice, was a ‘principled rejection’ of Orthodox Christianity and that there were key beliefs linking Lollards to one another. They questioned and/or rejected the sacred role of the priest, clerical celibacy, the sacrament, the Doctrine of Transubstantiation and the consecrated host, the veneration of idols, relics and devotional images, pilgrimage, the Corpus Christi procession, penances, fastings, Lent and indulgences, confession, prayers and masses for the dead, ornate and elaborate rituals including church music, candles, ashes and holy water and miracle plays. A useful observation from Andrew Brown was that the ‘Lollards tend to have been found in places where traditional religion was especially flamboyant or luxuriant, and may thus have been at heart a rejection against the excesses of popular ritualism’.

Some historians have suggested that ‘Lollardy’ was more a social construction than an actual movement of people, and that at a time of social fracture, its function was to bolster Orthodox Christianity via an imagined enemy. Scholars such as David Aers propose that the very existence of the notion of the ‘Lollard’ was essential to the construction of the late medieval Catholic identity. “The Lollard”, in other words, functioned as a scapegoat, whose exclusion and elimination enabled a divided society to experience reconciliation and unity. If, as David Aers suggests, ‘societies are shaped by those they exclude’, then the imagined figure of ‘the Lollard’ as it was understood in fifteenth-century Norwich, served to support and define the mainstream Christian identity. For this study, the imagined figure of the ‘Lollard’ was in a sense exactly that; imagined, and the prosecutorial processes played a significant part in creating that identity. Both ‘heresy’ and ‘Lollardy’ were, to an extent, clerical constructs that existed in the minds of the prosecutors, rather than in the beliefs of the accused. This is not to suggest that there were not groups of nonconformists that operated outside the parameters of Orthodoxy and that were brought together by a shared set of beliefs, but rather to acknowledge that Lollard

60 See Rex, *The Lollards*, pp. 60–61 in particular.
63 Ibid., p. 144.
theology and identity were shaped and, ironically, given coherence and order by the Church authorities that prosecuted it. Rita Copeland notes that:

Lollard doctrine is neither canonical nor systematic … and was not formally codified within the ranks of the movement. Indeed the terms of Lollard doctrine may be said to have been stabilized most by the orthodox prosecutors and inquisitors who from 1382 onward periodically drew up lists of points to be condemned.65

Through court processes such as those that were held in Norwich in the fifteenth century, Lollard doctrine and the Lollard canon was inadvertently documented, codified, prescribed and given some stability by the very authorities attempting to quash its existence.

If ‘Lollardy’ is regarded in part as a social construction that functioned as the ‘Other’ to the Orthodox Christian identity, it is interesting to note the extent to which its construction was along gendered lines. For some scholars of the Lollard movement in fifteenth-century England, there is a link between what the authorities of the day thought, or feared, Lollardy to be, and what they also understood women to characteristically be.66 Some historians have noted the medieval ‘tendency to figure the laity as female in order to align conventional misogyny with apprehensions about lay learning’.67 In a fifteenth-century context, the concept of ‘the Lollard’ was partially a creation of the authorities and ecclesiastical leaders who wished to codify and define the standards for, and identity of, the late medieval Christian. The image of the fifteenth-century Lollard functioned as an ‘Other’ to the orthodox; a corruption or deviation from the standard; that standard being the orthodox clergy-man. In this relationship, the characteristics ascribed to the Lollard and to Lollardy by the fifteenth-century authorities were in direct counter-distinction to those characteristics credited to the orthodox clergy. ‘Lollardy’ was attributed the characteristics of literalism, carnality, excess and vernacularity; characteristics that were, as will be argued in this thesis, also associated with women and femininity at

that time. In opposition to this, the Orthodox Christian standard was given the characteristics of literacy, order, containment, education and the Latinate; characteristics typically attributed to men and masculinity at that time.

Medieval Lollardy’s connection with concepts of ‘the feminine’, or those same characteristics ascribed to women in the fifteenth century, was not owing to women having a greater numeric presence in the movement, or to their being prosecuted more often or more harshly than their male counterparts; neither was the case. Rather, the position taken by some historians, and by this thesis, is that Lollardy itself was regarded in the same terms as were women at that time. Whereas Orthodox Christianity was masculinised through its association with clerical Latin, and the non-feminine and non-familial teaching spaces of universities and schools, Lollardy was associated with the vernacular or lingua materna, the more feminised spaces of the family home and household and unschooled women. The Latin term lingua materna or ‘mother tongue’, used to denote the common tongue, refers to the languages spoken and taught in the home or family, usually by the mother or some other female. Lollardy’s association with the vernacular reflects key features of the belief system and its practice; that is, that the Scripture should be directly available to the laity in their own tongue. Thus, Lollardy was often practised within particular

68 Although here it is argued that Lollardy or the laity in general were conceptually linked to the vernacular, as opposed to Orthodox Christianity, which was linked with the Latinate, it should be emphasised at this early point that this was not an easy or simple distinction. The vernacular, or the use of vernacular texts and discourses, was a feature of Orthodox Christianity as well as some of the heterodox religions at that time. The presence or use of the vernacular was not in and of itself a marker of heresy or non-orthodoxy. For discussions of the vernacular see Alastair Minnis, Translations of Authority in Medieval English Literature: Valuing the Vernacular, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2009. Minnis explores the idea of the vernacular as being more than just a category of language in medieval England. He argues that ‘the vernacular’ was a concept that also encompassed popular practices and beliefs that could either contest or validate those authorised by the Orthodox Church.


70 See Tanner, Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich. Tanner notes that ‘the women were sentenced to the same kinds of punishment as the men, but on the whole they seem to have been treated rather more leniently’, p. 24.

71 While universities were masculinised spaces, we should not infer from this that the familial spaces of the home were therefore feminine spaces. One of the guiding principles of this study is that the private/public dichotomy is a modern construct that plays little role in medieval communities. With this in mind, it is important not to unintentionally substitute private/public spaces with the equally dichotomised masculine/feminine spaces. As we shall see throughout this thesis, particularly in Chapter 7, the family home is difficult for the historian to negotiate.

72 For discussion of the lingua materna or vernacular languages and their relationship to the Latinate, see Kemp, ‘The Lingua Materna’, p. 233); Copeland, ‘Why Women Can’t Read’.
spaces of the home, and often among women. This association also reflects the role that gender played in the construction of concepts of Lollardy and Orthodoxy.

Conceptually and symbolically, Lollards and the laity were regarded as feminine in a fifteenth-century context. Their defining characteristics were in counter-distinction to the clergy and were reducible to the same terms that defined women in relation to men: they were carnal and subordinate to a higher authority. The Lollards and laity, in relation to clergy, occupied the same structural position in discourse as women in relation to men. As Rita Copeland explained:

By association, the laity as a whole is feminized and indeed infantalized by the repressive measures taken against its claims to theological and sacramental self-determination. Laity and women, we recall, occupy the same structural position in discourse. Thus we see that literalism, vernacularity, and laity are all, in metaphysical as well as social-discursive terms, reducible to a common identification with woman. In terms of their discursive order, the laws enacted and theories promulgated against the laity using vernacular Scriptures are no less than laws against feminine textuality, against female reading.73

Through discourses on the nature of Lollardy, the laity and femininity, all three concepts were characterised similarly. This is important when reading the records relating to the Norwich Heresy Trials and interpreting the imagery and language within them later.

Importantly it must be noted that although books, the vernacular languages and so-called ‘domestic’ spaces were important features of Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone’s religiosities and their prosecutions for heresy, these features were not in and of themselves heretical. Scholars have observed the important part that the vernacular languages played in Orthodox preaching and teaching.74 Similarly, there is much evidence of the role of books and book ownership in Orthodox female piety. P.J.P. Goldberg and Norman P. Tanner’s research concerning lay book ownership and wills provides evidence of the presence of devotional literature, including books

written in the vernacular, in Orthodox Christian practice. Furthermore, there is significant recent research concerning the place of ‘domesticity’ in Orthodox female piety. Although owning and reading devotional literature, praying and contemplating God in one’s home and hearing the Word of God in the Mother Tongue were not in and of themselves considered heretical acts, they became so when the literature involved was contraband Lollard literature and the praying and contemplating of God in one’s home gave way to women preaching, teaching and interpreting the Word of God for themselves and for others. It is the latter behaviour which this thesis is especially concerned although it does so noting that these activities could be features of both Orthodox piety and heretical activity.

At the outset to this thesis I indicated that the topic of women and Lollardy was not a new area of historical interest, but that this study would suggest ways of reading the source material that would allow for new understandings of Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone. An integral part of this process is examining how previous historians and scholars have approached and made sense of women and Lollardy; in particular, how they have dealt with the key themes taken up in this thesis. However, before examining how previous scholars have engaged with the key themes, it is worth briefly considering how Lollard women have been viewed generally.

Lollard women have been the subject of varied scholarly attention over the years. Among those to have considered the topic are historians such as Richard Rex, who fails to even ‘see’ or take account of the female Lollards. Then, there are historians such as Margaret Aston, Shannon McSheffrey, Rita Copeland, Ralph Hanna and J. Patrick Hornbeck, who ‘see’ female Lollards, but ultimately regard them as lesser participants that contributed only minimally from the periphery of the movement.

77 See Rex, The Lollards.
Tanner dismisses some of the female Lollards as theologically insignificant participants, perhaps sitting more on the ‘lunatic fringe of Lollardy’. Like others, he reduces their activities and participation to insignificant domestic chatter; at best, quaint, at worst, valueless. Patrick Collinson discounts the theological merit of Lollard conventicles, a common feature in the religious lives of many female Lollards. He describes them as centring more around ‘the idle gossip which might otherwise have accompanied the eating and drinking which was perhaps the chief business on such occasions’.

Within the field, we also find historians such as Ruth Nisse or Fiona Somerset, who view Lollard women as at least having some significance, albeit limited. For Ruth Nisse, Lollard women such as Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone can be regarded as thinking participants who made some worthy contributions to theological understandings and debates within the limited circles in which they operated. Fiona Somerset argues that some female Lollards attained a degree of ‘unusual learning, and even perhaps some limited recognition as instructors of women and children’. Although she too focusses on the limitations of female contributions and argues that, in the end, ‘Lollardy was never a hospitable ground for the growth of extraordinary learning among women’, she does take the important step of giving the contributions of female Lollards some regard and consideration in and of themselves. The viewpoints of Nisse and Somerset are similar to those of historians such as Shannon McSheffrey, Rita Copeland, Ralph Hanna, J. Patrick Hornbeck and Margaret Aston. They recognise and ‘see’ the roles and contributions of female Lollards, but choose to focus on the limitations on their activities, arguing that women’s participation within the Lollard movement was less fulfilling and important than that of their male counterparts.

83 Ibid., p. 248.
One of the principal factors at play in the readings of Lollard women’s influence is the assumption made by historians about the relationships between Lollardy and notions of literacy, books, reading and women. Many recognise that the Lollard movement centred on reading the Bible, book culture, reading activities and literate activities. Jill C. Havens remarked that:

Books were used in many ways: to proselytize, to teach, and to reaffirm the faith of the Lollards. And books, more importantly, became the vehicle through which Lollard communities defined themselves both for their adherents and their opponents.85

This dependence on, and centrality of, book culture and practices associated with books within Lollard communities raises the complicated issue for historians of how uneducated, illiterate women could have participated within the movement. Logic suggests that at best their participation would have been peripheral rather than central, supportive rather than active, with women taking the role of student rather than teacher, or spectator rather than participant. This gives rise to the question of the value of studying women and heresy at all. In this thesis it is argued that, despite Lollard women’s numerically minor status within the movement, and despite the seeming limitations of gender roles available to women, they did participate, and it is the nature of this participation with which we should be concerned.

This brings us to the key themes of this study and previous historians’ treatment of them. A feature of many histories associated with fifteenth-century English heresy has been a focus on the comparative roles of women within the Lollard movement. More often than not, histories have assessed Lollard women’s standing and influence within the movement in terms of ideas about literacy and family, and how these affected women’s participation. The second area of focus for historians relates to medieval court processes and the production of documentation relating to these. Interest in fifteenth-century court processes is an area of increasing attention for historians and raises important questions about historical methodologies and techniques. Although the historiography of these two themes will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter, here it is worthwhile to briefly outline the key issues to be articulated in this thesis, and to indicate where this research is positioned in the field in relation to others.

85 Havens, ‘As Englishe is comoun langage to oure puple’, p. 112.
Women’s roles in fifteenth-century Lollard theology and hermeneutics have been considered by the historians Shannon McSheffrey, Rita Copeland, Ralph Hanna and Margaret Aston; often with a focus on the key areas of literacy and family. These areas often attract the focus of historians interested in understanding and evaluating the status and contributions of women within the heretical movement, as they appear to frame women’s religious and social existence at this time. More than this however, the historians identified above regard these concepts as factors that significantly restricted the possibilities for women to equally and actively participate in the Lollard movement. They argue that because women were typically unable to independently read or write, and were for the most part physically, intellectually and economically ‘tied’ to the home and to roles associated with the family, the possibilities for theologically meaningful and active participation in the movement were limited.

While this observation of the dominance of these two concepts in Lollard women’s religious lives is largely correct, issues arise when historians view these concepts through a modern-day lens, claiming them as sources of women’s subjugation and the cause of an inability on the part of women to operate on an equal footing with their male counterparts within the movement. Issues of literacy and family are regarded by the historians identified as factors that denied female Lollards the possibility of meaningful and active participation within the movement and sophisticated understandings of its theology. For this thesis, however, while literacy and family were dominant themes in the religious practices of most Lollard women, it does not automatically follow that these factors were adverse, or somehow lessened the contributions of Lollard women.

Just as there is significant historiographical interest in the role of women in the Lollard movement, so too are historians and literary theorists now querying how to use court-produced documents as historical sources. For historians including Theresa

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87 For an example of this situation see Aston, ‘William White’s Lollard Followers’.
88 See Ibid.
D. Kemp, Steven Justice, M.T. Clanchy and Rita Copeland, the administrative and legal processes behind the production of court documents are important to their explorations of fifteenth-century Norwich Lollardy. Although court documents have always been considered a valuable source of information, historians are increasingly concerned with how to appropriately read and interpret them. More recently, the tendency has been for historians to move away from simply regarding court-related documents as empirical and neutral sources of historical information. Instead, with the greater influence of contemporary literary theory, many historians are now warming to the possibility of regarding court documents as literary texts in their own right.\(^89\) Prior to the last 15 to 20 years, there was reluctance among historians to engage with court documents in this way. However, with the idea of court documents as neutral and transparent increasingly being abandoned, it is now possible for the historian to approach these ‘texts’ as texts, to be subjected to the same intellectual scrutiny as any other text. However, as the historiography of recent decades shows, the reading of court documents, even when reading them as ‘texts’, is still an inherently problematic venture. These issues will be considered further in the next chapter.

The purpose of this research is, firstly, to ‘see’ the presence of Lollard women such as Mone and Baxter in the Lollard movement of fifteenth-century Norwich. In this way, this study distinguishes itself from previous histories. Secondly, this research will avoid measuring the nature and worthiness of that participation against a modern set of values. Unlike earlier historians who have recognised the presence of women in the movement but have then evaluated the worthiness of that presence with an uncritical modern eye and fallen back on focussing on the limitations of female participation, this research will consider women’s relationships with books and their textual activities, as well as their familial and household-based activities, not as indicators of their subjugation and secondary status, but as the spaces in which they legitimately, meaningfully and actively operated. It was in these spaces and through these activities that they developed powerfully feminine and familial-based religious beliefs and practices that allowed for intimate and direct engagement with Christ. This thesis will argue that the activities and beliefs of these ordinary women, though


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sometimes differing to those of their male counterparts, are worthy and should be taken seriously as a subject of intellectual history.

This thesis will argue that the utterances of Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone, recorded in the court-related documents, cannot be discounted as theologically worthless chatter or ‘the domestic talk of enthusiastic women’. They represent a moment in history when these individuals encountered an oppressive Church rule that sought to maintain its own linguistic and hermeneutical hegemony. Each woman’s individual religious practices represent an inherent challenge to the patriarchal Church because of the feminine and family-based theology they were teaching and living. Their individual theologies were experiential and practical, grounded in notions of the family and feminine household-bound roles. In this regard, they represented specifically feminine textual practices and ways of interpreting and engaging with Scripture. These practices threatened to disrupt the prescribed relationships between the Church, parishioners, God and the Scriptures. The nature of their religious participation and textual activities were intensely experientially based and generated meaning and understanding from the everyday, ordinary, feminine spaces, roles and activities they occupied and performed in the community. The significance of their religious beliefs and conduct is that they reveal individual women intimately, directly and personally engaging with Christ and the Bible, and deriving and shaping meaning of both based on their own views and experiences of the world.

This thesis will examine Hawisia Mone and Margery Baxter at the moment when their religious and book-related activities came into direct legal conflict with the Church fathers. What is of interest is what these moments of conflict reveal about the belief systems of the two women and the nature of their involvement within the Lollard movement. The starting point for this is the court-related documents that emerged from the 1428–1431 Norwich Heresy Trials. Unfortunately for this study, and for others like it, medieval court-related and court-produced documents of any sort present the historian with a series of theoretical and methodological challenges to negotiate. These challenges centre on reading, understanding and giving accurate

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meaning to the records of fifteenth-century legal testimonies almost six centuries after they were first created. The nature of late medieval court proceedings and the processes of document production and authoring raise questions for historians about the validity and reliability of court documents as sources of evidence. This leads to another key concern of this thesis; finding techniques, methods and ways of reading the available documents in all their complexities, ambiguities and areas of contention, that reveal aspects of Baxter and Mone’s lives and experiences not previously revealed.

The method used in this research is in response to the nature of the source material involved and the subjects concerned. The process for analysing and interpreting the court-related documents concerning Baxter and Mone will take account of the ways in which other historians have approached such documents and the difficulties they have encountered. However, primarily, this thesis will adopt techniques of close textual analysis associated with microhistory and ethnography, and apply them to the question of the participation of the two women within the Lollard movement of Norwich. The techniques themselves are not new, they have been used in other fields of historical study, but they have not yet been applied to the examination of fifteenth-century female Lollards in an illuminating way.

The evidentiary material used in this thesis, by its nature, has certain associated limitations. Firstly, there is a paucity of source material for fifteenth-century England, the Norwich Heresy Trials of that period, and women’s experiences within both. Secondly, the source material that does exist, while invaluable, is challenging. The records that remain were produced by the prosecuting authorities and are few in number. The records that survive in relation to the prosecutions of Baxter and Mone total no more than a few pages. Owing to these factors, techniques of close textual analysis, as used in the microhistoric and ethnographic traditions, have been applied in this thesis. These techniques broadly include supplementing the ‘gaps in the story’ with secondary and primary source material of, or appropriate to, the period, and present-day commentary. Where important information is incomplete or is not available from the records, this thesis will look to other source material applicable to the period. The methodology of this thesis, and the analytical tools used, will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two.
Another broad technique used relates to accurately and meaningfully interpreting the evidentiary material that is available. To do this, this thesis will closely analyse the extant documents, identifying key thematic clusters of language and imagery, before turning to both secondary and primary sources for clues about what that language and imagery meant in a fifteenth-century context. This involves dissecting each primary source document into individual words and phrases which are then individually assessed and grouped along with other words or phrases that either relate to the same or similar idea or use the same language or imagery. The purpose of this process is to identify particular patterns of language and imagery and what emerges from it is a series of themes or thematic ideas common to the documents. The assumption for this process is that these themes are significant and provide a means by which to further explore and understand the significance and meaning of the documents. The themes provide the basis and the organising framework for this research and the resulting thesis. Consequently, this thesis is heavily dependent on a diverse range of sources of the period and on secondary sources to supplement and make sense of the core court-related documents. Careful use of the techniques of close textual analysis will allow every word captured in the court-related records central to this research to be considered within the confines of the cultural understandings of the time. An important feature of this approach is that the source material is analysed and considered with a sense of what the words and images possibly meant at the time they were uttered.

The goal of this study is to consider the documents of the Lollard trials of fifteenth-century England in terms of the feminised and familial belief systems that they reveal. Using the documents, it will be shown that the female lay-Lollards of Norwich took the practice of hermeneutics out of Church-sanctioned spaces into the familial space of the home and the community. They took the transmission of doctrine away from Latin textual culture into the more community and bodily based culture of the laity. They took the discourse of religion away from the Latin fathers and gave it to the mother tongue, and they argued that understandings of God did not come from the mystical and mystifying utterances of the Latinate clerics, but instead from the ordinary, the experiential and the familial. Rather than accepting the historian Ralph Hanna’s claim that Lollard women’s literary patronage was at best ‘a
shadow second, an attenuated version of a more fully fledged masculine realm of activity’, or Margaret Aston’s already noted dismissal of women’s textual activities as ‘the domestic talk of enthusiastic women’, by using the available court-related documents, this thesis will take the two central concepts of literacy and family, explored often by historians, and challenge the position that they are the source of women’s subordination and secondary status in a religious context. Rather than regarding Lollard women’s social, economic and physical ties to the home and familial household-based roles, and their inability to independently access and read Lollard texts for themselves, as an indication of, and reason for, their peripheral and secondary status within the movement, viewing the concepts of family and literacy differently will open the way up for new understandings of Baxter and Mone. Using the experiences of the Norwich Lollard women, it will be shown that far from limiting, reducing and confining their religious practices and roles, for Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone, their experiences of literacy and family were enabling. These concepts framed, defined and gave possibility and genuine meaning to their religious experiences.

This thesis is presented in two parts. The first part is concerned with the historiography of fifteenth-century Lollard women, with a particular focus on the methods used by historians in this area. It will consider how to best engage with the court-related documents of the Norwich Heresy Trials in ways that reveal the words of the Norwich Lollard women. It considers medieval gender roles, in particular as they related to notions of literacy and family, and fifteenth-century court processes and record production. The second part is divided into a series of thematically based chapters that explore the language and imagery of the court records. In analysing these, a combination of sources of the period and contemporary commentary will be relied upon. These chapters each have a common approach in so far as they are concerned with exploring a thematic cluster. However, the approach taken to exploring the cluster in each chapter will be different, as the source material available for each varies. At times, these chapters will rely on contemporary commentary, at others, on appropriate contextual sources of the period.

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Chapter One will critically examine some of the ways in which Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone’s roles in the Norwich Heresy Trials and the Lollard community in Norwich have been viewed. The purpose is to demonstrate that there is a gap, both in the history of the topic and in our understandings of the role of women in the fifteenth-century Lollard movement of Norwich. The reasons for the gap include the methodologies used and the approaches to document analysis taken by historians, as well as the assumptions made about literacy and female gender roles.

Using some of the techniques of document analysis associated with ethnography and microhistory, Chapter Two closely analyses the primary source material. This analysis reveals four thematic language and imagery clusters. These clusters provide the focal points for the rest of this thesis. Importantly, the clusters set out a broad contextual scene in which the documents and the utterances of the fifteenth-century women can be viewed and give us a picture of their beliefs and practices.

Chapter Three relates to the first thematic cluster evident in the language and imagery of the court-related documents of the Norwich Heresy Trials: the notion of impending danger and God’s wrath. In exploring this thematic cluster, this chapter considers two ideas: the repeated images and language of death, decay, violence, and God’s vengeance, and the images of corruption and Church leaders fleeing. These will be considered in the context of the fourteenth-century Black Death and the effect the events had on the standing of the Church in medieval society. Using fourteenth-century art and literature—in particular, their representations of death—this chapter will argue that the events of the fourteenth century provided the language and imagery for Lollard thinking and the discourse of dissent. This chapter will also consider how the figure of Thomas Becket, the slain Archbishop of Canterbury, was used to articulate dissatisfaction with the Church. The focus of this chapter will be on the long-term contextual issues that influenced the fifteenth-century heresy trials.

Chapters Four through Six focus on the idea that words, books, utterances and texts were important to medieval people, but that their meanings were complex and different to those of a modern-day audience. In these chapters, it is argued that the
Norwich Heresy Trials centred on issues of who could access the Word of God. Here, concepts of ‘the Word’ are important and bear further analysis. Together, these three chapters explore some of these meanings. They consider fifteenth-century understandings of words generally, but also words as utterance, book or print.

Chapter Four is concerned with the second thematic cluster: the concept of dangerous and unregulated words and the notion of their misuse. It explores the significance of words to medieval people, and focusses in particular on concepts of language and words as uttered or voiced. To achieve this, the chapter examines the imagery of the ‘bee’ and the ‘tongue’ in terms of what they reveal about fifteenth-century attitudes towards women’s voices. Using diverse medieval sources, this chapter also considers the images of the ‘rose’, the ‘Siren’ and ‘Eve’, which all similarly attest to a particular attitude towards women, their words, language and voices, demonstrating that it is this attitude that is at play and, in part, fuels the prosecution of particular feminine religious practices.

Chapters Five and Six engage with the third thematic language cluster: the presence of literate mentalities and practices, and the increasing place of the written and printed word. Chapter Five, like Chapter Four, deals with the medieval interest in, and concern with, the intersection between words, language and linguistic deviancy, but pays particular attention to concepts of the written and/or printed word. The sources of evidence for this chapter include medieval images and narratives of the figure of Tutivillus; the recording demon, and the documents relating to the trial of the Lollard, Walter Brut.

Chapter Six examines the intersection between medieval images of Christ—in particular, the crucified Christ—and those of ‘the book’. Using a range of sources of the period, including religious moral plays, poetry, artistic representations and religious treatises, this chapter firstly examines ideas of Christ’s crucified body as a book, to reveal certain medieval attitudes towards words, texts, physicality and book. With the motif established, this chapter will then consider its significance to understandings of certain Lollard activities involving books and Margery Baxter’s reported claim to hold a ‘charter of salvation’ in her womb.
Finally, Chapter Seven is concerned with the fourth thematic cluster: the notion of certain medieval spaces being misused and their purpose violated. It considers issues of ‘space’ and the implications of fifteenth-century individuals and families electing to preach and hear the Word of God, not in a sanctified and authorised Church, but rather in particular spaces of the family home. The religious activities of Lollard women such as Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone will be examined in terms of how certain actions and discourses are given meaning according to the physical, metaphorical and metaphysical spaces in which they occur. The arguments of this chapter rely heavily on present-day commentary due to a lack of source material of the period relating to these ideas.
Chapter One: Historiography of Methodologies

Since the late 1960s, historians and literary theorists have taken an interest in reconstructing the religious and social lives of ordinary inhabitants of late medieval English communities. Of particular interest to historians have been the participants in heterodox religious movements such as Lollardy. Despite the welcome growth in studies of medieval piety and lay religious practice, it has been noted recently by the historian Robert Lutton that this growth ‘has been accompanied by a considerable degree of theoretical naivety and absence of reflection on method’. Meaningful consideration of the theories, techniques and methods that underpin analysis and reconstruction of these communities is lacking. Lutton offers ‘a provocation to fellow practitioners to develop more sensitive ways of working with notoriously difficult source material’. Lutton begins in much the same way as this thesis; that is, by firstly acknowledging the acute absence of attention to methodologies within the field, and secondly, by ‘critically examining past approaches in order to suggest ways to address more adequately the theoretical and methodological problems that beset the study of piety’.

The historian Gabrielle Spiegel, when writing of the shifting trends in critical thinking towards historical and literary theory, noted that, largely as a consequence of poststructuralist influence:

one thing is clear: the paradigms that have governed historical and literary study since the nineteenth century no longer hold unquestioned sway. The confident, humanist belief that a rational, ‘objective’ investigation of the past permits us to recover ‘authentic’ meanings in historical texts has come under severe attack in postmodernist critical debate.

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1 Some of these writers include Norman P. Tanner, Richard Rex, Andrew Brown, Margaret Aston, Patricia Crawford, P.J.P. Goldberg, Shannon McSheffrey, K.B. McFarlane and Ralph Hanna III.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
With this critique of history, postmodern historians have turned from ‘reality’ to language as ‘the constitutive agent of human consciousness and the social production of meaning’. For the postmodern historian, ‘texts represent situated uses of language’. Although Spiegel is ultimately dismissive of the postmodernist agenda, she notes that for the postmodernist:

All texts occupy determinate social spaces, both as products of the social world of the authors and as textual agents at work in that world, with which they entertain often complex and contestatory relations. In that sense, texts both mirror and generate social realities, and are constituted by and constitute the social and discursive formations which they may sustain, resist, contest, or seek to transform, depending on the case at hand.

The postmodern position towards critical thinking and historical practices foregrounds the centrality of language and texts. This idea is important for this study.

Issues associated with reading court-related documents, and the language contained within them, are at the centre of this study. As such, it becomes necessary to examine how other historians have, or have not, applied the techniques of contemporary literary theory and historical criticism to these sorts of source material. Given that this research is dependent upon interpreting the documents that came out of the Norwich Heresy Trials of 1428–1431, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the various methods adopted by scholars in the area of historical document analysis in dealing with these types of sources. Consideration will be given to some of the areas where slippage has occurred in these histories. Central to this chapter is the concept of reading ‘documents’ as ‘texts’ and examining the part that language plays in the construction of that text and that world. This chapter will show that language does not just reflect the world it captures in words and documents; it is constitutive of that world. That is, language creates meaning, and by extension, that world. Therefore, for the historian wishing to capture aspects of that world, its language and texts are crucial and represent a useful entry point. By exploring the approaches taken by other historians in response to the principal sources, it will be argued that the fifteenth-century materials available to the historian need to be approached as

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6 Ibid.
7 La Capra, Rethinking Intellectual History, p. 49.
‘literary texts’ rather than as neutral historical documents in order for their meanings to be fully understood.

This chapter has two main areas of focus. Firstly, it explores the 1428–1431 court-produced documents that form the evidentiary basis of this study and discusses how historians can read these texts. Particular attention will be given to the role of the court scribe, John of Exeter, and the institutional processes of examination at play in the production of these texts, including the role of the accused figure in the process. This chapter will also consider how historians have come to understand the documents and the words contained within them. It will examine the various interpretations placed by historians on Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone using the documents. It will be demonstrated that, by adopting more historically appropriate methodologies and processes of interpretation, an experientially based, feminised and familial book culture and religious practice, exemplified by Hawisia Mone and Margery Baxter, can be seen in the texts. In this way, the key questions and methods of this study will be established.

The intellectual historian, Dominick La Capra, articulates some of the main methodological tensions to be discussed in this chapter. Although he does not focus specifically on medieval history or the particular problems associated with reading documents related to court processes, his work reveals many of the areas of theoretical slippage associated with trying to give meaning to any complex historical text. La Capra suggests that ‘the historical profession today’ is consumed by ‘excessively reductive modes of interpretation’. He argues that ‘the primary form of reduction … arises from the dominance of a documentary conception of historical understanding’. This ‘documentary conception of historical understanding’ among intellectual historians, for La Capra, reveals itself in the way that they academically approach texts as historical ‘documents’, as opposed to historical ‘works’ or ‘texts’. La Capra observes that, as historians, ‘we usually refer to The Brothers Karamazov and the Phenomenology of Mind as works, and to a tax roll, a will, and

9 La Capra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*, p. 25.
the register of an inquisition as documents’. Problematically, such a distinction tends to frame ‘documents’ in terms of corresponding notions of neutrality and empiricism. The ‘document’ becomes situated ‘in terms of factual or literal dimensions involving reference to empirical reality and conveying information about it’. La Capra disrupts the common distinction made between documents and texts, and suggests that items such as wills, tax rolls and registers of Inquisitions need to be subject to the same intellectual scrutiny as any historical ‘text’. He suggests that if, as historians, we ignore the socio-political nature of these ‘documents’, if we read them as neutral and unproblematic sources of information rather than as literary constructions, the very meanings of the documents are destroyed.

This study approaches the court-related documents to emerge from the Norwich Heresy Trials, not solely as sources of information for reconstructing fifteenth-century English society, but also as literary texts shaped by the politics and contested power relations of that period. Reflecting the postmodernist notion of a ‘language-model epistemology’, this thesis argues that language should be ‘viewed not as a reflection of the world it captures in words, but as constitutive of that world; as generative rather than mimetic’. La Capra argues that such an understanding of documents and language:

has at least two implications that mitigate the opposition between the historical agent and the historian. First, it attests to the ways historical agents themselves are involved in attempts to make sense—or to explore the limits of sense making—in their texts or other historical acts. … Second, it questions historians’ rights to the position of omniscient narrators.

Using La Capra’s arguments, the court-produced ‘texts’ of the Norwich Heresy Trials can be regarded as historical texts needing to be subjected to the same intellectual scrutiny as other such materials. Further, with this view, the part played by historical agents in their construction is taken into account.

Before moving to a discussion of method it is necessary to briefly consider the legal and procedural context in which the Norwich Heresy Trials took place. That context

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12 *Ibid*.
includes the practices and procedures associated with medieval canon law and the ecclesiastical or canonical courts of fifteenth-century England. Scholars including James A. Brundage, R.H. Helmholz, R.N. Swanson and Joel T. Rosenthal consider this context in their respective works which in turn provide a basis of understanding for this thesis.¹⁵ Similarly Ian Forrest provides a detailed account and analysis of the detection and management of heresy in late medieval England within the context of medieval canon law.¹⁶

Canon law was a complex and comprehensive legal system central to the authority, operations and domination of the medieval Christian Church. Its influence permeated and jurisdiction extended across the entire medieval social order.¹⁷ Local canonical courts, sometimes called Courts Christian, operated in every diocese throughout Western Christendom exercising jurisdiction over matters of marriage, divorce, wills, testaments, property, taxes and disputes as well as allegations of heresy, blasphemy and sacrilege. Their jurisdiction extended to civil, criminal, commercial, clerical and lay matters alike. There were two primary ways by which matters came before these courts. First, the ‘so-called “office” cases, initiated by the church’s own actions (often following local investigations and denunciations), and brought by the holder of the jurisdiction *ex officio*.¹⁸ These might be considered somewhat equivalent to criminal prosecutions. The second was the ‘instance’ business which was similar to civil cases insofar as they involved cases with a defendant accused by (‘*ad instanciam*’) a plaintiff.¹⁹ As with Swanson, Brundage notes that:

Matters involving heresy, blasphemy and sacrilege fell naturally under canonical jurisdiction, although ecclesiastical judges usually called upon secular officials to carry out the punishment of convicted heretics when

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¹⁶ See Forrest, *The Detection of Heresy in Late Medieval England*.


¹⁸ Swanson, *Church and Society in Late Medieval England*, p. 163.

¹⁹ Ibid.
that entailed corporal penalties, such as branding, mutilation, or execution, in which the law forbade clerics to participate.\(^{20}\)

Although significant, office cases were not the chief business of the courts. It was instance business that dominated the church courts, that is, matters of debt, defamation and matrimony.\(^{21}\)

Whereas canonical courts of the twelfth century remained fairly localised and lacked administrative order and bureaucratic systems, after the twelfth century this was replaced with increasingly complex, sophisticated and professionalised bureaucratic legal procedures and systems. Bishops often delegated their judicial duties to specialists formally trained in the law. By the end of the thirteenth century bishops’ households in some dioceses included judge-delegates, teams of clerks who produced and copied documents, notaries who drafted and produced legal documents, a registrar who managed workflow and the judicial calender, bailiffs and examiners.\(^{22}\) Brundage notes that the informal procedures that characterised actions heard by bishops prior to the twelfth century ‘gave way between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries to processes that bristled with technicalities and required the skills of an increasingly professionalized body of legal experts’.\(^{23}\)

Brundage also notes that owing to those reformers who occupied the papal throne from the eleventh century onwards, there was within canon law and the system of canonical courts a more aggressive and vigorous approach to offenders against orthodox belief and behaviour. Specifically:

Bishops and other prelates, the reformers believed, should seek out offenders against orthodox belief and behaviour. Once detected, offenders ought to be put on public trial for their misdeeds and, when convicted, their punishment should likewise be public and ferocious enough to make other potential offenders think twice before imitating the miscreants.\(^{24}\)

As such, both Brundage and Swanson note that there were a range of penalties available to the judge.

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\(^{21}\) Swanson, *Church and Society in Late Medieval England*, p. 166.


\(^{23}\) Ibid., p. 153.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., p. 151.
The list included coercive penalties such as excommunication, interdict, or suspension from office. These were designed primarily to bring pressure on the miscreant to comply with the law and make his peace with church authorities. Retributive penalties, such as fines, restitution of ill-gotten gains, deposition from office, degradation from clerical status, confinement in a monastery, or other types of imprisonment deprived the guilty party of status, income, or freedom as punishment for his misdeeds. Purgative penalties, such as pilgrimages, the donning of penitent’s garb, participation in processions, the public offering of gifts to repair damages, ritual flogging, fasts, and abstinence from meat, wine, or sex for prescribed periods served to humiliate the penitent while at the same time they purified him of the guilt he had incurred.25

The most serious canonical crimes, especially heresy, could attract ‘relaxation to the secular arm’ whereby the defendant was handed over to the civil authorities to impose penalties such as branding or execution.26

Ian Forrest notes that the task of detecting heresy was far from simple not only because it was a largely hidden crime, often occurring in secret, but because of the ‘dangers associated with the involvement of the laity in its prosecution, since the qualities of zeal and discernment required for the detection of heresy were only a short step away from the religious enthusiasm and unauthorized interpretation that characterized the … heresy itself’.27 The task itself was also complicated by the fact that it occurred in the complex framework of canon law. In this framework responsibility for dealing with heresy fell across a number of jurisdictions and the task itself required a multi-faceted response. Although ‘deviation from the faith and disobedience to the church was primarily a concern of canon law, represented by the papal law books containing decrees and decretals, and the commentaries upon them’, canon law was broader than this.28 In additional to papal decrees, the discipline and practice of canon law included provincial and diocesan statutes. Noting that heresy cases were typically heard and judged within provinces and dioceses by archbishops and bishops, as indicated by the phrase ‘ordinary jurisdiction’, within this context archbishops and bishops were able to promulgate their own legislation. Additionally, specially designated and authorised inquisitors were able to exercise their own jurisdiction with respect to heresy within and across dioceses. ‘Despite the obvious

spiritual nature of the crime, heresy was an offence that secular authority, in this case the English crown, had a duty to resist, as protector of the church and guarantor of peace between men. 29

The prosecution of heresy can be regarded as having four stages: detection, arrest, trial, and punishment. In this model, which Forrest suggests fits most anti-heresy campaigns from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries, the Church oversaw the detection of heresy, the secular arm arrested suspects and handed them over to the Church for trial, and, depending on the outcome, was responsible for their punishment. 30

It has already been noted that with respect to the prosecution of Lollardy, it was unusual for accusations to have come from non-Lollards. Instead, the accusations/evidence tended to come from those within the movement already charged and convicted of heresy themselves. With respect to heresy generally, in the canon law model, the archbishop, bishop or inquisitor could commence proceedings against heretics by accusation, denunciation or inquisition.

Accusation and denunciation were modes of instance procedure that is cases brought by private individuals or corporate bodies, while inquisition, a procedure developed in the twelfth century as part of a shift towards a more proactive jurisprudence, was instigated by a judge and was known as an ex officio procedure. The manner in which crimes were reported varied according to the procedure being used. 31

An accusation required a written statement by a named accuser alleging that someone had committed an offence. The accuser needed to provide sufficient proof of the offence by two credible witnesses or else risked bring punished themselves for the offence. Denunciation allowed for an accusation to be made by an anonymous accuser and was a process that accepted unwritten reports, but the same standard of proof applied. Further the accuser was expected to offer ‘fraternal admonition’ to the accused before reporting them to a judge. 32 The process of commencing inquisition differed:

[I]t was begun by a judge and the burden of proof was public rather than private, reports could be anonymous and unwritten, no prior admonition

29 Ibid., p. 28.
30 Ibid., pp. 32-33.
31 Ibid., p. 69.
32 See Ibid., pp. 69-70.
was required, and the witness had only to report a suspicion rather than
verifiable evidence. The problem for the historian is that unlike
procedure by accusation, the notary recordings reports made in response
to an inquisition was only required to write down what was useful to the
case … this meant that detection was often not described in any detail.33

Forrest notes that although inquisition was not the only method for the prosecution
of heresy, with respect to late medieval England, it became the favoured method.34

Before turning to the key documents with which this study is concerned, it is
important to briefly note the kinds of documentation typically associated with the
processes just described. These include bishop’s registers and court-books. The main
sources for the study of the prosecution of medieval heresy are the records produced
by ecclesiastical investigators, usually bishops, their staff or specially appointed
inquisitors. The bulk of this sort of documentation is found in surviving bishop’s
registers. These were registers compiled either during or at the end of the
administrative term of a particular bishop. They are collections of incoming and
outgoing correspondence, mandates and statutes and can be considered copies of
original instructions and communications. Importantly, because their purpose was to
function as a bureaucratic record preserving important details of a bishop’s
administrative term, they are often compilations of a number of related records or
abbreviations of the original record. Unlike bishop’s registers, few court-books
survive. Court-books served to record the proceedings and decisions of particular
court processes and, unlike registers, were often destroyed as soon as the process
they related to was complete and the information they recorded was no longer being
used.35

For historians concerned with Lollardy and heresy of the fifteenth century, the
collection of depositions, abjurations and recantations from the heresy trials in the
diocese of Norwich, edited by Norman P. Tanner, has been both a God-send and a
curse. On the one hand, they record important parts of the legal proceedings taken
against 51 men and nine women prosecuted for heresy in this prosperous and
influential diocese in East Anglia. Tanner was not over-stating the point when he
suggested that ‘it is perhaps the most important record of heresy trials in the British

33 Ibid., pp. 69-70.
34 Ibid., p. 70.
35 See ibid., pp. 3-6 for details about bishop’s registers and court books.
Isles before the Reformation’. If one considers that the short, yet systematic, persecution of Lollardy at this time represented an important ideological and legal move to enforce orthodox hermeneutics, then these documents allow access to community and institutional attitudes towards the laity’s reading of Scripture and their seditious textual and religious practices. The documents provide access to some of the beliefs and testimonies of the accused Lollards themselves. However, historians do not fully understand these documents, and their meaning continues to be argued. The collection of documents is incomplete, messy, unsystematic and without a clear purpose. For the historian, their ‘messiness’ and ‘unofficialness’ can be regarded as both a limitation and a source of opportunity. Interestingly, they did not derive from the Bishop’s episcopal register, where documents of this kind would usually be found. Tanner suggested that the collection of documents is ‘perhaps best described as a court-book ... a record compiled by and for ecclesiastical authorities’. He concludes that it was most likely written by John of Exeter, either solely or with the assistance of other scribes from the scriptorium of the bishopric of Norwich. Whereas some have assumed ‘the manuscript was written in answer to the request which Archbishop Chichele made to his suffragans in 1428 that they inform him of any actions they might take against heretics’, the messy and disordered nature of the manuscript itself suggested to Tanner that it was more likely produced under instruction of the Bishop of Norwich for his own personal reference.

Despite the importance of Tanner’s editing and translation of the works, some historians have been critical of his lack of analysis in considering the documents. Tanner approaches these documents as ‘pure’ historical documents, rather than as ideologically produced texts, framed by politics and power. While he acknowledges that it was common practice for the examining clerics to rely on formulaic questions from established heretical handbooks, and that this may have ‘determined, to a considerable extent, the picture of the defendants’ beliefs’, he then unquestioningly

36 Tanner, Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, p. 1.
37 Ibid., pp. 1, 4.
38 Ibid., 5.
39 The purpose of these documents is a contested point among historians. It is less than accurate to call them ‘court-produced documents’, as it is unclear whether their production was part of the formal court process. It is more accurate to call them ‘court-related documents’, as they were produced in response to the court proceedings that were occurring. Their value to the historian is that in all likelihood they were produced in response to, or as a consequence of, the Trials, but were not a formal or official record of the proceedings.
accepts the very picture of the defendants painted by the authorities. For example, Tanner suggests that some of the accused, most particularly Margery Baxter, ‘may have been on the lunatic fringe of Lollardy’. In suggesting this is the case, Tanner accepts, without qualification, the representation of Margery Baxter constructed by the courts, the examiners, the deponent and the scribe; reflecting his perception of these as benign ‘documents’.

Tanner’s failure to fully consider the practical power relations and motivations underpinning the court process, and by extension, the documents related to those trials, is further evidenced in his observations regarding the so-called ‘Lollard vocabulary’. Tanner writes of a ‘Lollard vocabulary’ observed within the court depositions. Tanner takes the repeated presence of such words and phrases as ‘trufle’ (extravagant notion or false claim), ‘mawmentries’ (idolatry), ‘shakelment’, ‘every Friday is a free day’, ‘alle trewe Cristis puple’ and ‘the trewe law of Crist’, to be evidence of a single inter-connected Lollard community in Norwich. While this may be the case, Tanner does not explore the alternative possibilities that might explain the repeated presence of these phrases. As historians do not know the questions that were asked to elicit each response, it could be that the initial question itself contained and produced the Lollard vocabulary. For example, it is possible that the examiner, being more than familiar with the discourses of the heresy he was hunting for, asked the accused, ‘why do you believe that every Friday is free day?’

40 Tanner, Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, p. 19. See Anne Hudson, Lollards and Their Books, London and Ronceverte, The Hambledon Press, 1985, esp Chapter 8, ‘The Examination of Lollards’, for a discussion of the use of formulaic questions in heresy trials. See also, Rosenthal, Telling Tales. Although not concerned with Lollard or heresy trial in particular, this study does consider the use of standardised questions and responses in medieval court processes in medieval England. 41 Tanner, Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, p. 20. 42 Ibid., p. 28; See also Chapter 10, ‘A Lollard Sect Vocabulary?’, of Hudson, Lollards and Their Books, in which Hudson examines this question of a distinctive ‘Lollard vocabulary’ or a ‘Wycliffite dialect’ (p. 165). In this chapter, Hudson explores some of the problems inherent in trying to discern such a language or idiom. Hudson suggests that the reoccurrence of words such as ‘autentik’, ‘mawmeter’ or ‘mawmetric’, usually considered a sign of the existence of a sect vocabulary, is problematic, as ‘most, if not all, of the words can be found in texts either clearly orthodox or where there is no reason to suspect Lollardy’ (p. 170). Despite admitting that certain words and phrases are characteristic of many Lollards and Lollard texts, Hudson argues that the ‘usage of these words, or of any others so far discerned, cannot be claimed as the sole prerogative of Lollard writers. Consequently, vocabulary alone can never be used (as it sometimes has been in the past) as a test of a text’s Wycliffism’ (p. 170). 43 Typical of the period, the witness depositions were not recorded as a verbatim account of the questioning process. Rather, they were a single piece of third-person narrative that presented the salient information necessary for establishing guilt, item by item.
is also possible that the presence of these phrases across multiple examinations is a reflection of the use of one scribe. John of Exeter likely became familiar with the language of the Lollards, and may have frequently deferred to a ‘common’ Lollard phrase for ease and brevity’s sake, particularly when preparing abjurations for the recanting heretic.

It must not be forgotten that the authorities believed Lollardy was a single, coherent and organised threat. They were thus predisposed to see, and it was in their interests to represent, the individually accused persons as being part of a larger group. In acknowledging the value of Tanner’s work with the documents of the Norwich Heresy Trials, it is important to note that its greatest contribution to this research is found in its limitations. Tanner’s work alerts the historian to the need to examine court-related manuscripts or products such as these, not as ‘neutral’ historical documents, but rather as constructions; texts produced by competing belief systems and agendas.

For many historians concerned with the prosecution of Lollardy in Norwich during the fifteenth century, the core methodological problems and considerations centre on the question of the court-related documents.\textsuperscript{44} Whereas Tanner worked from the primary assumption that the documents formed part of a ‘court-book’ produced for Bishop Alnwick’s personal reference, the historian Steven Justice problematises this assumption. Justice instead focusses in some detail on the figure of the scribe or official notary in these proceedings, John of Exeter. To Justice, the messy and unsystematic nature of the manuscripts implies that they were not produced for any official purpose. It is unlikely that, as a professional notary and the registrar to the Bishop of one of England’s most powerful and prosperous dioceses, John of Exeter, would have produced documents such as these for the Bishop’s reference or for the official register. Justice concludes that it is a far more reasonable proposition that the documents were being collated for Exeter’s own personal use, perhaps as an anthology of his skills.\textsuperscript{45} Given that the documents were so untidy, ‘copied haphazardly and with no trace of an intended order’, often moving from Latin to the vernacular without apparent reason, it is open to conclude that these records were

\textsuperscript{44} See Justice, ‘Inquisition, Speech, and Writing’; Kemp, ‘The Lingua Materna’, p. 233, in particular.
\textsuperscript{45} Justice, ‘Inquisition, Speech, and Writing’, p. 301.
more likely a ‘miscellany’ collected by John of Exeter for his own use. For Justice, ‘it feels strangely right that John may have copied these records as samples of his literary art. Taken chronologically, they witness to his fascination with the artfulness of the Lollard speech and of his transcription’. Justice comes to rely on the ‘unofficial’ and ‘haphazard’ nature of Exeter’s manuscript, as well as the role and social position of John of Exeter himself, to argue that these are some of the most important documents available to historians with respect to the study of heresy in the fifteenth century. In a clever and interesting argument, Justice suggests that these documents can be regarded as the closest thing possible to an accurate account of the accused person’s words.

Justice’s arguments overturn accepted understandings about the effect the use of a scribe has on a text. Generally, historians have tended to regard the use of a scribe, whether it be in the context of a legal deposition or not, as a further barrier between the speaker’s voice and the historian. The use of a scribe has typically been regarded as yet another filter through which the speaker’s words are (perhaps unsuccessfully) ‘heard’, and potentially corrupted. Justice does not begin from this assumption. Rather, he offers a rather curious reading, a microhistory of the role of John of Exeter in the documenting of the Norwich Heresy Trials. Justice bases his argument for why the records from the Norwich Heresy Trials found in Tanner’s book should be regarded as an accurate reflection of the accused heretic’s words, on two key points. Firstly, Justice argues that John of Exeter was so bored by the ‘mechanical’ and ‘formulaic’ job of transcribing between 60 and 120 examinations that he, almost unintentionally or unwittingly, accurately transcribed the proceedings. Secondly, because the documents seem to have had no official purpose and no intended audience beyond Exeter himself, they are likely lacking in the propagandist agendas and ideological purposes found in other documents produced by the authorities. Justice explains:

I have not tried to claim that John of Exeter was sympathetic to the heretics. My argument is stranger: that he did not particularly pay attention to them as heretics, and that the boredom of scribal work drove

46 Ibid.
48 This argument is especially valid considering that in medieval courts the scribe did not record the dialogue verbatim, but rather it was the practice of the day for the scribe to edit and summarise into a single, third-person narrative, the entire proceeding for the day.
him to record their words; that this sort of detached curiosity could produce a record historiographically more usable than either a hostile or a friendly account, because so little under ideological pressure, or indeed any pressure less vagrant than the need to occupy the mind; 

*that a chink in the armature of institutional power is the banality of so much of its work.*

Focussing on the figure of John of Exeter, Justice produces a microhistory of the Norwich Heresy Trials that foregrounds the idea that, through the court-related documents, the words of those involved in the trials can be accessed by present-day scholars.

To understand the documents that came out of the Norwich proceedings, Justice relocates the documents and their production within the context of the post-Innocent III Church, in which bureaucratic document production was at its height. Justice notes that the post-Innocent III Church was characterised by its fervent zeal for bureaucracy, documentation and systematisation, and ‘a passion … for documentary order’. Importantly, the nature of post-Innocent III medieval bureaucracies increased the demand for public notaries and scribes. However, as Justice argues, the work was highly ‘mechanised’ and formulaic for people such as John of Exeter. Such individuals were educated and intelligent, yet they held low-level positions within the administrative hierarchy. Exeter was responsible for ‘conferring the impressive, continental warrant *auctoritate apostolice sedis* (‘with the authority of the apostolic See’) and was known as John of Exeter, a man of minor orders’.

In terms of the Norwich trials, he appears to have been third in a chain of command, after Bishop William Alnwic and Chancellor William Bernham, even presiding

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50 See M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307*, 2nd edition, Oxford and Cambridge, Blackwell, 1993. Clanchy notes that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries there was an increase in demand for scribal labour as there was a ‘shift from memory to written record’ (p. 5). It would also seem that this trend continued well after Innocent III’s reign. Clanchy suggests that: in thirteenth-century Europe … the number of documents continued to increase fast. The average number of letters extant per year for the pontificate of Innocent III (1198–1215) is 303, whereas for Innocent IV (1243–54) it is 730. By the end of the century Boniface VIII (1294–1303) is estimated to have issued 50,000 letters a year (pp. 60–61).

51 Justice, ‘Inquisition, Speech, and Writing’, p. 295. For a discussion of the increasing document production at this time, see Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, in particular Chapter 2, ‘The Proliferation of Documents’.

52 For a discussion of the repetitive and ‘menial’ nature of scribal work see *Ibid*. Clanchy writes that ‘skill in writing … could be rewarding for scribes working in rich monasteries and professional ateliers, … but such men were exceptions. Most writing involved repetitive manual labour’ (p. 194).

over the trial of William Colyn of South Creake (23 October 1429 to 20 March 1430).\textsuperscript{54} He was also the recipient of the King’s writ. John Foxe reproduces a patent writ from the King (6 July 1428) directed to ‘his well-beloved John Exeter, and Jacolet Germain, keeper of the castle of Colchester’, directing him to arrest William White and others on suspicion of heresy.\textsuperscript{55} This last point is revealing. John of Exeter, a professional administrator of a sort increasingly central in fifteenth-century royal and ecclesiastical operations and bureaucracy, was a man of substance in his own right, personally summoned for service to the King. Yet ironically, and somewhat sadly, the man ordered by the King to arrest the Lollards was then instructed by his Bishop to record the transactional, formulaic and mundane trials. For although ‘John had the education and position that would allow him to serve as judge pro tem in the Bishop’s jurisdiction, and while he had secured for himself an enviable position as registrar, he was still, in his day-to-day duties, a scribe’.\textsuperscript{56} Ultimately he and other scribes in similar positions were copyists; they did not enjoy the more exciting work or privileges extended to the literati or professional atelier. Thus, Justice speaks of a ‘humiliating social indecorum’ that came with Exeter’s role in the Norwich trials.\textsuperscript{57}

Central to Justice’s argument that John of Exeter experienced a sort of ‘detached curiosity’ towards the words he recorded, is the idea that, for him, the examinations had become formulaic and a standardised process. Justice provides evidence of a mechanised, almost industrialised image of the scribal work undertaken by people such as Exeter. He offers an example from Michael Camille’s *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art*.\textsuperscript{58} Camille reproduces a picture or ‘doodle’ from a *Book of Hours*. Here, words that were accidentally omitted from the main text are added to the margins. From the margins they are seemingly hoisted into their correct place by a rope held in the right hand of a labourer who uses his left hand to indicate their correct place within the text. Camille calls them ‘tiny textual construction workers’.\textsuperscript{59} For Justice, this ‘doodle’ is;

\textsuperscript{54} He also presided over part of the trial of John Burell of Loddon, 18 April 1429 to 9 December 1430.
simply the scribe, imagining himself as another sort of menial laborer. The illustration suggests his sense not only of the laboriousness of scribal labor, but also its humiliating social indecorum, which has given the textually expert position more like that of a hod-carrier than that of a *litteratus*.  

It is likely that this ‘humiliating social indecorum’ was particularly applicable to Exeter, who was educated and intelligent, of minor orders and in the position to personally receive the King’s writ and act as sometime judge in proceedings. Yet, on a day-to-day level, he was the copyist; he was the ‘textual construction worker’ hoisting others’ words into their correct place within the established institutional formula. This boredom and indignity created an environment conducive to, and allowing for, Exeter to inadvertently capture something close to the actual words of the accused heretics. In this study, I wish to utilise and build on Justice’s arguments towards John of Exeter and his role in the court proceedings and resulting documents. This approach allows access to something near to the actual words and beliefs of the individual Lollards involved in the Norwich Heresy Trials. This is important for my research.

In response to Justice’s arguments, an obvious question for the historian is, why, if Exeter was so bored with the laboriousness of his role in the trial proceedings, did he often construct such seemingly thorough and reflective recantations for the abjuring heretic? Turning to the recantation crafted by John of Exeter for William Wright as an example of this, it can be argued that this record is not only not formulaic, but even goes so far as to include a powerful threat to the enemies of the Lollards. In the recantation penned for his by the scribe, Wright admits to having said:

> that it is read in the prophecies amongst the Lollards, that the sect of the Lollards shall be in a manner destroyed; not withstanding at length the Lollards shall prevail and have the victory against all their enemies.

It would be far-fetched to presume that Exeter included this thinly veiled threat out of some sense of commitment or sympathy to the Lollards. What is more probable is

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61 It was practice for the accused heretic in the fifteenth-century in such proceedings to be presented with a standardised set of assertions, which they were asked to accept or deny and then forswear. There was a formulaic set of questions, generic clichéd depositions and responses, and finally a recantation or abjuration constructed by the scribe. The recantation was penned by the scribe, not the heretic, and therefore tended to be purpose driven.
that the boredom of the scribal work drove him to a professional curiosity with the language of the Lollards. Justice notes that, as the trials progressed, the transcriptions moved away from the characteristically formulaic structure and started to use the Lollard’s own words, rather than the typical clichés of the earlier records. Taken chronologically, the transcriptions suggest not a seditious sympathy for the heretics, but rather a curiosity with the lyricism, wit and artfulness of Lollard speech. At times, at the moment of recantation, Exeter penned for the heretic a statement to read aloud that gave the heretic back their own words to speak.

Justice’s approach to the documents is important to this study, as it provides a basis by which to discuss the court-related documents as legitimate tools for accessing the ‘voices’ and ‘words’ of the marginalised, rather than as one-sided or one-dimensional narratives of the ruling institutional authorities. Justice observes that he and other historians have argued that often:

the most tendentiously ideological of hegemonic sources, the most pressured in their need to suppress what they fear, can be useful, even nearly transparent in revealing dissenting thought, precisely because of their tendentiousness.

However, in terms of Exeter’s unique documents, Justice sees another possibility for why the sources reveal the very voices they wish to suppress. That is, when an authority is either so assured of its own standing, or when the person to whom scribing is tasked has no real interest and focusses on nothing intently, the utterances of the accused are more accurately recorded. John of Exeter, in executing the transactional and mechanical task of transcription, allowed his mind to engage perhaps not with the content or meaning of the words being uttered, but with the words themselves, and transcribed them as he heard them.

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63 It should be noted that the arguments offered by Steven Justice have application in terms of the examinations of lay Lollards, but they are not necessarily applicable to other heresy trials. In the heresy trials of the more academic Lollards, such as William White, William Sawtre or William Thorpe, this argument does not hold. These more high-profile trials were far from routine and formulaic. Given that in the trials of the lay Lollards, a death sentence was unlikely (unless it involved a relapsed heretic), it was possible for the scribe and the courts to take as little interest as possible. In the more political and significant trials of such individuals as Sawtre, White and Thorpe, the stakes were higher on both sides, more clerics and Church authorities were present, and therefore it is not as likely that the scribe would have been driven by such an immediate feeling of boredom (which is necessary for Justice’s arguments).

In her study of fifteenth-century religious and legal conflicts over the *lingua materna*, the historian Theresa D. Kemp engages with Justice’s arguments. As with Justice, Kemp also focusses on the role of the scribe in the Norwich heresy trials, John of Exeter. Where their arguments differ is in relation to the ‘vernacular intrusions’ within Exeter’s otherwise Latin documents. Exeter’s records, on occasion, move from Latin to the vernacular, without an immediately apparent purpose or reason. The work of scholars such as Brundage, Helmholz, Swanson and Forrest, who are concerned with medieval canon law and the court processes associated with it, would suggest that this was not necessarily uncommon in canonical court documents. However, whereas Justice regards Exeter as recording aspects of the proceedings in the English vernacular in an attempt to relieve his boredom with the routine nature of the proceedings, Kemp rejects this. She disagrees that John of Exeter engaged with the Lollards from a position of inconsequence. As an ambitious man whose career was vested in the clerical prerogative and the linguistic supremacy of Latin over the vernacular, Kemp thinks Justice’s suggestions unlikely. For Kemp, the scribe’s boredom may account for his lapses into the vernacular, but those lapses were not without ideological significance. She suggests that far from being indifferent to the proceedings, Exeter was in fact intrinsically involved in producing a text that would establish legal guilt. Kemp argues that Exeter used Latin transcription punctuated by intrusions of vernacular, to strategically illustrate the intellectual and ideological distance between Latin and the vernacular. According to Kemp, on ‘several occasions he [John of Exeter] highlights defendants’ statements by recording them in English rather than in Latin’, particularly when the defendant is appearing to criticise the Church for its ‘mystification of religion’. To illustrate this, Kemp uses the example of Margery Baxter’s reported statement, recorded both in Latin and in vernacular English:

Lucifer post casum quod non potuit obtinere in celo iam habet cotidie in terris inadoracione of stokkes and stones and ded mennes bones [italics mine].

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That which Lucifer was unable to obtain in heaven after the fall, he now has every day on earth in the adoration of sticks and stones and dead men’s bones.  

Kemp argues that Exeter uses both Latin and vernacular placed side by side in the record to make plain the distance between the crude, unlearned vernacular and the authoritative and dignified words of the Latinate. For Kemp, ‘by recording her Margery Baxter’s statement in Latin up to these words, Exeter calls attention to the contested space between the languages of the clergy and the discontented laity’.  

In addition to the presence of vernacular intrusions within the otherwise Latin text, Kemp also attributes particular significance to Exeter’s use of Latin without any vernacular intrusions. In an analysis of the record influenced by a psychoanalytic approach, Kemp suggests that Exeter uses the ‘safety’ of Latin to remain clinically detached from the more ‘dangerous’ utterances he was required to transcribe. Kemp focusses on Margery Baxter’s reported statement about the holy sacrament becoming a ‘thousand Gods’ in a thousand privies. Joan Clyfland’s disclosure to the court led Exeter to write that:

Et tunc dicta Margeria dixit isti iurate, ‘tu male credis quia si quodlibet tale sacramentum esset Deus et verum corpus Christi, infiniti sunt dii, quia mille sacerdotes et plures omni die conficiunt mille tales deos et postea tales deos comedunt et commestos emittunt per posteriora in sepibus turpiter fetentibus, ubi potestis tales deos sufficientes invenire si volueritis perscrutari’.  

And then the said Margery said to the witness, ‘you believe wrongly, for if each sacrament be God and truly the body of Christ, then there are thousands of Gods, for thousands of priests, and many others, make thousands of such gods every day and after they eat such gods, they foully send out their hind ends what has been eaten into fetid pots where you can clearly see such gods if you wish to look closely’.

Kemp argues that Exeter was personally so horrified by the scatological narrative, which suggested that priests worship their own excrement, he retreated into the safety of Latin, keeping the vulgar crudities of the vernacular at a distance. Kemp writes that:

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68 Translation Kemp’s. See Ibid.  
69 Ibid.  
70 Tanner, Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, pp. 44–45.  
71 Translation Kemp’s. See Ibid., p. 239.  
72 Ibid.
this attack on priests and the eucharist was apparently so horrifying to the scribe that he could not render Baxter’s words verbatim in their original English; instead he presents a ‘rather clinical Latin report of her statement’, one safely distancing himself from the threat posed to ecclesiastical authority by Baxter’s words spoken in the mother tongue.73

To support this interpretation, Kemp recalls that, ‘writing five hundred years later, Peter Gay noted Sigmund Freud’s inability to write about his childhood memory of seeing his mother naked “without lapsing into safe, distancing Latin”’.74 Kemp’s interpretation of the role of Exeter in transcribing these documents shows that how the historian regards Exeter’s use of both Latin transcription and Latin interspersed with the vernacular is important, but also contested.

Kemp’s reasons for ultimately dismissing Justice’s arguments are interesting. However, the interpretations she offers in their place are problematic. I agree with Kemp only in so far as she argues that Justice is too quick to regard the lapses into vernacular as random and ideologically meaningless, but I am troubled by the meanings Kemp attaches to them instead. Kemp’s core argument is that Exeter was so ‘horrified’ by Baxter’s reported comments that he retreated into ‘a rather clinical Latin report of her statement’.75 Crucial to Kemp’s argument is the idea of Exeter’s ‘horror’. The question is whether this interpretation reflects more of Kemp’s own sensibilities than those of the medieval Exeter. While a contemporary individual such as Kemp, with modern sensibilities about bodies and excrement, may find this scatological narrative confronting, no evidence is offered for why a medieval person would have been horrified. To present-day persons, ideas of oozing and leaking bodies and talk of God seem incongruous, if not blasphemous. However, what any historian of medieval cultures should be struck by is the intense interest medieval people had in bodies, including Christ’s body.76 It is problematic to accept that

73 Ibid., pp. 239–240.
75 Kemp, ‘The Lingua Materna’, p. 239.
Exeter was disturbed by talk of excrement and theology. Secondly, Kemp suggests that because Exeter was so ‘horrified’, he relied upon ‘clinical Latin’ (much like Freud writing of his naked mother) to distance himself from what he was required to transcribe. In a fifteenth-century context, there is no evidence that the use of Latin had the same ‘clinical’ or scientific connotations as it did to Freud or as it does to a present-day audience. To a 1900s medically trained man like Freud, Latin was ‘clinical’, detached and safe, but to take his attitudes and apply them to the actions of a medieval scribe is unsound. Indeed, such a reading does not comfortably apply to a medieval context, indicating that Kemp has mis-read Exeter’s actions.

The works of both Justice and Kemp give rise to an important question for this thesis: how should Exeter’s use of Latin, including those moments of intrusion by the Lollard vernacular, be interpreted? There is validity in Kemp’s criticism of Justice when she argues that Exeter’s lapses into the vernacular ‘are not entirely without ideological significance’ and that Justice is too quick to dismiss them as such. Justice suggests that since the documents were not being produced for any official reason, there was no evidentiary, ideological or propagandist reason to render these passages in the vernacular. He even argues that the choice of statements to include in the vernacular is random and unpredictable. Contrary to this, Kemp suggests that the choice of statements, whether consciously or unconsciously made, is far from random, and they serve both the ideological and propagandist purpose of Exeter. It is Kemp’s tendency to attribute too much of the text’s production to Exeter personally—as an author, rather than as a transcriber—that leads Kemp to give too much meaning to the vernacular passages. However, it is Justice’s tendency to give too little meaning to the same. Kemp’s paper as a whole attributes much of the text’s content and meanings to Exeter himself. Unlike Justice, who considers Exeter’s role as the producer of the document, Kemp tends to regard him as the sole author, and does not take full account of the role that the Bishop, the clerics, the deponents, the accused and wider sections of the mainstream community played in the court proceedings that lay behind the documents. In her introduction, Kemp described the trial documents as a record of John of Exeter’s response to the mother tongue. This

77 Kemp, ‘The Lingua Materna’, p. 239.
78 Ibid., p. 254, footnote 16.
focus is too narrow. While I agree that Exeter’s role in producing the documents was crucial, and that the decision to render certain statements in the vernacular was most probably his, the beliefs and attitudes captured within the documents are broader than those of Exeter alone.

Whilst it was not uncommon for a mixture of vernacular and Latin to be used in medieval canonical court documents, it does not follow that in such cases the decision to use one over the other was without significance or meaning. The purpose of this research is to explore what that significance or meaning might have been in this case. As such, this research places itself conceptually between the arguments of Justice and Kemp with respect to the intrusion of vernacular passages in the otherwise Latin record. Although I agree with the concept of Exeter’s boredom finding its way into the text, it is hard to accept that the choice of passages to render in the vernacular was entirely random. Justice’s later observation that Exeter seemed to become intrigued by the words, language and discourses of the Lollards can also be usefully applied to our readings of the vernacular passages. As an educated man whose trade centred on words, it makes sense that the mundaneness of his scribal work in the heresy trials created conditions conducive to John of Exeter becoming curious about the language of the Lollards. Justice observed that, after a while, Exeter started to pen fairly elaborate and considered recantations for the defendants, as a way of keeping himself entertained and engaged with the proceedings. 79 Could it be therefore that Exeter rendered certain statements in the vernacular in which they were uttered because they were excellent examples of the rhythmical lyricism and wit of Lollard discourses by which Exeter had inadvertently become intrigued? By examining two particular statements attributed to Baxter and transcribed in both Latin and the vernacular, this argument holds. Firstly, it was said:

dicens in lingua materna: ‘dame, bewar of the bee, for every bee wil styngge, and therfor loke that ze swer nother be Godd ne be Our Ladi ne be non other seynt, and if ze do the contrarie the be will styngge your tunge and veneme your sowle’. 80

And again:

80 Tanner, Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, p. 44.
Lucifer post casum quod non potuit obtainere in celo iam habet cotidie in terris in adoracione of stokkes and stones and ded mennes bones.\textsuperscript{81}

Both statements exemplify the wit, lyricism and melodrama of the Lollard vernacular, suggesting that Exeter was curious enough about their expression to reproduce the words as uttered. A Latin rendering would have been at the expense of the lyricism of the words ‘sticks and stones and dead men’s bones’. Thus, Exeter left these statements in the language in which they were voiced. That he did not similarly render the passage regarding the Eucharist and excrement in the vernacular might be taken as an indication that the language of the statement was not particularly lyrical or witty to Exeter, or perhaps did not capture his attention from a linguistic point of view. From a theological point of view, the observation of ‘a thousand Gods’ and a thousand privies was an attention-grabbing statement, and certainly it is one that captures the attention of historians, but it must be remembered that there is no suggestion that Exeter was interested in the theology of Lollardy. Exeter did not wish to, or try to, engage in any meaningful way with the ideas of Lollardy, he simply engaged at times with the language of Lollardy, and sought to use his skills in the art of transcription to capture the language. This is reflected in the resulting documents in terms of the decisions he made about rendering certain statements in the vernacular or in Latin, and in the abjurations and recantations he penned for the repentant.

For historians examining the prosecutions of Lollardy in Norwich during the fifteenth century, a significant degree of critical thinking must be given to the documents produced by John of Exeter. Rather than viewing these court-related documents as empirical and neutral historical documents, this thesis approaches these materials as ‘texts’; ‘operating both as products of the social world of the authors and as textual agents at work in that world’.\textsuperscript{82} To understand these materials as ‘texts’, this chapter has so far examined how some other historians have approached this evidence, in particular, in relation to the role of the court scribe in their production. By ceasing to view these court-related narratives as ‘documents’, the historian can examine the part played by the court scribe and access some of the

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{82} Spiegel, ‘History, Historicism and the Social Logic of the Text’, p. 198.
actual words uttered by the accused Lollards. Using aspects of Justice’s argument (tempered by Kemp’s comments regarding Exeter’s choice of vernacular intrusions), it has been argued that, at times bored with the institutional processes of transcribing, the court scribe John of Exeter, inadvertently, and with a degree of detached interest and curiosity, recorded the words of the accused individuals involved. This approach to reading the role of John of Exeter in producing the documents leaves the present-day historian with a record historiographically more valuable than many other medieval court-produced accounts of legal proceedings. It allows the present-day reader access to the attitudes of the fifteenth-century Norwich authorities towards lay people independently accessing Scriptures and, to an extent, the beliefs and testimonies of the accused people themselves.

Although the arguments of this thesis so far seem to suggest that John of Exeter played a crucial role in the production, content and nature of court-related documents central to this study, it is important to note that the documents were also shaped by, and were the result of, a legal process involving various players. Exeter had a central role in terms of the production of the documents, but it must not be forgotten that behind them lay a prosecutorial process in which multiple parties, including the heretic suspects, had sometimes collaborative and/or competing roles. Returning to the idea of the court-related documents as ‘texts’, the following sections will consider the court processes behind them; in particular, the role of the accused.

Leaving behind discussions of the role of the court scribe, this chapter now explores the institutional process of interrogation evident in the fifteenth-century Norwich trials. In particular, it focuses on the figure of the accused heretic and the idea that, because of the nature of the processes of examination and recording utilised in the fifteenth-century Norwich courts, the accused were, at times, able to actively participate in the ‘authoring’ of the key texts. With this, they were provided the opportunity to participate, in a limited way, in their own literary representation. The next section of this chapter focusses on the extent to which the examined heretics were able to participate in the processes of literary production. Once again, this argument is dependent upon the historian approaching the fifteenth-century record of proceedings in Norwich not as ‘historical documents’, but as texts; texts reflecting
multiple and competing interests, shifting power relations and power structures, and power negotiations between all those involved in their production.

Justice and La Capra are two scholars that have approached trial-related documents quite differently from many earlier historians. Both Justice and La Capra destabilise the traditional distinction made between ‘documents’ and ‘works’ and disrupt the notion of ‘documents’ as neutral sources of information about an external reality; instead, presenting them as part of a textual power structure with links to the power relations and structures of society. These historians do not regard the transcript as a pure presentation of the accused nor, conversely, as a one-sided text through which the accused person is constructed by those controlling the text’s production and within which the accused is without the power or opportunity to participate in that construction. Justice in particular, regards trial-related documents as what Karen Sullivan calls ‘collaborative fiction’ or ‘involuntary literature’.\(^8^3\) Essentially, the trial text is viewed as an unwitting collaboration, the point of intersection between multiple and competing voices: the voices of clerics who wish to define the accused; the voice of the accused, sometimes resisting the act of passive representation by the examiners; and finally, the voice of the dominant, mainstream community, whose beliefs, anxieties and concerns invade the text. In this relationship, vernacular intrusions represent a point at which the accused’s voice is more clearly heard than at other moments in the text, and at which a degree of self-representation is achieved, primarily because of the process of document production. Importantly for this thesis, this view of court-related texts allows historians to explore the narrative devices sometimes adopted by accused persons to participate in the construction of their text.

Marion Gibson’s reading of early English witchcraft pamphlets also relies on the concept of medieval/early-modern trial-related documents as literature, and as ‘collaborative text’ that allowed those on trial to appropriate a degree of control and participation in their textual representations. In her work, Marion Gibson reviews early English witchcraft pamphlets, which she explains were based largely on the ‘transcribed’ legal documents of the witch trials. Gibson’s work bears many methodological similarities to that of Justice in that she too suggests that ‘pamphlets,

manuscripts and legal records need to be recognized as texts, representing, and not merely transmitting, information about witchcraft’. To this end, in:

re-emphasising that they are only representations of events, such a perception suggests that witchcraft pamphlets need to be studied structurally, with traditional literary inquiries into their construction, as well as considered in a more historical way as databases of ‘facts’.

Gibson’s book is important to this study for two reasons. Firstly, it reads court-related documents and pamphlets as ‘literary texts’ needing a literary inquiry into their structure. Secondly, Gibson consciously avoids overstating the ‘power’ and part of the examiner in the construction of these texts; the accused are not simply regarded as passive participants. Central to both Gibson’s position and those of this study is the idea that these texts represent an uneasy collaboration between the questioner, the accused, the scribe and the dominant Orthodox Christian authorities and community leaders. It cannot be assumed that these power relations were even or stable, nor can it be assumed that the witch or heretic was passively constructed by the courts with no opportunity for participation, self-definition or literary involvement. As with the documents related to the Lollard trials, ‘the dynamics of the surviving witchcraft examinations seem to be about co-operation, co-authorship and negotiation’. Through a series of dynamic power relations, the ‘witch and questioner may be battling for control of the process, or they may be collaborating, knowingly or not, ghost-writing one another’s contributions’. Thus ‘examinations and the pamphlets which use them emerge as collaborative representations rather than records’ and they attest to the potential for literary self-representation and participation by the witch/heretic.

It is important to clarify this notion of the potential for self-representation and participation by the accused within the construction of the trial processes and the texts to emerge in relation to them. Although it has been suggested that, because of the literary nature of the legal processes, it was possible for the accused to negotiate and appropriate a degree of power and play a part in their own literary

84 Gibson, Reading Witchcraft, p. 7.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid., p. 34.
88 Ibid., p. 13.
representation, I acknowledge the limitations of such an argument. By implication, this argument risks suggesting that the accused figure occupied an equal and unproblematic position of power in the courts and that the accused would play a hand in any ‘negative’ representation of themselves. It must be remembered that, although structurally the potential may have existed for the accused to resist aspects of the process of construction and instead participate in their own literary construction, the reality was that this was not necessarily possible for each individual. Whether witches or heretics, the accused individuals were sometimes on trial for their lives. For relapsed heretics, punishment could include death and for those found guilty of heresy for the first time, social ostracism and harsh, public punishment was a likely outcome. Many were lacking formal education and likely confused by the alienating court process. Some did not possess the language or awareness of institutional processes needed to understand, let alone participate actively in the process. In reality, it was easier and safer for many to submit, abjure and walk away. The ‘luxury’ of self-representation was not practically affordable to all of the accused individuals. Additionally, it is known from the use of standardised recantations that some of the individual trials were likely regarded by the authorities as unimportant. In these situations, the trials ran quickly and the opportunity for participation on the part of the accused was lessened.

Using the arguments of Gibson and Justice, it can be said that in the cases of Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone, the opportunity for them to participate in their own literary constructions was probably greater than for other prosecuted individuals. This was mainly due to the particular circumstances and role of the scribe, John of Exeter, and that they were not viewed by the prosecuting authorities as particularly high-profile or important Lollard figures. Furthermore, for Mone, for whom we have no record of ever having been charged with heresy before, she was unlikely to have been sentenced to death if found guilty. This is unlike in the case of accused witches of the seventeenth century, when penalties for witchcraft were most severe, or the more high-profile figures in the Lollard movement or relapsed heretics. Further, based on information presented to the court—for example, regarding Baxter’s controversial encounters with various Church and community leaders,

89 The ‘stereotyped’ nature of some of the records was noted by Norman P. Tanner in Tanner, *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich*, p. 6.
whom she was quick to challenge—neither woman was a passive individual likely to let pass the opportunity to be heard and have her views represented during the court process.

As well as recognising the literary nature of medieval court-related documents, Gibson’s analysis of early English witchcraft pamphlets is useful as she explores some of the literary devices employed, which reveal the ‘constructed’ nature of the documents. As with the Lollard trials, the written report of the examination of the accused in witchcraft trials was produced in a single, third-person piece of narrative. The report did not include the question asked, or how many questions were asked before it produced the desired response. The historian has no way of knowing the exact words used or the tone of the speakers. It was also standard practice in the medieval court for the scribe to select the details considered relevant or not, as he summarised and revised the text. Gibson explains that:

Once one considers how witchcraft stories [or Lollard stories] were elicited, it is easy to see that their whole shape and sequence might be determined by factors which are now almost invisible in the finished text of the narrative of witchcraft [or heresy].

Therefore, it is up to the historian to ‘reconstruct’ and deduce these factors to the greatest extent possible.

Applying what is known of the nature of medieval court processes, the historian ‘can engage in reconstructive reading of documents in situations where questions are not recorded and thus can easily be overlooked as motivating factors, and we can trace the interplay of suggestion and response’. It must be remembered that these were documents (or records of a prosecutorial process) that were being produced ‘in order to establish criminal responsibility’. For this reason, their coerced nature should not be underestimated. The final record of the proceedings produced by the court was shaped by conventions about what would carry weight as a truthful and accurate

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90 Gibson, Reading Witchcraft, p. 18.
91 Ibid., p. 19.
92 Ibid. In the case of the Norwich Heresy Trials, it is possible that this ‘coercion’ is less obvious. Given John of Exeter’s apparent boredom with the court proceedings, his part in constructing a text that would ‘establish criminal guilt’ may have been less apparent. However, he was transcribing the proceedings, not directing them. Therefore, I would suggest that, while the Bishop and clerics were constructing and directing the proceedings to clearly establish the guilt of the accused, Exeter was less involved in this.
account. The legal historian James Cockburn suggests that they were ‘invariably sensational treatments, deliberately but inconsistently overdrawn in order to heighten tension or point to a moral’. Thus, while consideration can, and should, be given to the literary devices employed by the accused heretics to negotiate literary power in the courts, the opportunity for self-representation by the accused, needs to be viewed in the context of the judicial process in which they occurred. The discursive ‘collaboration’ between the accused and the accusers was not fair or equal because, ultimately, the text was crafted within a judicial process that framed articulations and representations in terms of a need to establish guilt.

Considered together, the arguments of Justice and Gibson allow for court transcripts and court-related documents to be regarded in a more historically useful way. Instead of regarding such sources as a one-sided representation of the silent accused figure, these historians show that the accused heretic/witch was able to participate, albeit not freely, in their own literary construction. The persons on trial were able to appropriate aspects of the literary process to actively resist their representation by the authorities. Further, these historians argue that, as the result of either the boredom of the court scribe, or the structure of the court processes themselves, the historian is able to access something close to the actual words of the accused. This shift away from reductive interpretations of court documents offers the historian the opportunity, among others, to access the individual theologies and religious practices of the female lay-Lollards of Norwich in a way that recognises their attempts to appropriate power. However, it is also necessary to overcome the limitations of this type of history by exploring the slippages evidenced by the works of Justice and Gibson and others in the field.

Using the work of Justice and others, partial access to some of the words of Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone is achieved. However, consideration must now be given to how the historian can accurately make sense of, and bring appropriate meanings to, these words. If, using the methodologies available, the present-day historian is able

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to ‘hear’ the voices of fifteenth-century heretics, attention must then turn to applying meaning to their words. If the meanings of fifteenth-century words and actions are not ahistorical and transparent, then the historian faces the problem of understanding the context-specific meanings of fifteenth-century words and deeds. Although Justice and Gibson offer much in terms of methods for historical document analysis, unfortunately they do not acknowledge in any comprehensive way the uncertain and problematic nature of the language concerned. They recognise the ability for historians to partially access the words of the accused, but do not examine the problem of understanding the meanings of those words; instead, often applying modern meanings to those utterances. This thesis argues that this is particularly evident in the works of Justice, Copeland, Hornbeck, Aston and Hanna, who each rely on present-day understandings and apply them inappropriately to fifteenth-century language and actions.

Having already acknowledged the contributions of Justice, in particular in terms of his methodologies, it is also important to examine the limitations of his research, especially his application of modern meanings to medieval concepts, actions or words. This is particularly evident in his understandings of the significance of social situations and family structures. In his study of the Lollard trials of medieval Norwich, Justice refers to a particular ‘domestic faith’ evident among the Norwich Lollard community, most particularly among its women. He argues that Margery Baxter’s faith was ‘elaborately and consciously, a domestic faith, with the house, family, and the maintenance of both at the centre of her religious values, a yardstick to take measure of doctrine’. The importance of the home and the family to Baxter’s faith is clear from the document concerning her prosecution for heresy. Baxter’s religious beliefs and practices were built around notions of her family and her home, and her duties to them both, as Justice suggests. However, while Justice’s observations about the nature of Baxter’s religious activities are useful, he does not critically examine his use of the term ‘domestic’ or his application of the concept in his analysis.

96 Ibid., p. 315.
Justice examines the deposition made against Baxter and deduces from it the existence of a faith centring on the home and the family. However, by attaching the term ‘domestic’ and corresponding notions of private/public spaces to this, he applies present-day understandings to medieval words and activities. The term ‘domestic’ is a modern concept that invokes the notion of a public/private dichotomy that does not apply to the medieval period. When terms like ‘domestic’, ‘private’ or ‘public’ are used, a present-day audience calls to mind contemporary beliefs about the separation between society and the sanctity of the home. In the medieval world, homes, or at least certain parts of the home, were shared social spaces accessible to parts of the community. That is, spaces open and accessible to those outside of the home, and still regulated and defined by social conventions and laws. The historian cannot speak (without strong qualification) of a ‘domestic faith’ without calling into play distinctions between public and private that did not exist in a medieval community such as Norwich. Justice’s arguments regarding this ‘domestic faith’ demonstrate the wider problems scholars face in trying to give appropriate meaning to the words and actions of medieval people. Using techniques of historical document analysis, Justice was able to access Baxter’s words, only to then ascribe modern meanings and values to them. This discussion about the public/private dichotomy and the concept of ‘domestic’ spaces will be taken up in greater detail in Chapter Seven.

97 Justice offers no definition or explanation of what he understands ‘domestic’ to mean. He seems to imply that it refers to the house, the family and the roles associated with maintaining them. See Justice, ‘Inquisition, Speech, and Writing’, p. 315 in particular. Notions of the ‘family house’ and ‘the family’ are just as problematic as that of ‘domestic’, and Justice offers no analysis of the implications of using these terms. Justice offers no discussion of the medieval concepts of home and family; instead, taking their meanings as given. In doing so, he risks allowing modern conceptions of home and family to stand in the place of the medieval meanings.

98 See Marjorie K. McIntosh, ‘Finding Language For Misconduct: Jurors in Fifteenth-Century Local Courts’, in Barbara Hanawalt and David Wallace (eds), Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England, Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 1996. In her study of fifteenth-century local courts, McIntosh examines the concerns communities had with trying to maintain community peace and social harmony. In her study of fifteenth-century social offenses and legal misconduct, McIntosh argues that community leaders and the authorities could, and would, regulate behaviour both outside and within peoples’ homes, in an effort to stem any threats to ‘the social peace and concord of their communities’ (p. 87). The authorities made no practical or ideological distinction between public and private spaces when protecting the community as a whole from behaviour and beliefs that threatened to ‘sow discord amongst neighbours’ (p. 91). The extent to which they believed individual behaviours within individual homes could affect the wider community, also suggests that the lines between ‘community’ and ‘family’ spaces were blurred, or at least contestable.
Similar to Justice, another historian who inappropriately applies the modern concepts of the ‘domestic’ and ‘public/private’ to medieval actions is the author of Gender and Heresy, Shannon McSheffrey. McSheffrey notes the overwhelmingly familial and household-orientated roles played by women within the Lollard community. However, unlike Justice, McSheffrey does not just imply from this observation the corresponding existence of a public/private dichotomy; she claims its existence (and its centrality) directly and with confidence. In the section of her work entitled ‘Public and Private: Men and Women in Lollard Conventicles’, and indeed, throughout her study, McSheffrey relies upon what she perceives to be the ‘self-evidence’ of the public/private dichotomy in medieval society. Her reliance upon the existence and dominance of this dichotomy is problematic for two main reasons. Firstly, this dichotomy should not be uncritically accepted. In the context of a medieval community, the concept of public/private itself needs to be explored more fully and its existence not merely presumed. Secondly, the ‘self-evident’ existence of the public/private dichotomy is problematic owing to the associated value judgements.

Like other scholars, McSheffrey contrasts the family and household-oriented roles played by the female Lollards to the roles played by men, which saw them travelling to other districts and participating in more ‘active’ and ‘public’ ways. As a result of this comparison, McSheffrey regards women’s contributions as lesser and secondary to those of men. However, this second-tier relegation of women’s roles in the Lollard movement rests on the public/private dichotomy with its inherent modern-day value judgements, which, as has been mentioned, did not necessarily hold true for the medieval context. Further, her reliance upon this dichotomy prevented McSheffrey from seeing the valuable ways Lollard women participated in this movement.

99 McSheffrey, Gender and Heresy.
100 Ibid., pp. 65–66.
101 Also see Aston, ‘William White’s Lollard Followers’.
102 Robert Lutton is another historian who recognises the importance of family and kinship to the transmission of piety and dissent in the Lollard movement, particularly among its female followers, but that extends the idea no further. In Lutton, Lollardy and Orthodox Religion, esp pp. 19–26, Lutton considers ‘family’ in terms of the transmission and practical housing of Lollard activities and tools, but does not consider how ideas of family shape the actual beliefs and understandings of Lollards, particularly Lollard women. He does not consider how notions of the family and the home influence doctrine and belief, only how they contribute to the practical transmission of both.
With respect to women’s roles within Lollard communities, McSheffrey regards the organisation and daily functioning of the Lollard movement as reflecting the same gender assumptions and roles of medieval society as a whole. She explains that:

Male and female members of the communities played roles that reflected rather than overrode late medieval gender expectations. Although some have seen medieval heresy as an escape for women from patriarchy, Lollardy did not serve this function. The sect affirmed in theory and in practice the norm of the male-dominated family, where women were restricted to roles that kept them close to the domestic centre and where men were the public leaders.103

McSheffrey provides two reasons for women’s subordinate and peripheral position within the movement: their ties to the ‘private’, ‘domestic’ and familial sphere of the home, and their overwhelming rate of illiteracy. McSheffrey writes that:

Women’s illiteracy reinforced their subordinate position in the Lollard movement—inability to read effectively excluded almost all women from leading roles.104

McSheffrey and others focus on these two themes of women’s lives; illiteracy and relegation to the domestic arena, as the markers of their subordination. It is the misreading of these two themes that leads to an overall lack of appreciation by some historians for the female Lollard’s contributions to the movement.

To demonstrate that, even in a heterodox religious movement such as Lollardy, women were only permitted to participate in subordinate, marginal and dependent ways, McSheffrey relies on the literate/illiterate gender divide. According to McSheffrey, women were unable to take on leadership or teaching roles within this textual, book-based community, primarily because of their considerable rates of illiteracy. McSheffrey produces the stark rates of female illiteracy versus male literacy in a comprehensive numeric analysis of the Lollard prosecutions from 1428 to 1530.105 She notes that of 955 suspected Lollards, 684 (72 per cent of the total) were men and 271 (28 per cent of the total) were women. Further, of these, 130 (possibly 131) men were literate (19 per cent of men), whereas only nine women were possibly literate (3 per cent of women). These figures support McSheffrey’s observation that very few Lollard women were literate. However, the conclusions she draws from this observation are unhelpful.

103 McSheffrey, Gender and Heresy, p. 4.
104 Ibid., p. 59
105 Ibid., pp. 65–166 for these figures.
As will be discussed later in this thesis, the concepts of literacy and illiteracy are largely meaningless when applied to a medieval context, yet McSheffrey uses these terms without clarification as to what exactly they refer. In a contemporary, post-Enlightenment setting, the binary opposition of illiterate/literate is clear. However, in a medieval setting, this distinction does not apply. In medieval communities, concepts of literate and illiterate were largely non-existent, and the measure of one’s ability to read and/or write existed on a continuum, rather than in a binary opposition. McSheffrey’s arguments can be further criticised for their misplaced validation of literacy itself. Again, as will be discussed later in this thesis, there is no evidence that medieval people regarded the ability to read and/or write as in any way superior to traditional oral practices. In spite of this, McSheffrey, like other historians concerned with the period, relies on literacy as the primary measure of one’s power and influence in the community. Thus, by suggesting that female Lollards could not participate in this movement actively or as equals primarily because they were not literate, she is employing modern dichotomies that do not accurately reflect the medieval context. Applying such modern dichotomies out of context can potentially distort any useful meanings to be drawn from medieval actions.

In J. Patrick Hornbeck’s 2010 study of Lollard dissent in late medieval England, the author defers to the work of Shannon McSheffrey when dealing with the question of women’s participation within the movement. This is particularly the case in relation to the issue of lay marriage and clerical celibacy. Hornbeck suggests that historians such as Fiona Sommerset or Margaret Aston have been unsuccessful in their attempts to argue that women found some measure of representation and participation in the movement. He instead returns to the idea that dissenting religions such as Lollardy merely reinforced the patriarchal gender roles that generally subjugated the women of the period. He argues that McSheffrey’s:

thesis that ‘Lollardy was made by, and in a sense for, men’ offers a necessary corrective to earlier ideas about the connections between

106 While the figures for illiteracy and literacy McSheffrey offers are initially startling, with no clarification of these key terms, the figures mean little. At no point does McSheffrey explain what her rates of literacy/illiteracy are referring to, and indeed we have little idea of what is being measured. Thus, while the numbers seem impressive, the conclusions to be drawn from them are debatable and caution is certainly needed when considering them.
heresy and gender, and her study demonstrates that marriage and family life were important to the members of dissenting communities.\footnote{Hornbeck, *What is a Lollard?* p. 107.}

In accepting McSheffrey’s arguments uncritically, Hornbeck too applies modern interpretations and judgements to women’s roles and activities. Historians need to cast a critical eye over the measuring tools applied to the question of women’s participation in the Lollard movement. It is flawed to measure women’s participation and ‘liberation’ in terms of their ability to reject the prescribed roles of mothers and wives, to be ‘literate’ in a modern sense, and to function in active and public ways. The measure of achievement or participation should not be based on performing masculinised activities or roles. In using such measuring tools, historians risk inappropriately applying present-day assumptions about literacy and family to medieval cultures, and risk privileging characteristically masculine modes of behaviour and pursuits.

Ralph Hanna III is another historian whose work in the area of female piety and religious practices in the Norwich Lollard movement relies on contemporary and narrow notions of agency, authorship and writing. Hanna’s arguments typify the difficulties many historians face in trying to move beyond modern sensibilities in analysing the beliefs and behaviours of the past. In his discussion of medieval Lollard women, Hanna’s starting position is that these women could not write and therefore could not participate in Lollardy as authors. He argues that, in terms of women and ‘literary patronage’, women were unable to write or author as women, they could only imitate male authors. Thus, any relationship they could forge with books and writing was ‘secondary’ at best. He writes that:

>a woman patron claims for herself a masculine position, and may engage in an activity merely imitative and/or appropriative of already extant male efforts. She may remain always a shadow second, an attenuated version of a more fully fledged masculine realm of activity.\footnote{Hanna III, ‘Some Norfolk Women and Their Books’, p. 288.}

Taking this position from the outset prevented Hanna from seeing the non-masculine and unexpected ways in which these women did positively participate in authoring and writing. These ways will be outlined in more detail later in this chapter.

\footnote{Hornbeck, *What is a Lollard?* p. 107.}
It is noted that, despite having argued that women could not author in any meaningful way without simply ‘imitating’ their male counterparts and reproducing patriarchal literary genres, Hanna still wished to include women in his discussion of literary patronage. He suggests, apologetically, that the only way to do this is to widen the scope beyond ‘women and writing’, to include women owning, transferring and concealing books (since, after all, in his view, this was the only way women could participate in literature and ‘writing’). He goes on to examine what he calls “activities with books”—not necessarily the ordinary gesture of commissioned authorship. Having established this conceding point, Hanna then examines the role women such as Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone played in the ‘textual exchanges’ of the ‘book-bound’ Lollard community of Norwich. Their role, as Hanna sees it, was in carrying and concealing books on their persons and in their homes, sheltering Lollards, establishing Lollard schools in their homes and making efforts to indoctrinate servants and neighbours with their theology. What is disappointing about Hanna’s arguments is that, having identified and demonstrated some awareness of the importance of these women and their activities in the book-based Lollard community, he still regards their role as ‘secondary’ and lesser to their male peers because they themselves did not ‘write’ or ‘author’ in a conventional, modern-day sense. He argues that, in spite of their contributions to the textual community:

both Baxter and Mone’s involvement with books remained in one sense secondary. Neither woman appears to have been literate in either the medieval Latinate sense or in our own. They were not ocular readers but aural ones, dependent on someone else’s reading to access the text. Thus, although physically proximate to the volumes that inspired their faith and, on at least some occasions, apparently responsible for the very safety of such volumes, they were forced to rely upon males for any understanding of the books’ contents. Whatever their importance to constructing the situation in which books might be read, these women could not perform that reading on their own.

Again, the question for scholars is whether medieval people regarded books, reading and authoring along the narrow lines that some historians assume, or whether those historians have inappropriately applied their own modern concepts to medieval practices.

109 Hanna calls this ‘the immasculation of the feminine subject’. See Ibid.
110 Ibid., p. 289.
111 Ibid., p. 290.
112 Ibid., pp. 291–292.
Hanna’s arguments pose a number of problems. Firstly, Hanna regards masculine ‘ocular reading’ as superior to the ‘aural participation’ Baxter and Mone are ‘forced’ to rely upon because of their illiteracy.\textsuperscript{113} Hanna suggests that Baxter’s and Mone’s involvement with Lollard books was ‘secondary’ because their illiteracy meant that they were dependent upon having texts read to them, rather than being able to read those texts independent of the educated men in the community.\textsuperscript{114} This argument is unhelpful as it reflects Hanna’s own values, rather than those of the medieval lay-community the subject of this research. Hanna’s argument fails to give appropriate regard to the nature of medieval society. Medieval communities were primarily oral cultures that would not necessarily have regarded aural participation as in any way secondary to the written word.\textsuperscript{115} Based on the work of the historian Clanchy, Hanna’s seemingly ‘neat’ separation of oral and aural textual activities is further destabilised when one considers the common medieval practice of reading aloud, so that words, even written words, became a verbal/aural activity. Clanchy notes that ‘despite the increasing use of documents … traditional oral procedures, such as the preference for reading aloud rather than scanning a text silently with the eyes, persisted through the Middle Ages and beyond’.\textsuperscript{116} Thus, despite the growing dependence upon documentation and ‘literate’ modes of recording, Clanchy asserts that this society still exhibited a ‘pre-literate emphasis on the spoken word’.\textsuperscript{117}

Hanna’s arguments overall give far greater emphasis to the issue of literacy than is perhaps fitting for a primarily ‘illiterate’ culture.\textsuperscript{118} By arguing that the

\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 291. Hanna offers no analysis of his use of the terms ‘literate’ and ‘illiterate’. In \textit{From Memory to Written Record}, Clanchy notes that these are highly problematic terms, loaded with historically specific cultural meanings. He suggests that ‘the literacy of the laity is the most frequently discussed aspect of medieval literacy, yet that cannot be understood until the terms are defined in their medieval contexts’ (p. 186). Clanchy argues that terms such as ‘\textit{clericus}’ and ‘\textit{litteratus}’ have no adequate modern equivalent, yet historians like Hanna continue to simply use the terms ‘literate’ and ‘illiterate’ (with all their twentieth-century meanings) in their place (p. 230).


\textsuperscript{115} See Clanchy, \textit{From Memory to Written Record}.


\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 272.

\textsuperscript{118} Literacy levels in medieval communities are hard to discuss with certainty. In the medieval era, to be literate was to be able to write in Latin. To be able to read or write in the vernacular was still regarded as illiterate. It is also important to note that literacy in the medieval period referred to the ability to write the language and did not take into account the ability to read that language. It is therefore possible that the traditionally low literacy levels associated with this period would be substantially higher if they took into account the ability to read. With the emergence of trade and commerce in areas like Norwich, the ability to read was increasingly found among the ‘middle-class’...
predominance of female illiteracy made Baxter and Mone dependent upon men, and
thus ‘secondary’ and subordinate in terms of their position in that textual
community, by implication Hanna is also suggesting that women’s ‘liberation’ from
such a reduced status can only be measured in terms of literacy levels and the ability
to read and write. This argument fails to take into account the idea that the agency of
these Lollard women came from sources other than reading and writing, and it
privileges present-day assumptions about the place of the written word. As Clanchy
notes, ‘where only a minority of a population are literate, those who are illiterate do
not necessarily pass their lives in “mental confinement”’.\textsuperscript{119} Thus, again, this
overwhelming emphasis on, and privileging of, literacy and ocular reading activities
prevents Hanna from recognising the \textit{possibilities} for female textual agency and
participation.\textsuperscript{120}

Interestingly, halfway through his paper about Norwich women and their books,
Hanna’s argument shifts and begins to take a more favourable view of Baxter and
Mone’s role in the Norwich Lollard community. At this point, he alludes to the
alternative ways women ‘author’ and ‘write’. Unfortunately, however, he does not
take his observations any further, as he still regards these ‘alternatives’ as secondary
to ‘actual’ writing and authoring in the conventional sense of the words. Hanna
admits that Baxter and Mone used their ‘secondary status’ to develop a more
powerful mode of book transferral than would likely have been conceived of by men.

In this case:

purely aural access to the book did not form simply a passive activity. …
Rather, both Baxter and Mone developed mechanisms for absorbing
what they had heard … They absorbed texts in the interest of possible
oral performance, whether as internal meditation or overtly vocal
teaching. In so doing, \textit{they became in fact the book} [emphasis mine] (or
the usable portions thereof): they rendered the physical volume in some
measure superfluous and incorporated it within themselves. They

\textsuperscript{119}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 9.

\textsuperscript{120} Clanchy concedes that:

writing gives the historian his materials and it is consequently understandable that he
has tended to see it as a measure of progress. Further, literate techniques are so
necessary to twentieth-century western society, and education in them is so
fundamental a part of the modern individual’s experience that it is difficult to avoid
assuming that literacy is an essential mark of civilisation (\textit{Ibid.}, p. 7).
embodied texts and transported them in their corporeal persons, gave to
them a life beyond mere vellum, and thus attained a flexibility (if not
perhaps what masculine scholars might consider an accuracy) of use that
their male coreligionists might not have achieved.\textsuperscript{121}

Although Hanna observes the alternative ways Baxter and Mone participated in
authoring and literary patronage, he does not take full account of this observation or
bring it to any sort of helpful conclusion. He acknowledges that Baxter was not just a
vocal vehicle for male texts:

for in addition to such transmittal of male texts, her idiosyncrasies
suggest that she had formulated for herself a version of Lollardy that
privileged both the mechanism by which she had attained this belief
system and the way she disseminated it.\textsuperscript{122}

Hanna observes that for Baxter and Mone, the female body was a sort of ‘evangelical
vehicle’ that allowed them to embody and disperse Lollard beliefs.\textsuperscript{123} However,
despite Hanna recognising the way that Baxter changed the mode of ‘transmittal of
male texts’, he does not recognise the possibility that in memorising and retelling the
story, sometimes explaining the theology using understandings or examples from her
own experiences as a wife and mother, she also changed the text.\textsuperscript{124} It is the way in
which Baxter and Mone altered the Scriptures and their meanings to suit their
purposes that tells us something of the significance of their contributions to the
movement. Hanna, however, concludes his observations with the reminder that
Baxter and Mone’s literary efforts are ‘reabsorbed into one or another form of
masculinized book culture’.\textsuperscript{125}

From examination of the various historical studies concerned with the Lollard era, it
is apparent that a crucial area of methodological slippage is the tendency for
historians to attach modern-day meanings and value systems to medieval actions and
words. The historian Margaret Aston takes a similar position to that of Rita
Copeland in terms of regarding the lay-Lollards as ‘simple folk’, and in doing so she
attributes present-day values towards notions of schooled/unschooled,
learned/unlearned and literate/illiterate. With respect to the Norwich Heresy Trial

\textsuperscript{121} Hanna III, ‘Some Norfolk Women and Their Books’, p. 292.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., p. 293.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
documents, Aston writes that it is clear that we are dealing ‘here with suspects who were learners more than teachers, recipients, not makers, of heresy, the disciples of more important absentees’. 126 From the initial stages of her paper, ‘William White’s Lollard Followers’, it is clear that she intends to regard the lay-Lollards of Norwich as lesser than their more academic counterparts, and wishes only to examine their trials as the route to a more rewarding understanding of the ‘absent teachers’. For Aston, an examination of the lay-Lollards is a necessary means to an end; that end being academic Wycliffe/Lollard theology. Aston, like some other historians, leaves little room for the possibility that lay-Lollards were anything more than unthinking imitators of others’ ideas who vulgarised and corrupted these ideas with their own crude understandings. Such a position from the initial stages of her study leaves her with only room for a narrow reading of the trial-related documents available.

Historians such as Hanna, Aston and others take a similar attitude to that of medieval Church leaders in relation to the issue of lay people accessing Scripture and holy texts. They considered that the integrity of Wycliffite theology was debased and corrupted by the uneducated laity. The historian, K.B. McFarlane, for example, ‘was perhaps the most influential exponent of the view that Wycliffe’s ideas had been dumbed down as they moved from theologically aware, Latin, scholastic discourse into a vernacular idiom’. 127 Even Anne Hudson, who has pioneered much of the research into Lollard/Wycliffe hermeneutics, is reluctant at times to see the lay-Lollards as an individually legitimate religious entity. 128 Much of Anne Hudson’s work is concerned with tracing the Wycliffe roots that are the foundation of lay-Lollard assertions. In attempting to trace the etymology of Lollardy back to the original Wycliffe writings, Hudson seems to be arguing that it is the academic origins that make these lay-Lollard assertions legitimate. Like other historians, she gives the impression of being uncomfortable with the idea that the lay-Lollards were

126 Aston, ‘William White’s Lollard Followers’, p. 75.
128 In Chapter 2, ‘A Lollard Compilation and the Dissemination of Wycliffite Thought’ of Lollards and Their Books, Hudson discusses the significance of books to the dissemination of ideas from the Oxford Wycliffites to the lay-Lollards. What is significant about this is that Hudson regards this ‘passage of ideas’ (p. 14) as one-way. Hudson implies that the flow of ideas, thoughts and knowledge is one-directional and involves a ‘filtering down’ process. The risk of phrases such as ‘passage of ideas’ or ‘dissemination of thought’ is that they are loaded with modern cultural assumptions about the intellectual inferiority of the ‘unschooled’.
capable of producing and disseminating their own independent ideas based on their experiences as sources of meaning. Instead, she seems more at ease with an order of things in which ‘Wyclif ideas get passed from their university origins to the parish clergy and the ordinary Lollard’.\textsuperscript{129} While this was how many ideas were transmitted, the hasty and easy assumption that lay-Lollards merely regurgitated Lollard doctrine unthinking should be avoided. As this thesis will show, the evidence suggests otherwise.

Despite the limitations of Margaret Aston’s position towards the contributions of ‘ordinary’ Norwich Lollards, her method has some value for the purposes of this research. Instead of trying, as Hudson does, to directly link the ideas of the lay-Lollards to the Wycliffe writings in which they find their roots, Aston seeks to trace them back to a closer source: William White. Aston ‘maps’ the direct influence William White had in the Lollard community in the diocese of Norwich. She examines the court-related documents looking for the theological origins of the ideas expressed by individual Lollards. Although Aston argues that Wycliffe is undoubtedly the chief source of Lollard opinions, she suggests that it is unrealistic to compare the opinions of individual lay-Lollards with Wycliffe’s Latin works. She instead suggests that Tanner and Foxe both provide the answer to the ‘missing link’, but neither follow it up. That ‘missing link’ is the defendant’s connections to William White. Aston explains that:

William White was named as the heretic’s instructor in sixteen out of Alnwick’s sixty cases. This, however, is far from being the full extent of his traceable influence … we can show, both from the corpus of shared error and also from the verbal echoes, the heretics’ common source. The peculiarities of this group of Lollards—their denials of the sacraments, and some of their more unusual opinions—have one identifiable source: William White.\textsuperscript{130}

Aston identifies the extent of William White’s influence in this community. However, her goal is not to examine the unique processes for transmitting knowledge and ideas throughout this group; her goal is to show that the ‘Lollard schooling of humble lay people endangered theological priorities’ and allowed for the ‘vulgarisation and debasement of Wycliffite theology’.\textsuperscript{131}

\textsuperscript{129} Hudson, Lollards and Their Books, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{130} Aston, ‘William White’s Lollard Followers., p. 88.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., p. 93.
One of the flaws in Aston’s analysis of the relationship between the ‘schooled’ and ‘unschooled’ Lollards lies in her decision to regard figures such as William White and Hugh Pye as the ‘teachers’, and ordinary people such as Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone as their ‘disciples’ or ‘students’. She writes that:

The records make it plain that whereas White was being charged with teaching, preaching and writing his heresies and errors, the defendants in the Trials were all accused with having ‘learned, held, believed, and affirmed’, ‘held and heard’, ‘held, believed, and affirmed’ their points of heresy. On one side stands the man who taught; on the other the disciples who learned.  

At first glance this might appear to be the case. However, upon examination, the relationship between the so-called ‘teachers’ and ‘disciples’ should strike the historian as being far more complicated and open to interpretation. The basis of the charge levelled at Margery Baxter by Joan Clyfland relates to her preaching and/or teaching Lollard doctrine to her neighbours and their servants; her attempts to teach the ‘true’ faith to various individuals, including a friar from Yarmouth; and her activities with books. In short, she was accused of trying to indoctrinate others through acts of teaching, preaching and active proselytising. This signals a far more contested space between William White and his lay followers than is accommodated by the teacher/student relationship assumed by Aston. Despite this, Aston does not acknowledge any alternate ways of reading this relationship.

In addition to suggesting that the lay people of Norwich were the ‘students’ of the instructing Lollard masters, Aston also characterises the lay-Lollards of Norwich as being ‘simple’ in their understandings of what was taught to them by the ‘masters of Lollard schools’. Their ‘limited intelligence’, according to Aston, led to the ‘debasement’ and corruption of the theology itself. Aston argues that:

vernacular theology had its hazards. Scholastic concepts inevitably shed some nuances as they reached a popular audience adventuring in English doctrine. The Trials present illuminating indications of the way in which carefully qualified phrases on that most difficult of all topics, the

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132 Ibid., p. 89.
133 Ibid., p. 91. The problem with Aston’s view of their ‘simplicity’ is that she ascribes corresponding notions of unthinkingness and debasement to it. If she recognised their ‘simple’ understandings as being experientially based, there would be less of an issue. Their understandings were simple only in so far as they were experiential and drew meaning from their everyday lives, but it does not follow that they were unthinking or debased.
doctrine of transubstantiation, became lost or adulterated as they moved from academic utterance into an unschooled milieu.\textsuperscript{135}

Using Margery Baxter’s reported comments regarding the Eucharist and Doctrine of Transubstantiation as examples, Aston argues against the laity having unmediated access to the Scriptures. Baxter reportedly rejected the idea of the consecrated host, arguing that if this were the case, there would be many ‘stinking privies’ full of ‘infinite gods’.\textsuperscript{136} Aston justifies her position towards lay-participation by focussing at some length on Margery Baxter’s reported comments, arguing that through them, ‘the process of debasement [is seen to be] descending still lower’.\textsuperscript{137} Aston ‘wonders whether the loss of the main teachers accentuated such theological crudities’.\textsuperscript{138}

The Doctrine of Transubstantiation, which was first pronounced at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, is an important doctrinal feature of orthodox Western Christian belief.\textsuperscript{139} The belief that the consecrated host was the body of Jesus was central to mainstream fifteenth-century religious teachings. To refute the doctrine at that time went to the heart of the Christian belief system. Baxter’s ‘observation’ did this. Contrary to Aston, I would suggest that it is in her use of the doctrine that Margery Baxter demonstrates the sophisticated contributions made by some ordinary lay-Lollards, including women. If we abandon our modern sensibilities and instead look behind the ‘crudity’ and the ‘vulgar’ references to bodily functions, what is revealed is a woman successfully articulating the flawed nature of the doctrine, using her own uniquely feminine, household-based experiences and understandings of theology. She shifts the doctrinal debate from the sphere of closed universities and academia, placing it within the arena of the everyday feminine experience and female roles within the household and gives it real, commonplace meaning. Where Aston sees ‘debasement’ and corruption of Wycliffite theory, there is room to instead see theology made real; ordinary persons deriving meaning from lived experiences and shaping that meaning in return.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., p. 91.
\textsuperscript{136} Pratt, \textit{The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe}, p. 594.
\textsuperscript{137} Aston, ‘William White’s Lollard Followers’, p. 92.
\textsuperscript{138} See Pratt, \textit{The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe}, p. 594 for Baxter’s reported comments; Aston, ‘William White’s Lollard Followers’, p. 92.
Aston concludes her paper noting that in terms of the Norwich Lollard community:

we can observe heresy that was academic, more or less, in origin, passing through active proselytizing and Lollard schools into the sometimes limited intelligences of glovers and skinners, and into the *domestic talk of enthusiastic women* [italics mine]. As it did so, its content changed—and moved measurably further from Wycliffe. Dogma was weakened in the chain of repetition. Statements were simultaneously diminished and enlarged. They became simpler, less hedged with qualification, more thickened with verbiage, and more crudely anticlerical. Popular theology cannot stand much refinement. The humbler followers of William White, however great their fidelity to this ‘holy doctor’, could not help revealing the distance that divided them from him.\(^{140}\)

For Aston, the court-related documents available indicate the ‘effect of vulgarization and the kind of transformation that took place as points of dogma inculcated in Lollard schools were mulled over in the chat of domestic hearth or tavern’.\(^{141}\) Conversely, for this study, the court-related documents demonstrate the way in which lay-Lollards reformulated doctrine to fit their own lived daily experiences of religion, theology and family, and the manner in which they moved Lollard doctrine away from the abstract and theoretical and into the experiential. In this way, Lollard women derived and shaped their understandings of Christ, the Bible and its teachings based on their everyday lived experiences of the world. Aston’s ‘observations’ about the vulgar and crude effect the laity had on doctrine and theology should highlight the need for historians to give more appropriate, context-specific meanings to the utterances of people such as Baxter or Mone. While talk of faeces and privies might offend some sensibilities and may well appear ‘crude’ to a present-day reader, we need to consider what such imagery meant to the medieval audience.

Some of the most well-regarded historians concerned with this area of history perceive the activities of the Norwich Lollard women as inferior to those of their male counterparts and as debased in comparison to the activities of their intellectual Wycliffe fathers. As has been shown, Ralph Hanna III dismisses the textual activities of the Norwich women as ‘secondary’, while Margaret Aston dismissed the religious activities of Norwich lay-Lollards as ‘the domestic talk of enthusiastic women’ and the misspent ‘chat’ of ordinary peoples.\(^{142}\) It is noted by Steven Justice that in Margaret Aston’s study of William White and his ‘followers’, Aston uses the

\(^{140}\) Aston, ‘William White’s Lollard Followers’, p. 99.


Norwich documents to argue how little the lay-Lollards understood the intellectual basis of Wycliffe’s theology. Furthermore, attempts by glovers and skinners to come to grips with the intellectual content, in the end, ‘coarsened it’. Justice suggests that Anne Hudson is guilty of ‘an a priori unwillingness’ to believe the lay-Lollards capable of appropriating in an intelligent manner the teachings of their Wycliffe leaders, shaping them for their own purposes. Given that so much of Hudson’s work is about tracing the words of the laity back to Wycliffe’s own teachings, ‘Hudson needs the Lollards to sound like each other; if they are not to be mindless, the mind must be Wycliffe’s. Whatever lay-Lollards can be imagined to have done, they cannot be imagined to have thought for themselves’. Even though Hudson has a more appreciative approach to the lay-Lollards than Aston or Hanna, they all contend that if the words of the lay-Lollards do not come directly from Wycliffe or his academic followers, then the ideas become crude and unsophisticated.

There is reluctance by historians including Aston, Hanna and Hudson to see lay-Lollards as intellectually capable. This position prevents them from recognising that the ‘sophistication’ of Baxter and Mone’s words lies in their very ‘crude’ or ‘simple’ nature. That is, that their wisdom and the cleverness of their words do not come from their links to academic Wycliffe doctrine, but instead from their ability to articulate those doctrines in terms of their own experiences. Thus, where historians discuss figures such as Baxter or Mone within the context of Wycliffite doctrine, or alongside the more scholarly Wycliffe followers, there is a risk they will mistakenly view their contributions as simple and crude, and to regard their utterances as either an unthinking regurgitation of Wycliffe rhetoric, or as a bastardised version of the theories. It is therefore unhelpful to examine them in such a context, as their individual religiosities are quite distinct from that of the academic Wycliffites. Far from corrupting or bastardising Wycliffe doctrine, the value of the lay-Lollards stems from their ability to make the doctrine ‘real’ and meaningful.

144 Ibid., p. 313.
145 Ibid., p. 311.
146 An excellent example of this is when Margery Baxter is reported to have made false confessions to the Dean of St. Mary in the Fields, to obtain money from the Church. Steven Justice observes that: It quite specifically reverses what she describes as the usual direction of money’s flow between clerics and laics; and it quite specifically does in small what Wycliffe and his followers had said since the 1370s should be done to the English church as a whole: it liberates some portion of the church’s ungodly wealth for the good of the laity. The
their religiosity in the language of their experiences, not only did they make sense of their world, but they provided rich meaning to doctrines that might otherwise have remained intangible.

Rita Copeland is one historian who takes the important step of recognising and looking for the ‘non-traditional’ and ‘non-patriarchal’ ways that women engaged with books and reading within the Norwich community. Unlike Hanna and Aston, Copeland’s paper ‘Why Women Can’t Read: Medieval Hermeneutics, Statutory Law, and the Lollard Heresy Trials’, identifies women’s unique book and reading practices. Despite later demonstrating a reluctance to regard the lay-Lollards of Norwich as anything more than silent and powerless, in this particular paper, she argues that ‘women were instrumental in setting up autonomous and self-reproducing textual communities in the family, the household, and in towns, readerly networks that displaced the authoritative apparatus of clerical preaching’.  

Copeland approaches the court-related documents as evidence of the Orthodox Church leaders and legal authorities ‘anxiety’ about ‘the transgression of a symbolic order of reading’. For Copeland, the available documents speak of a Lollard movement circulating and concealing books, and circumventing and transgressing laws of gender, space and linguistic activities. In metaphysical terms, the result was women, as readers and teachers, sharing books and interpretations among themselves independently and without regulation. She writes that ‘the real enemy, the object of official repression, is the Lollard hermeneutic itself’. This research builds on Copeland’s observations as they relate to Lollard women’s textual activities and book-centred practices, recognising the ways in which they engaged with Christ and books. As noted already, however, in her later work on the Lollard William Thorpe, Copeland dismisses the literary and textual activities of lay-Lollards as insignificant and returns to the position taken by so many historians that have engaged with the question of women’s participation in the Lollard movement. It is unclear why.

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148 Ibid., p. 274.
149 Ibid., p. 272.
It is apparent from both the work of previous historians and an analysis of the central court-related documents of the Norwich Heresy Trials that, with respect to the roles played by women in the Lollard movement and community, ‘literacy’ and ‘family situation’ were central, determinative factors. That women were typically unable to read or write and that they were intellectually, emotionally, economically and physically tied to the familial home have been regarded as the key factors shaping women’s religious lives. While this observation is valid, most historians have erred in applying modern interpretations and values to it. This gives rise to the question of why historians commonly apply modern attitudes and assumptions to medieval actions? One possible reason for this is that literacy is the chief tool and business of academics. Historians are thoroughly immersed in present-day notions of books, reading and literacy. Thus, to examine alternative concepts and understandings of words, books, literacy, reading and textual activities in a way that consciously detaches us from our own experiences is difficult. That historians sometimes err in this is perhaps unsurprising.

This chapter has surveyed several important areas of historical concern with respect to fifteenth-century Lollardy. It has also identified the methods of reading the source material that form the basis of this thesis, and the key themes to be taken up in the remainder of this study. In relation to the important areas of fifteenth-century Lollardy addressed above, the first of these was the nature of the 1428–1431 court-related documents and how historians can approach these texts. Particular focus was given to the role of the court scribe, John of Exeter. The second area of consideration was the institutional processes involved in the production of these court-related texts and the role of the accused figure in ‘authoring’ the texts. The third key area of focus related to the religious and textual/reading practices exemplified by Hawisia Mone and Margery Baxter and revealed through the trial-related texts. The final area of focus for this chapter was the dilemma of historians assuming the lay-Lollards in Norwich, and women in particular, were simply crude imitators of the more sophisticated Wycliffites. These discussions were framed by an awareness of shifting trends in historical practices and literary understandings that emphasise the centrality of language and texts for historians and this thesis. Some of the difficulties associated with determining the meaning of language in a medieval context have also been identified.
In the next chapter, using techniques of ethnography and microhistory, the central court-related documents will be closely analysed for evidence of the key thematic concerns of the Norwich Heresy Trials and the fifteenth-century environment in which they occurred. The identified themes will form the evidentiary basis of the remainder of this thesis.
Chapter Two: Methodology: Ethnographic and Microhistorical Readings

‘The new medievalism is a science not of things and deeds, but of discourses; it is an art, not of facts, but of encodings of facts’.1

The purpose of this chapter is to put the ideas expressed in the above quote into practice; to decipher and unravel the beliefs, values, concerns and attitudes of those living in fifteenth-century Norwich encoded within the court-related documents of the fifteenth-century Norwich Heresy Trials. This process of ‘unravelling’, however, is not a simple one. In this undertaking, source materials are scarce and complex, and the meanings to be taken from their language and imagery are multi-dimensional and open to continued interpretation.

The importance of the documents relating to the Norwich Heresy Trials to historians has already been noted. They are some of the most unusual and, therefore, useful sources available to historians. However, they are at times confusing and alien to present-day scholars. They use patterns of language and images that have little meaning outside of the fifteenth-century English context in which they were first uttered and recorded. These documents speak of a bee that ‘stings your tongue and venoms your soul’, 2 the ministers of the Bishop are described as ‘members of the devil’ 3 and ‘Caiaphas’s servants’. 4 The documents refer to the false adoration of ‘sticks and stones and dead men’s bones’ 5 and to a mysterious ‘charter of salvation’ 6 that dwells within the womb of an accused heretic. To a present-day audience these statements have little resonance and meaning in our own lives. However, to a medieval audience, they meant a great deal. Encoded within these remarks lies an

3 Ibid., 595.
4 Ibid., 596.
5 Tanner, Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, p. 42.
understanding, shared by the institutional authorities and sections of the mainstream community, about their society and the threat posed to its continued harmony by the Lollards. Also encoded is evidence of some of the beliefs, practices and words of the accused Lollards.

The following chapter has two purposes. Firstly, it examines in more detail the methodological tools and approach for this study. Secondly, using these tools, this chapter examines the patterns of language and images present in the court-related documents that form the evidentiary basis of the discussions to be presented in the subsequent chapters and provides a sense of how these should be read. Using the theories and practices of microhistory and ethnography to decipher and bring meanings to these medieval encodings, the beliefs and values of the Lollard women and of some sections of fifteenth-century English society will be revealed. To achieve this, the reading strategies and processes of ethnography and microhistory will be applied to several of the documents produced by John of Exeter, in particular the documents relating to the trials of Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone.

There are several reasons for focusing on Baxter and Mone above other accused Lollards in the Norwich trials. Of the 60 people prosecuted for heresy in Norwich between 1428 and 1431 for which records survive, only nine were women. Along with the records pertaining to Baxter and Mone, Tanner includes in his book records for Isabel Davy of Toft, Sybil Godsell of Ditchingham, Matilda Fletcher of Beccles, Katherine Wryght of Shotesham and Isabel Chapleyne of Martham. However, the records relating to Baxter and Mone stand out from those of their female peers because of the relative degree of detail included in the abjuration and deposition relating to them. It is not clear whether this level of detail was because Baxter and Mone were more active in the Lollard community, or whether they simply happened to capture Exeter’s interest.

Another reason for this focus on Baxter and Mone is that in previous histories they have tended to be regarded as peripheral, insignificant and secondary participants in the Norwich Lollard community and in the movement generally. Where Margery Baxter has been the subject of historians’ attention, it has often been to dismiss her
as sitting on the ‘lunatic fringe’ of the movement. I believe this tendency to regard, or disregard, the two figures in this way warrants reconsideration. A final reason for focussing on Baxter and Mone is that the documents relating to their respective trials are unusual, not just for women, but also for ‘ordinary’ Lollards. The court records for figures such as William White or William Thorpe, who were regarded by the authorities as important Lollard figures and leaders, were typically detailed and lengthy, whereas the records relating to ‘ordinary’ Lollard followers were customarily formulaic and standardised in their form and content. Mone’s abjuration (penned for her by John of Exeter) and the deposition made against Baxter by Joan Clyfland are unusual insofar as they capture the rhythmical language and rich imagery of the vernacular, rather than comprising only the standard clichés typically found in the records relating to the trials of ordinary Lollards. It is the unique nature of the records available in relation to the two accused figures that makes them important to this thesis.

In applying the techniques of micro and ethnohistory and closely analysing the documents relating to Baxter and Mone, four key themes will become evident. This is achieved by firstly dissecting each primary source document into individual words, phrases and images which are then grouped together with other similar or repeated words, phrases and images. For example, words such as ‘lips’, ‘tongue’ and ‘mouth’ were grouped together because of their links to orality and speaking. Similarly, words and phrases including ‘Lucifer’, ‘cast out of the church’, ‘excommunicated’, ‘vengeance of God’, ‘burned’ and ‘false traitor’ were grouped together because of their links to the notion of evil, wrath and God’s vengeance. At the end of this dissecting and grouping process we are left with clusters of words, phrases and images tied together by a common theme or idea which can then be further examined and explored. What emerges from this process of dissection and clustering is a series of clear themes or thematic ideas common to and running through the primary source documents.

The first theme revealed in this way is the notion of impending danger and God’s vengeance. The second is the presence of dangerous and unregulated words. The

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7 Tanner, Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, p. 20.
third is evidence of the growth of the literate mentality and literate practices. The fourth is the use of familial spaces and the disruption of sanctified spaces. These four clusters of ideas help to reconstruct aspects of the fifteenth-century community, including the beliefs and practices of the Lollard women. These clusters also provide the thematic basis for the rest of this thesis, as each will be examined in detail in the remaining chapters. This chapter will focus firstly on the techniques and methods for overcoming and managing the limitations and scarcity of the source materials and for determining the thematic clusters recorded in the available court-related documents. It will then move to an analysis of the images that form the four thematic clusters to be taken up in the remainder of the thesis.

In writing of the nature of microhistorical methodologies, the poststructuralist theorist and microhistorian Giovanni Levi characterised microhistory as:

> a framework of analysis which rejects simplifications, dualistic hypotheses, polarizations, rigid typologies and the search for typical characteristics. ‘Why make things simple when one can make [them] complicated’ is the slogan [Jacques] Revel suggests for microhistory. By this he means that the true problem for historians is to succeed in expressing the complexity of reality, even if this involves using descriptive techniques and forms of reasoning which are more intrinsically self-questioning and less assertive than any used before.⁸

Microhistory attempts to reconstruct, as closely as possible, the individual experiences of people living in the past, in a way that is real and meaningful.⁹ Born out of the political and cultural debates of the 1970s, the concepts of microhistory articulate what was, and continues to be, dissatisfaction with the traditional grand narratives of history and literary theory, as well as reflecting wider moves within the discipline of history to question existing structuralist methodologies and interpretations.¹⁰ In a climate of dissatisfaction with the limitations of empirical, quantitative ‘macrohistorical’ studies, microhistory ‘laid emphasis on redefining

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concepts and profoundly analysing tools and methods’. As the name would suggest, microhistory is concerned with the close observation of the small, the local or the individual, and ‘the unifying principle of all microhistorical research is the belief that microscopic observation will reveal factors previously unobserved’. Microhistory is a historiographic practice defined almost in direct opposition to the pseudo-scientific methodologies of the grand historical narratives. Far from attempting to provide holistic and grand sweeping answers to broad areas of history, microhistory is built around notions of the close observation of the local, the everyday, the specific and the individual.

Levi wrote that one of the central difficulties faced by the discipline of history as a whole, which the microhistorical approach in particular attempts to address, is ‘the problem of how we gain access to knowledge of the past by means of various clues, signs and symptoms’. The reality of much historical research is that available source material is incomplete, leaving the historian with only clues and hints to the past. This problem is especially true for medieval historians concerned with the place of women in society. The source material of the period is difficult to work with and the material itself, particularly that relating to women, is limited. When source material does exist, it usually takes the form of documents produced by the dominant institutional powers, providing only a narrow view of the period and peoples experiences in it. The medieval historian is necessarily forced to reflect upon questions of sources and analytical techniques before proceeding with the business of ‘doing history’.

Along with the microhistorical approach, the discipline of ethnography or ethnohistory provides some useful strategies for interpreting and using historical source materials. Ethnography emerged from collaborations between historians and anthropologists also trying to move away from the empirical, quantitative and

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12 Ibid., p. 97.
pseudo-scientific methodologies of their respective disciplines. Their collaboration was constructive and ‘by the end of the decade [the 1950s] anthropologists and historians came together to combine the strengths of both disciplines, and founded the journal Ethnohistory’. The influential ethnohistorian, Greg Denning, called the discipline:

the bastard child of history and anthropology, born out of the snobbish reluctance of historians to be interested in anyone who was not white and did not wear a crown and born too out of the intransigent belief of anthropologists that to understand anyone they must be alive, in remote places and in dire danger of disappearing.

Reflecting its anthropological roots, early ethnohistorians were often concerned with history and cultures at the frontier; those people, environments and cultures subject to invasion and imperial conquest at the point of intrusion. Typically these cultures had no documentation or historical record in a traditional and conventional sense. Therefore, techniques were developed for reading historical sources in ways that would provide the description of cultural environments that anthropologists would normally have gleaned through direct observation. The contribution of historians to the ethnographic quandary of trying to know ‘a culture which had no means, in the ordinary sense of historical record, of giving permanence to its transient moments’, was that historians were ‘long accustomed to a fragmented, limited knowledge of human events when all that was left of them was marks on paper’.

Driven by necessity, and because of its roots in both anthropology and history and its early interest in the ‘frontiers’, ethnography developed practical strategies for interpreting historical documents and source materials, especially when source material was scarce or when one was dealing with a culture that was without

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20 Ibid., p. 37.
Denning articulated the problematic nature of frontier history as one where the scholar can only see ‘through the eyes of those who stood on the frontier and looked out. To know the native one must know the intruder’. This observation resonates with the Norwich trials of fifteenth-century England, as what we know of the accused Lollards comes from the recollections and records of the accusers and the prosecuting authorities. Denning writes:

What meaning can be given to actions which now have existence only in descriptions written by those who did not understand what they were seeing, who never observed exhaustively, and whose sets of descriptive models are not given in tidy operational definitions but have first to be tediously discovered?

For the purposes of this research, the strategies early ethnohistorians developed when faced with these problems are important. The techniques of both microhistory and ethnography underpin the work being done here in trying to build a meaningful picture of the fifteenth-century community of Norwich. These strategies will be central as this chapter begins to interpret the images and language present in the source material.

The problem of narrow or difficult source material is one that will continue to arise in discussions throughout this study. Even when primary documentation is available to the historian, the question of how to give culturally appropriate meanings to them remains. As Denning wrote, ‘words have meaning in their usage, not in their substance’. In 1999, Green and Troup wrote of theoretical methodological approaches to history that:

Ethnohistorians and those researching popular culture must often work with scraps of evidence, frequently those written or compiled by the dominant party. Anthropologists have pioneered reading such materials ‘against the grain’, or for silences and suppression, as a means to recover voices from the past.

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21 See James Axtell, ‘Ethnohistory: A Historian’s Viewpoint’, in The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America, Oxford, 1981. Although this text is about Colonial North America, it is useful in its demonstration of how Ethnohistory can be used when researching ‘people without history’. That is to say, it is a methodology that allows for the inclusion of those ‘non-literate’ cultures without traditional historical records. The phrase ‘people without history’ is taken from Eric R. Wolf, Europe and the People without History, Berkeley, 1982.

22 Greg Denning, Islands and Beaches, p. 43.

23 Ibid., p. 41.


Similarly, Ramen Selden suggests that in terms of close document analysis, the reader needs to ‘seize upon the differences between what the text says and what it thinks it says’. These reading strategies will be utilised in the readings of the Norwich Heresy Trial documents.

One solution proposed by Frederic W. Gleach to overcome the problem of incomplete source material is that of ‘controlled speculation’. When source material is lacking, it is replaced with ‘comparative material from other cultural or historical situations to infer crucial information that may be missing or obscured in the historical record of the particular situation’. In 1983, the historian Natalie Zemon Davis wrote of employing similar strategies in writing *The Return of Martin Guerre*. She wrote that:

> [W]hen I could not find my individual man or woman … then I did my best through other sources from the period and place to discover the world they would have seen and the reactions they might have had. What I offer you here is in part my invention, but held tightly in check by the voices of the past.

This practical application of ethnographic strategies helps us to better understand Clifford Geertz’s provocative statement that ‘cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses’.

At times, this study will be utilising the techniques of ‘controlled speculation’ to fill the gaps and silences in the stories of the fifteenth-century Norwich players the subject of consideration. This is particularly evident in Chapter Four, where, due to a lack of specific source material, a number of other medieval sources are examined for clues about how to best understand particular images, words or actions. It is also the case in Chapter Seven, as no other supporting contextual material is available and the historian must rely on present-day commentary to interpret the thematic cluster.

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The work of the pioneering ethnohistorian, Inga Clendinnen, provides some valuable strategies for reading historical events and actions.\(^{30}\) Her studies in the areas of colonial New South Wales, Aztec rituals and the World War II Holocaust, reflect upon the role and place of the historian and the tools used for understanding. In 2003, she wrote that:

> It is a commonplace rediscovered every decade or so that individuals see what they see from their own particular perspective, and that perspectives change through time. These disenchanted days we know there are no I-am-a-camera observers, and we also know that even cameras lie. This recognition has not stopped would-be historians from piecing together snippets derived from a range of narratives, perspectives and sensibilities in chronological order, and calling the resulting ribbon patchwork ‘objective history’. Making coherent stories out of the fragments we find lying about is a natural human inclination, and a socially necessary one, but when doing history it must be resisted.\(^{31}\)

Clendinnen identifies the historian’s task as starting with building a context in which sequences of actions and events can be viewed. Her own preferred metaphor for this comes from snorkelling. Using this image, she argues that:

> at first we are uneasy interlopers, with both the flitting shapes and the social geography vague. Then, after sufficient hours of immersion, we begin to reconstruct in our minds the salient formations—the context—and to be able to follow the opalescent inhabitants as they go about their engrossing affairs—the action. This submerged world is never as clear as the airy world above, but it is the more absorbing for that.\(^{32}\)

Central to this task of doing ‘good history’, as Clendinnen calls it, is the critical consideration of sources, the analytical techniques applied to them and the place of the analyst him or herself. “‘Good’ history depends on the commitment to seek to understand human action in the past by the critical evaluation of sources and the disciplined procedures of the analyst … at least as close as we can manage it’.\(^{33}\)

Clendinnen suggests that:

> the doing of history, our ongoing conversation with the dead, rests on the critical evaluation of all the voices coming from the past, on our reconstruction of the circumstances of their speaking, and on our critical evaluation of our own ‘natural’ unexamined responses to those voices.\(^{34}\)


\(^{31}\) Clendinnen, \textit{Dancing with Strangers}, p. 12.


\(^{33}\) Clendinnen, \textit{Reading the Holocaust}, p. 13.

\(^{34}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 26.
From the ethnohistorian’s perspective, the historian cannot realistically achieve ‘knowledge’ of the past. Rather, the goal should be for an informed and appropriate ‘understanding’ of it. To achieve this, the techniques of the analyst are paramount.

Clendinnen describes some of these. She wrote that:

understanding can best be advanced by unglamorous techniques we use every day for the evaluation of gossip. These are the same techniques used by biographers and historians: the piecing together of contexts, the establishing of sequences of actions, the inferring of the likely intentions behind those actions from our knowledge of the individuals involved and our general stock of knowledge about human motivations. What distinguishes this laborious and inherently contestable process from the lightning flash of intuition is that it is at all points open to scrutiny, criticism and correction.\(^{35}\)

For Clendinnen, ‘the critical evaluation of texts … stands at the heart of the historical enterprise’ and ‘each document must be squeezed for everything it can yield’.\(^{36}\) She points to Raul Hilberg’s reconstruction of events from the Holocaust as an example of this. Hilberg reconstructed ‘from commonplace and apparently innocent railway timetables, with their scrupulous aseptic language … the map and the temporal process of mass murder’.\(^{37}\)

Clendinnen argues that ‘actions and words are conceived, expressed, recognised and understood within a system of shared expectations and meanings—in short, within a precise cultural context’.\(^{38}\) It is only through the reconstruction of sequences of actions that ‘the significances encoded in those actions can be identified, and the ensemble of meanings within which they have been shaped and sustained gradually retrieved’.\(^{39}\) The ethnographic approach is important for this study largely because of its strategies for accessing assumptions and understandings of the historical period. Sequences of actions are reconstructed and analysed, and are subjected to interpretation informed by understandings of the cultural context in which they occurred.

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\(^{35}\) Ibid., p. 24.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., pp. 25, 30.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., p. 25.

\(^{38}\) Clendinnen, ‘Understanding the Heathen at Home’, p. 436.

\(^{39}\) Ibid.
Having established the techniques, tools and strategies of this study, this next section moves to applying these to the court-related documents. The purpose here is to identify the images and ideas encoded in the documents and then to decipher, interpret and bring meanings to these medieval encodings. By firstly undertaking a close analysis of Joan Clyland’s deposition to the court regarding Margery Baxter, and then of the abjuration penned for Hawisia Mone, four specific themes emerge, each revealing important dimensions of Lollard women’s religious lives. These clusters provide the starting point for my arguments regarding the relationship Lollard women had with books and their homes, and how these shaped their religious beliefs and practices, and the part they played in the Lollard movement in Norwich.

The first document to be considered is a translated version of Joan Clyland’s deposition to the court. Her statement was documented by Exeter in the form of an itemised inventory of accusations against Margery Baxter. Under the eight main items, particular remarks or actions attributed to Margery Baxter by Clyland are listed. These serve to provide the evidence of her alleged heresy. Some are particularly important to my research and will be discussed in detail throughout this thesis. They include:

First, That the said Margery Backster did inform this deponent, that she should in no case swear; saying to her in English: ‘Dame, beware of the bee, for every bee will sting; and therefore take heed you swear not, neither by God, neither by our lady, neither by any other saint; and if you do contrary, the bee will sting your tongue and venom your soul’.40

Item, This deponent being demanded by the said Margery, what she did every day at church; she answered, that she kneeled down and said five Pater-Nosters, in worship of the crucifix, and as many Ave Marias in worship of our lady. Whom Margery rebuked, saying, ‘You do evil to kneel or pray to such images in the churches, for God dwelleth not in such churches, neither shall he come down out of heaven; and he will give you no more reward for such prayer than a candle lighted and set under the cover of the font, will give light by night to those who are in the church:’ saying, moreover, in English: ‘Lewd wrights of stocks hew and form such crosses and images, and, after that, lewd painters gleer them with colours. And if you desire so much to see the true cross of Christ, I will show it you at home in your own house.’ Which this deponent being desirous to see, the said Margery, stretching out her arms abroad, said to this deponent: ‘This is the true cross of Christ, and this

cross thou oughest and mayst every day behold and worship in thine own house; and therefore it is but vain to run to the church, to worship dead crosses and images’.

Item, This deponent, being demanded by the said Margery how she believed touching the sacrament of the altar said that she believed the sacrament of the altar, after the consecration, to be the very body of Christ in the form of bread. To whom Margery said; ‘Your belief is nought. For if every such sacrament were God, and the very body of Christ, there should be an infinite number of gods, because that a thousand priests, and more, do every day make a thousand such gods, and afterwards eat them, and void them out again in places, where if you will seek them, you may find such gods.’

… The said Margery said to this deponent, that Thomas of Canterbury, whom the people called Saint Thomas, was a false traitor, and damned in hell, because he injuriously endowed the churches with possessions, and raised up many heresies in the church, which seduce the simple people; and, therefore, if God be blessed, the said Thomas is accursed; and those false priests that say that he suffered his death patiently before the altar, do lie; for as a cowardly traitor, he was slain in the church door, as he was flying away.

Moreover, this deponent saith, that the said Margery told her, that the cursed pope, cardinals, archbishop, and bishops, and especially the bishop of Norwich, and others that support and maintain heresies and idolatry, reigning and ruling over the people, shall shortly have the very same or worse mischief fall upon them, than that cursed man, Thomas of Canterbury, had. For they falsely and cursedly deceive the people with their false mammetries and laws, to extort money from the simple folk, to sustain their pride, riot, and idleness. And know assuredly that the vengeance of God will speedily come upon them, who have most cruel slain the children of God, Father Abraham, and William White, a true preacher of the law of God … which vengeance had come upon the said Caiaphas, the bishop of Norwich, and his ministers, who are members of the devil …

Also this deponent saith, that the said Margery desired her, that she and Joan her maid would come secretly, in the night, to her chamber, and there she should hear her husband read the law of Christ unto them, which law was written in a book that her husband was wont to read to her by night; and that her husband is well learned in the Christian verity.

Also that the said Margery said to this deponent, ‘Joan, it appeareth by your countenance, that you intend to disclose this that I have said unto you;’ and this deponent swere that she would never disclose it, without

41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., p. 595.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
the said Margery gave her occasion. Then said Margery unto this deponent: ‘If thou do accuse me unto the bishop, I will do unto thee, as I did once unto a certain friar, a Carmelite of Yarmouth, who was the best and learned friar in all the country.’ Then this deponent desired to know what she had done to the friar. Unto whom Margery answered, that she had talked with the said friar, rebuking him because he did beg, saying, that it was no alms to give him any good thing, except he would leave his habit, and go to the plough, and so he should please God more, than following the life of some of those friars. Then the friar required of the said Margery, whether she could teach him or tell him anything else. Then the said Margery (as she affirmed to this deponent) declared to the friar the gospel, in English; and then the friar departed from her. After this the said friar accused the said Margery of heresy; and she, understanding that the friar had accused her, accused the friar again, that he would have seduced her; and because she would not consent unto him, the friar had accused her of heresy. And, moreover, she said, that her husband would have killed the friar there-for; and so the friar, for fear, held his peace, and went his way for shame.46

Moreover, [Margery Baxter said] that she should not be burned, although she were convicted of Lollardy, for that she had a charter of salvation in her body.47

When first reading the Clyfland deposition, one is struck by the ‘colourful’ nature of the text. Biblical language and a strong, proselytising tone are features of the text, causing it to read like a piece of Apocalyptic Scripture. Upon closer examination, however, and applying the techniques of microhistory and ethnographic history to the deposition, individual words and phrases can be clustered according to their common theme. With this close examination, it is clear that the text is filled with images of destruction, evil, death and, importantly, God’s capacity for vengeance. Clyfland repeats to the court Baxter’s threat that a bee will ‘sting your tongue and venom your soul’48 if Clyfland failed to take heed of Baxter’s warnings about swearing to God, Our Lady or any other Saint. These images of death and destruction are continued when reference is made to people worshipping ‘dead crosses’49 and ‘false cowardly traitors being slain in the church door’.50 At one point, the text casts doubt on the miraculous powers of the sacrament and the Doctrine of Transubstantiation when it speaks of Christ’s body being reduced to excrement. In

46 Ibid., pp. 595–596.
47 Ibid., p. 596.
48 Ibid., p. 594.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid., p. 595.
one particular passage, Clyfland repeats Baxter’s claim to know the ‘will of God’ and her threat to the Bishop of Norwich and his ministers that ‘the vengeance of God will speedily come upon them’. The bishop and his ministers are identified as ‘Caiaphas’ and ‘members of the devil’ who ‘most cruelly slay[ed]’ the ‘children of God’. The text includes images of people ‘falsely’ worshipping the ‘devils who fell from heaven with Lucifer’ and being ‘cast out of the church’, ‘excommunicated’ and ‘burned’. Even the continued presence of such words as ‘false traitor’, ‘false priests’, ‘cursed man’, ‘the vengeance of God’, ‘damned in hell’ and ‘execution’ are all reminders of death, evil, destruction and God’s vengeance. When the language and imagery of the text is examined at this microscopic level, it is apparent that a principal concern or theme of the deposition is this notion of impending doom and the presence of evil and death. Far from being one isolated utterance, Clyfland’s recounting of events to the court is almost wholly a testament about fear, death and destruction.

The second major thematic language cluster present in the Clyfland deposition relates to the presence of, and misuse of, dangerous words, books, voices and language. These ideas are closely related to the first cluster. One of the primary accusations levelled at the Lollards generally by Church authorities was that they participated in the prohibited reading, ownership, transportation and dissemination of vernacular religious texts for the purposes of illicit heterodox preaching and meetings. This concern is echoed in the Clyfland deposition. At several points throughout the statement, images of and references to dangerous and unregulated words, books, voices and language are made. The deposition speaks of Baxter allowing unauthorised books written in the vernacular, in particular ‘the law of

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51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., p. 596.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., p. 595.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 Justice, ‘Inquisition, Speech, and Writing’.

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Christ’, to be read ‘secretly, in the night, [in] her chamber’. Baxter also invites Clyfland and her maid to join her secretly in her chamber so that they too could ‘hear her husband read the law of Christ unto them, which law was written in a book’. This sort of unauthorised teaching, reading and discussion is evidenced throughout the document, as the religious discussions take place in the vernacular. Baxter is linked to dangerous and false words when she was said to have ‘feignedly confessed to the dean of the fields’ and to have threatened to make false accusations of sexual misconduct against an innocent friar. By this example, Baxter is linked to lies and dishonest words, and she is accused of corrupting the sacred process of oral confession. Further reference to dangerous voices and words is present in relation to the execution of William White. According to Clyfland, Baxter reported to her that at the place of his execution:

she [Margery Baxter] saw that when he would have opened his mouth to speak unto the people to instruct them, a devil, (one of bishop Caiaphas’s servants), struck him on the lips, and stopped his mouth, that he could in no case declare the will of God.

Here, not only is White aligned with unregulated words and preaching, but the authority’s attempts to regulate and suppress his dangerous words are also recorded.

Another example of the potential danger of certain words, already noted, is present early in the record of Clyfland’s deposition. Clyfland repeats for the court Baxter’s alleged statement to her that she should take heed not to swear, ‘neither by God, neither by our lady, neither by any other saint; and if ye do contrary, the bee will sting your tongue and venom your soul’. This image includes the presence of dangerous words and dangerous speech, the kind that can ‘sting’ and ‘venom’. Clyfland’s deposition further associates Baxter with unsanctioned, unregulated and dangerous words when she reports to the courts Baxter’s claim to hold a mysterious text, or ‘charter of salvation’, within her body. When each of these images or references to dangerous words, books, voices and language are taken together, it is

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66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid., p. 596.
69 Ibid., pp. 595–596.
70 Ibid., p. 595.
71 Ibid., p. 594.
72 Ibid., p. 596.
clear that one of the major ideas present in this deposition is that the Lollards are participating in deviant and highly dangerous linguistic and textual practices.

The third thematic cluster is a concept that has and will continue to arise throughout this study: literacy and the literate mentality. The deposition made to the courts by Baxter’s neighbour includes a number of images of the written word and signs of an increasingly literate community mentality. The entire document and the legal process it records are evidence of this increasingly literate mentality and the dominance of literate practices. Swearing, accusing, deposing and recanting are all legal notions that take place in a literate setting and are testament to the increasing dominance of literate ways of thinking at this time.\textsuperscript{73} For this thesis, one of the most significant claims Baxter was alleged to have made was that she held a ‘charter of salvation’\textsuperscript{74} in her body. That Baxter’s claim to legitimacy exists and is understood as a written document is further evidence of the increasing power and authority of the written word. Such a claim would have constituted dangerous behaviour in the eyes of the authorities and the court. This importance and potential danger of the written word is also apparent in Clyfland’s revelation that she was invited to Baxter’s home to ‘hear her husband read the law of Christ unto them, which law was written in a book that her husband was wont to read to her by night’.\textsuperscript{75} The interactions and tensions between the written and the oral word are revealed through this passage. In other parts of Clyfland’s deposition, the Orthodox Church is associated with ‘false mammetries and laws’,\textsuperscript{76} whereas individuals such as the Lollard hero William White; ‘a true preacher of the law of God’\textsuperscript{77}, are associated with speaking God’s laws and the will of God. At several points throughout the text, William White is associated with orality and the spoken word, contrary to the Church authorities who convicted and executed him. As noted already, at the moment of his execution the authorities ‘struck him on the lips, and stopped his mouth, that he could in no case declare the will of God’.\textsuperscript{78} In this image, the tensions between orality and the increasingly dominant written word are metaphorically depicted. Even the continued

\textsuperscript{73} These notions also encapsulate the relationships and interconnections between the oral and the written word. Although legal notions that occur in a literate setting, ‘swearing’, ‘accusing’, ‘deposing’ and ‘recanting’ are also acts that are initially oral and indicative of the primacy of the spoken word.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p. 596.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p. 595.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
presence of such images and words as ‘tongue’, 79 ‘mouth’ 80 and ‘lips’, 81 as well as references to being ‘well learned’, 82 point to the existence of an interest with literacy and orality.

The fourth and final thematic cluster to emerge from a close examination of the Clyfland deposition is more obscure than the ever-present images of evil, death and destruction already discussed. The fourth thematic language cluster relates to space and the disruption of the accepted uses of spaces. In the Clyfland deposition, two ideas concerning space are evident: the inappropriate use of familial spaces for religious purposes and the corruption of sanctified Church spaces. These particular concerns follow from the first thematic language cluster discussed earlier, as the sanctified Church spaces become associated with images of death, evil and corruption. Through Clyfland’s statement to the courts, ideas about Lollards and their use and ‘corruption’ of spaces are revealed. During her statement, Clyfland states Baxter’s claim that ‘God dwelleth not in such churches’, 83 rather the ‘true cross of Christ’ 84 is ‘in thine own house; and therefore it is but vain to run to the church, to worship dead crosses and images’. 85 This belief not only disrupts accepted fifteenth century community standards for the use of certain spaces, it also casts doubt onto the sanctity of the church itself. In Clyfland’s revelations, the church is represented as a place of ‘dead crosses’, 86 and ‘injuriously endowed … with possessions’, 87 a place where ‘many heresies are raised’ by ‘false traitors’, 88 and saints and Archbishops are ‘slain in the Church door’. 89

Further to this corruption of the sanctified space of the Church, Baxter then acts contrary to the accepted community standards for the use of the familial home. According to her neighbour, Baxter invites people into her home to ‘read the law of

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79 Ibid., p. 594.
80 Ibid., p. 595.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid., p. 594.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid., p. 595.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
Christ’, instead of worshipping in the churches, for Lucifer’s devils fell to earth ‘entered into the images which stand in the churches, and have long lurked and dwell in them’. It is also revealed to the court that, instead of the ‘charter of salvation’ being held by the priests within the sanctified walls of the church, it is in the unseen and mysterious space of Baxter’s womb. The language and imagery relating to space in this text suggests the important part that space played in female religious practices. Further, it suggests that the Lollards did, or the Orthodox Christian authorities and community leaders believed they would, corrupt certain spaces and perhaps by their doing, bring about danger and evil.

From the thematic language clusters and reoccurring imagery of the Clyfland deposition, the religious, linguistic and textual practices of the Lollards are visible. That these activities were considered dangerous by the institutional authorities at that time is also clear. The thematic clusters and patterns of imagery provide insight into the beliefs and practices of the Lollard women, as well as the institutional and community responses to those beliefs and practices. Parts of the community were fearful of certain discursive, linguistic and textual practices, deemed to be ‘deviant’ and unauthorised. However, their concerns were more complex than simply a fear of unauthorised reading, writing and/or speaking. They were particularly worried about deviant textual practices occurring in spaces that could not be regulated and contained. Added to this, they were concerned by the disruptions to the accepted uses of space within the community, in family homes and even inside female bodies. The sanctity of the church building was called into question and the familial home was offered as an alternative. Compounding this, the language and imagery of the deposition also betrays a level of concern with the changing roles of the written and oral word. Throughout the text, a tension is felt between the increasingly dominant literate mentality and the traditional oral ways of thinking. The Clyfland deposition is a text that centres on ideas of disruption and change. Through it, accepted textual, linguistic and discursive practices; uses of space; notions of authority and language and discourse are all interrupted and challenged.

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90 Ibid.
91 Ibid., p. 596.
92 Ibid.
93 These ideas about the significance of space are discussed at length in Chapter Seven.
These same ideas, as encoded within the language and imagery of the Clyfland text, can be seen in the 1430 abjuration made by Hawisia Mone of Loddon to the Norwich courts. Evidence of the same four thematic language clusters is also apparent. Yet, despite the two statements to the courts featuring the same four themes, they are dealt with separately here because of the key differences between the two texts. The Mone abjuration is important because, unlike some other records available, it comes not from a ‘witness’ or ‘accuser’, but from the accused person herself. Typically at the point of abjuration, the scribe would total up the defendant’s offences and itemise them in the form of a single statement so that the defendants could acknowledge and recant their errors. The authorities would often use the utterances of the accused figure as a way of pointing to their guilt by their own words. Although the abjuration was penned with the purpose of the convicted heretic reading it aloud to the court, where the heretic was unable to read the document, the scribe or cleric appointed by the penitent heretic would read it to the court and the heretic would indicate their acceptance of the statement verbally and with some sort of written sign. In the case of Mone, it is inferred that she could not read the written document, as the statement is set with a cross and her seal. The Mone abjuration is different from other documents available, including from the Clyfland deposition, in terms of the voice it reveals and how it is written. On the whole, the Mone abjuration is far less dogmatic than the deposition made against Margery Baxter. There is less imagery and the language is more tempered. Perhaps by the end of 1430 the trials and the processes of recording them had become far more routine and staid. However, compared to the abjurations of other ordinary Lollards that survive, Mone’s is far more detailed and lengthy.

These differences with the Clyfland deposition aside, the fact that the document reveals the same themes as those already evidenced in the Clyfland deposition suggests that the activities of the women were similar, and that the concerns held about particular Lollard practices were not isolated to Margery Baxter. In the case of Hawisia Mone, the concern that certain Lollard textual, discursive and spatial practices would bring death, destruction and sin to their world is again present. The case made by the courts against Hawisia Mone, as recorded in Exeter’s document, is

94 Tanner, Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, p. 7.
interesting, as it primarily centres on the charge of receiving and harbouring known heretics in her home and of holding Lollard ‘schools of heresy’ in her house. Similarly to Margery Baxter, Mone’s ‘crimes’ relate to the misuse of the familial home for religious and proselyting purposes. Just as Baxter invited her neighbours and friends into her home to hear the vernacular Bible being read in the hopes of revealing the true Word of God to them, so too was Mone accused of encouraging (and sometimes leading) illegal textual practices in her own house.

The document recording Hawisia Mone’s abjuration or recantation to the court, consists of a series of ‘errours and heresies … writen and contened in these indentures’\(^95\) to which the heretic confessed. Like Clyfland’s deposition, it details around twenty items. Some of these are particularly important to my research and will be discussed in detail throughout this thesis. They include:

\[\ldots\text{that before this tyme Y have be rightly hoomly and prive with many heretikes, knowynge [thaym] for heretikes, and thaym Y have received and herberwed in our hous, and thaym Y have conceled, conforted, supported, maytened and favored with al my poar—whiche heretikes names be these \ldots\text{ whiche have ofte tymes kept, holde and continued scoles of heresie yn prive chambres and prive places of oures, yn the whyche scoles Y have herd, conceived, lerned and reported the errours and heresies which be writen and contened in these indentures.}\(^96\)

\[\text{Fyrst that the sacrament of Baptem doon in water in forme customed in the Churche is but a trufle and not to be pondred, for alle Cristis puple is sufficiently baptized in the blood of Crist, and so Cristis puple nedeth noon other baptem.}\(^97\)

\[\text{Also that confession shuld be maad oonly to God, and to noon other prest, for no prest hath poar to remitte synne ne to assoile a man of ony synne.}\(^98\)

\[\text{Also that the pope of Roome is fadir Antecrist, and fals in all hys werkyng, and hath no poar of God more than ony other lewed man but if he be more holy in lyvyng, ne the pope hath no poar to make bishops, prestes ne non other orders, and he that the puple callen the pope of Roome is no pope but a fals extersioner and a deseyver of the puple.}\(^99\)

\[\text{Also that he oonly that is moost holy and moost perfit in lyvyng in erthe is very pope, and these singemesses that be cleped prestes ben no prestes, but thay be lecherous and covetouse men and fals decyvours of the}\]

\(^96\) *Ibid*.
\(^97\) *Ibid*.
\(^98\) *Ibid*.
puple, and with thar sotel techyng and prechyng, syngyng and redyng piteously thay pile the puple of thar good, and tharwith thay susteyne here pride, here lechery, here slowthe and alle other vies, and always thay makyn newe lawes and newe ordinances to curse and kille cruelly all other persones that holden ageyn thar vicious levyng.\textsuperscript{100} Also that every man may lefully withdrawe and withholde tythes and offringes from prestes and curates and yeve hem to the pore puple, and that is moore plesyng to God.\textsuperscript{101} Also that every man and every woman being in good lyf oute of synne is as good prest and hath [as] muche poar of God in al thynges as ony prest ordred, be he pope or bisshop.\textsuperscript{102} Also that it is not leful to swere in ony caas, ne it is not leful to pletyn for onythyng.\textsuperscript{103} Also that no pilgrimage oweth to be do ne be made, for all pilgrimage goyng servyth of nothing but oonly to yeve prestes good that be to riche and to make gay tap[s]ters and proude ostelers.\textsuperscript{104} Also that no worship ne reverence oweth be do to ony ymages of the crucifix, of Our Lady ne of noon other seyntes, for al suche ymages be but ydols and made be werkyng of mannys hand, but worship and reverence shuld be do to the ymage of God, whiche oonly is man.\textsuperscript{105}

The central heretical ‘error’ recorded within the Mone abjuration relates to the idea of dangerous textual and discursive practices occurring within the unregulated, unsanctified and unseen spaces of the familial house. As with the case against Margery Baxter, Mone is identified as having invited people into the ‘private chambers and private places’\textsuperscript{106} of her home to read, hear, speak and debate the sacred Scriptures. Added to this, she admitted to having concealed and comforted known heretics in her house. During her recantation Mone confirms to the courts that she had been ‘right hoomly and prive with many heretike, knowyng [thaym] for heretikes’.\textsuperscript{107} As already noted, she also revealed that she had ‘oft tymes kept, holde and continued scoles of heresie yn prive chambres and prive places of oures’.\textsuperscript{108} In admitting this to the court, Mone reveals something of her activities, as well as the

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., p. 142.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., p. 140.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
authorities’ concern and interest with the idea of dangerous heretical and deviant textual and discursive activities occurring outside of Church-sanctified spaces in areas that were more difficult to regulate and control. Mone’s ‘crime’ was not just that she allowed the space of the familial home to be corrupted, but that she also participated and allowed erroneous and heretical ideas to be written down, heard, spoken and disseminated there. The important interplay between ideas of space and dangerous or deviant words and textual practices in this fifteenth-century society is exemplified by this point.

As with the Clyfland deposition of 1429, throughout the Mone abjuration there is evidence of an important link existing in the minds of medieval authorities between dangerous words and the notion of impending death, destruction and sin. Within the statement given to the courts, reference is frequently made to treacherous and untrustworthy words. Words and phrases such as ‘lyyng’, ‘bakbytyng’, ‘vicious leyng’, ‘fals deceyvours’ and ‘errorous and heresies which be writen’ all point to the notion of dangerous, deceptive words. This is further exemplified by references to the deviant textual and discursive practices occurring within Lollard homes. It is significant that through the language and imagery of the text, these hazardous words are linked with notions of impending doom, sin, death and God’s wrath. In her statement, Mone uses words and phrases such as ‘synne’, ‘curse’, ‘kille cruelly’, ‘penance’, ‘censure of holy Churche, sentences and cursynges’, ‘slee a man’, ‘putte ony man to deth’, ‘vengeance’ and ‘the sentence of God’. Words such as ‘sin’, ‘curse’ and ‘death’ are important as they allow for associations to be made between notions of human destruction and the textual and discursive practices the authorities were trying to prosecute.

109 Ibid., p. 141.
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
112 Ibid.
113 Ibid., p. 140.
114 Ibid., p. 141.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
118 Ibid., p. 142.
119 Ibid.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
The process of recanting meant that Mone (or the scribe who read the recantation for her) was able to announce in public some of her heretical beliefs. Among these were phrases that reminded the court-audience of God’s potential for vengeance. Mone’s abjuration to the court states that:

it is not leful to slee a man for ony cause, ne be processe of lawe to dampne ony tratour or ony man for ony treson or felonie to deth, ne to putte ony man to deth for ony casue, but every man shuld remitte all vengeance oonly to the sentence of God.\footnote{Ibid.}

This statement, which is clear that only God could pass judgement and sentence over a person, would unlikely have deterred the authorities from their prosecutions. Rather, the arrogance of the Lollard’s claims to know God’s will and to question the lawfulness of the prosecutions, it might have made them even more adamant and resolved in their persecution of Lollardy. To what extent the audience and the community might have been genuinely scared by this overt reminder that God could be vengeful and the Church authorities were potentially trespassing into his territory is unknown. However, the imagery and language of the Mone abjuration demonstrates how the religious, textual, discursive and spatial practices of the Lollards intersected with ideas of books, spaces within the home, and feminine, household-based activities and roles. It also supports the claim that the dominant community and authorities of fifteenth-century Norwich feared that these practices would disrupt the harmony of their society and threaten to bring about death, destruction, sin and the potential wrath of God.

Having examined in close detail, the patterns of language and imagery of the Clyfland and Mone deposition and abjuration, this chapter has revealed several clusters of thematic language and reoccurring images. Individually, each of the thematic language and imagery clusters evident in both the Clyfland and Mone statements reveal an important aspect of Lollard women’s religious beliefs and activities. When these clusters are considered together, the fears and concerns of some members of this community, particularly its religious and social leaders, are also betrayed to the present-day scholar. Individually and collectively, these clusters point to sections of a community fearful of the changing roles and beliefs within its
society. The texts tell the present day reader not only what the Lollards believed and practised, but also what the authorities and some people within the community feared the Lollards believed or practised. The Clyfland and Mone statements speak of groups fearful and confused by competing religious discourses and voices and the changing roles within their society. They convey the tension felt in relation to this and the apparent disruption to some important accepted truths. They speak of ordinary women applying Lollard theology to their own experiences and shaping spiritual lives that were meaningful to them. They provide evidence of the role that books and the family household played in women’s linguistic, textual, spatial and religious practices. They also reveal that the Norwich authorities and parts of the community feared that the wanton misuse of books, words, language and voices, in certain unsanctified spaces, would disrupt the harmony of their world and would bring death, doom, evil and perhaps even God’s vengeance. However, these ideas are only apparent when the historian undertakes a close textual analysis of the trial-related documents, looking, in particular, for reoccurring images and patterns of language.

Hawisia Mone’s abjuration and Joan Clyfland’s deposition to the Norwich courts provide the present-day historian with an invaluable insight into the beliefs of fifteenth-century Lollard women and the community in which they lived and operated. Many of their beliefs and practices, however, as well as the attitudes and concerns of the fifteenth-century institutional authorities, are not immediately accessible to the historian. They are encoded within the words of the court-related records. The purpose of this chapter has been to examine the language and imagery of the records using microhistory and ethnography, to reveal aspects to Lollard women’s particular theologies. It is the position of this thesis that the language and imagery evident in the records is not incidental, rather it should be regarded as an articulation of the two Lollard women’s core religious beliefs. The records are also an expression of the concerns and understandings of Lollardy held by sections of the community and the authorities. By examining in detail the reoccurring images and patterns of language in the texts, several key themes emerged. They related to the presence of dangerous words, books, voices and language; the potential for death; evil and God’s vengeance; the misuse and disruption of ‘space’; and the tensions between the written and oral word. While each of the thematic clusters is significant
in isolation, when examined together, they reveal much about the particular textual and religious activities of some Lollard women and the concern that sections of the Norwich community and its religious authorities had in relation to them. They feared that the textual and religious practices of the Lollards violated the accepted standards of community behaviour and threatened to bring about doom, evil and perhaps God’s wrathful vengeance.

Few histories to date have engaged with Lollard women and the nature of their religious participation. Many of the macrohistorical approaches have failed to recognise the influence of the rise of literacy and literate practices, the active and contributing roles of women in text-based religious cultures, and the significance of familial spaces to the practices of Lollardy. In opposition to this, this thesis will argue that these factors, so far largely ignored or dismissed as irrelevant by some historians, are in fact central to any understanding of the Lollard trials. The concession to these histories is an admission that the factors, although central, are not always immediately observable to the historian because of their complexity, the nature of document production in medieval legal culture and the paucity of source material available. However, by employing an approach to this topic informed by micro and ethnohistory, these ideas are apparent to the historian. This approach is important to this study, as it allows better access to what is silenced, suppressed or unsaid in the documents. Further, this approach prevents this thesis from making the same mistakes apparent in other histories that have accepted the sources of the period at face value.

Chapters Three through Seven establish the context in which the Lollard Heresy Trials should be considered and viewed, and examine each of the already identified thematic clusters in greater detail. The next chapter explores the fourteenth-century Black Death in England and the twelfth-century figure, Thomas Becket, who was executed in 1170 in the Canterbury Cathedral, with a view to providing a long-term contextual environment in which to read and interpret the court-related documents of the Norwich Heresy Trials. This is done so with the first thematic cluster, which includes the presence of images of death and destruction, in mind. This chapter will not be arguing that the events of the Black Death somehow ‘caused’ the Lollard prosecutions 80 years later. Rather, it is argued that the events of the Black Death
provided the imagery and discursive framework by which the prosecutions would later be framed, described and understood. This framework reveals itself through the thematic language clusters of the documents from the fifteenth-century trials. It will also argue that Margery Baxter’s alleged remarks in regards to Thomas Becket provide an understanding of Lollard beliefs and the standing of the Orthodox Church at the time of the heresy trials.
Chapter Three: ‘The Seeds of the Terrible Pestilence’:
Plague, Death, Violence and the Crisis in the Church

‘The death cart rumbling over the cobbles, the chalked cross on the house door, the useless bonfires in the streets struck terror into men’s hearts’. ¹

‘Death hovered over this century like no other in the Middle Ages’. ²

Eighty years before the 1428 Norwich Heresy Trials began, the Black Death reached the coast of England.³ Having already affected much of Europe from 1346 onwards, its first appearance in England came in June of 1348 in the port of Melcombe. The Plague’s arrival in the British Isles was described in this way in the Grey Friars’ Chronicle:

In this year, in Melcombe (now Weymouth), in the country of Dorset, a little before the Feast of St John the Baptist, two ships, one of them from Bristol, came alongside. One of the sailors had brought with him from Gascony the seeds of the terrible pestilence and through him the men of the town of Melcombe were the first in England to be infected’.⁴

Historians including William McNeill and Margaret Aston have put the subsequent population decrease from the effects of the Plague in the British Isles at somewhere between 20 and 45 per cent.⁵ Recently, however, some scholars have challenged this general assumption of a one-third loss in population. John Aberth and Ole J. Benedictow have both argued that this conservative figure needs to be revised

³ At first the plague was largely static and remained localised for a time. Then, it spread rapidly through Dorset and Somerset, westward to Devon, northward to Bristol, then on to Gloucester and eastward to Oxford and London by the beginning of November. See Cartwright, *A Social History of Medicine*, p. 62.
upwards to between 40 and 60 per cent at least.\(^6\) Although debates continue about the exact causes, effects, rate of death and overall significance of the Black Death, it is clear that it is regarded by most scholars as an important social, economic and political event of the Middle Ages and that the long-term effects on society were profound.\(^7\) For this study, the significance of the Plague lies not just in the number who died, but rather in its long-term effects on communities and their belief systems. The events of the fourteenth-century Black Death provide a basis for understanding English society in the fifteenth century and how Lollard women’s religious ideas arose and were expressed.

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold. Firstly, it examines the events of the 1340s Black Death with a view to establishing a broad contextual climate in which the Lollard Heresy Trials can be read and understood. This climate includes the general standing of the Orthodox Christian Church in English society post-Plague and that society’s understandings of, and attitudes toward, death. The second purpose of this chapter is to consider how these events provided a discourse and framework of understanding for Lollard women’s ideas. To achieve these purposes, this chapter starts with the first thematic cluster evident in the trial-related documents associated with Hawisia Mone and Margery Baxter; specifically, the notion of impending danger and God’s wrath, as reflected in the presence of violent and fearful language, and images of corrupt Church leaders abandoning their flock. To understand the meanings of this cluster of language and imagery present in fifteenth-century England, this thesis returns to the events of the 1340s. It will be argued that the events of the Plague contributed to a new pragmatism and realism to understandings of death in this culture, as well as a desire for a more individualised and direct relationship with Christ. This shift in thinking later provided the imagery and

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discursive framework through which the events of the fifteenth century were understood and articulated. This chapter also discusses the long-term religious dissatisfaction that emerged from the fourteenth century onwards, and how this was displayed in the deposition and abjuration of Mone and Clyfland, respectively. Particular reference will be made to how this dissatisfaction was expressed through the language, imagery and discourses of sin and God’s judgement present in both documents. This provides a context for the remainder of this thesis. The sources for this chapter include fourteenth-century art and literature; particularly images and representations of death and dying. Where English primary source material is scarce or unavailable, this thesis turns to relevant source material from the Continent.

This chapter will also explore Margery Baxter’s reported comments concerning Thomas Becket, the twelfth century Archbishop of Canterbury, executed in 1170. Saint Thomas, as he later became known, was a popular figure in the fifteenth-century and Baxter was accused of having dismissed him as a traitor and fraud. Exploring these comments, and their significance at the time they were uttered, provides further insight into the beliefs of Baxter and the Lollards and the standing of the Orthodox Christian Church in the eyes of the Lollards.

At first, it seems anomalous to focus on the Black Death and the events of the 1340s considering this is a study of English society in the 1430s. The idea that events that took place 80 years prior to the Norwich Heresy Trials could tell us something about the community in which the prosecutions occurred seems unlikely. However, as incongruous as it initially seems, the Plague and the social, economic, religious, political and emotional changes initiated by it, left a lasting imprint on the communities it affected. This historical event fundamentally altered and shaped the nature of English society in ways that were later revealed through the beliefs, values and mentalities of the people of 1430s Norwich. It will not be suggested that the Plague ‘caused’ the heresy prosecutions, or that it directly ‘caused’ individuals to seek solace in beliefs and values beyond Orthodox Christianity. However, it did provide a language and framework of understanding for the fifteenth-century Lollards. This thesis intends to explore the idea that the Plague and corresponding events of the 1340s in England had long-lasting effects on English communities;
including Norwich. In turn, by the 1430s, certain residual beliefs and values shaped by events of the 1340s are present in the texts of the Norwich Heresy Trials.

This chapter responds to an initial, simple observation about the Clyfland and Mone deposition and abjuration; an observation that is at the heart of the first thematic cluster. The statement provided to the Norwich courts by Margery Baxter’s neighbour, Joan Clyfland, and the abjuration of the accused Lollard, Hawisia Mone, frequently use violent and fearful language and imagery. By grouping the language and imagery within both texts, two distinct ideas are evident. The first idea repeated throughout the statements relates to images of death, violence, human destruction and the notion of God’s vengeance. The second is the idea of the corruption of, and abandonment by, the Church and its leaders. Although concepts of God’s wrath and human destruction, and even corrupt authorities, are not new and are present in the Bible, in this case, they are localised and directly relevant to the Norwich community. In her abjuration to the courts, Hawisia Mone identifies the priests and ministers of the Church as ‘lecherous and covetous men deceyvours of the puple’. \(^8\) Further, that they ‘kille cruelly’ \(^9\) anyone who questions ‘thar vicious levyng’. \(^10\)

This association with death and corruption is also found in the Clyfland deposition, in which it is suggested that the true ‘children of God’, \(^11\) William White, Father Abraham, John Wadden and others, were ‘most cruelly slain’ \(^12\) by the Bishop of Norwich and his ministers. In Margery Baxter’s alleged comments recounted to the courts by her neighbour, she attacks these Church leaders. She reportedly accuses them of ‘falsely and cursedly deceiv[ing] the people’, \(^13\) and she likens their work to that of the Devil and his members. \(^14\) Reference is also made to a bee that ‘stings the tongue and venoms the soul’, \(^15\) the slaying of the Archbishop of Canterbury in the Canterbury Cathedral, \(^16\) as well as the public execution of the Lollard teacher

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\(^8\) Tanner, *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich*, p. 141.
\(^9\) Ibid.
\(^10\) Ibid.
\(^12\) Ibid.
\(^13\) Ibid.
\(^14\) See Ibid.
\(^15\) Ibid., p. 594.
\(^16\) Ibid., p. 595.
William White.\textsuperscript{17} Further to this, the text is riddled with reminders of sin and human destruction. Language such as ‘slain’,\textsuperscript{18} ‘devils’,\textsuperscript{19} ‘sins’,\textsuperscript{20} ‘burned’,\textsuperscript{21} ‘cursed’\textsuperscript{22} and ‘death’\textsuperscript{23} are just a few examples of this. In the Mone abjuration, continued reference is made to concepts of death, vengeance and doom. Mone’s abjuration refers to ‘synne’,\textsuperscript{24} ‘curse’,\textsuperscript{25} ‘kille cruelly’,\textsuperscript{26} ‘slee a man’,\textsuperscript{27} ‘putte ony man to deth’,\textsuperscript{28} ‘vengeance’\textsuperscript{29} and ‘sentence of God’.\textsuperscript{30}

The repeated presence of the two key ideas throughout the deposition and abjuration is significant to our understandings of the trials and the contextual climate in which they occurred. Thought needs to be given to why images of death and doom are so prevalent, and why images of Church-corruption and Church leaders fleeing are present in the documents. Concerns with death and human destruction were not new; they had existed in Christian and non-Christian societies for a long time. However, as will be evident throughout this chapter, in fifteenth-century England these ideas took on great importance and intensity.\textsuperscript{31} Fifteenth-century English theology, art, literature and popular discourses provide evidence that these ideas had started to dominate and had become localised and more immediately relevant and specific to the community. Thus, for many fifteenth-century people, there was a belief that the Devil was not just on earth, he was at work in their communities. Furthermore, they feared that God’s wrath was being dealt to their communities.\textsuperscript{32} To understand why

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 596.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p. 595.
\textsuperscript{24} Tanner, Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, p. 141.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 142.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
these images and concepts were so prevalent in these fifteenth-century documents, it is necessary to look to the context in which they were produced; to understand the nature of, and the significance of, these images and concepts in that society. However, in order to reconstruct an appropriate contextual landscape of fifteenth-century Norwich, we need to look beyond the 1430s. The starting point is therefore an examination of the significance of the earlier Black Death, in particular in Norwich and East Anglia, and the social, economic, political and emotional changes it fuelled; changes that would continue to be felt in 1430s Norwich.

At the end of 1348, the Black Death made its way to the southernmost districts of East Anglia.33 By March of 1349, it was spreading across areas of East Anglia, including Norwich. It peaked in May, June and July of that year and appears to have receded during the autumn of 1349.34 Evidence is that, as a diocese, Norwich suffered greatly from the Black Death.35 As with many other East Anglian districts, the death rate was particularly high. The historian John Aberth puts the clerical mortality figure in 1349 for Norwich at 48.8 per cent, with an average clerical mortality figure across England of 48.97 per cent.36 Ole J. Benedictow also puts the mortality rate among clerics in the Norwich diocese at 48.8 per cent, although he admits this figure is likely an underestimation.37 He also puts his general mortality rate for the clergy at an approximate figure of 50 per cent, with a higher mortality figure of 60 per cent for urban clerics.38 The historian Philip Ziegler further confirms the particularly high clerical mortality rate in this diocese noting that:

in the years before the Black Death the average annual [mortality] figure for episcopal institutions was eighty-one. In the year between 25 March,
1349 and 25 March, 1350, the total rose to eight-hundred and thirty-one. Ziegler proposes that with death and desertions, there must have been at least 2,000 clerical vacancies.

With respect to those outside of the clergy, there is evidence to support the claim that previous mortality figures have generally been underestimated. Using manorial rolls and records of tithing members pre- and post-Plague, Benedictow estimates death rates among the non-clerical population. He puts the average mortality rate among the customary tenantry at approximately 55 per cent and the general population mortality rate in England at 62.5 per cent. Similarly, Aberth puts the rate within the range of 40 and 60 per cent. In his study of the diocese of Hereford, William Dohar conservatively puts the figure of beneficed clergy to have died as being between 38 and 40 per cent noting that the downward trends in recruitment and the simultaneous rise in rates of attrition point to similar, perhaps even greater, losses among the non-beneficed clergy as well.

One reason for this revision of mortality figures is increased access to a more diverse array of sources and improved methods for interpreting them. Aberth bases his mortality rates on a number of different historical sources that cross multiple dioceses and social groups. He uses three main sources: Inquisitions post-mortem, Heriots or death taxes and Bishop’s Registers. In comparison, Benedictow’s analysis of the British Isles uses two sources, both institutional registers: Bishop’s Registers and manorial court rolls. In isolation, each of these sources presents a limited picture, as they only reflect information about a limited social or community group. When considered together, however, they provide a more comprehensive representation of mortality at this time.

Writing in the early 1800s, almost 200 years prior to Aberth and Benedictow, the work of the historian F. Blomefield supports this view of the extent to which the Plague devastated the population of Norwich in the summer and autumn of 1349. He

40 Ibid., p. 172.
42 Ibid., p. 377.
43 Aberth, From the Brink of the Apocalypse, pp. 127–128.
44 Dohar, The Black Death and Pastoral Leadership, p. 52.
suggested that no less than ‘57,104 persons in the city, beside religious peoples and beggars, died’. Blomefield admitted this number was perhaps high, but explained that in the middle of the fourteenth century, the city was flourishing. Ziegler put the number of deaths throughout the diocese at 57,374, suggesting that, in his calculations, Blomefield had confused the figures for the city with those of the county or diocese. Ziegler also identified problems with Blomefield’s calculations for the total population in 1348. In spite of the miscalculation, the work of historians such as Blomefield, Benedictow, Aberth and Ziegler supports the position that the death rate in East Anglia was well above the national average.

Notwithstanding the high mortality figures in Norwich during the time of the Plague, the devastation caused to the community and institutional authorities by the Black Death did not lie in the figures alone. To appreciate the effects of the Plague on a community like Norwich, historians need to consider how the Church and community leaders dealt with the events and performed as leaders. As noted by William Dohar in his study of pastoral leadership and the Black Death in the diocese of Hereford, ‘death was the most impressive of the plague’s effects, but it was not the only one’. Dohar wrote that:

> prelates did not hesitate to claim a place of spiritual leadership in the holy warfare that was required at this time. Nevertheless, the church’s abilities to shepherd, guide, console, and minister in time of plague were all potentially compromised and severely so by the impact the disease had on the church itself. ... priests were falling as well to the disease. Many who remained in their churches, facing the possibility of contagion daily, died in the execution of their duties. Others quit their parishes and fled for whatever safety they thought they could obtain. In either case, congregations were left without priests or the sacramental care of the church, those same sacraments that were the assurances of Christ’s presence and healing.

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50 Blomefield calculated that the total population in 1348 would have been at least 70,000. This figure has been disputed and there has been suggestion of an error with the medieval transcription of some figures. See *Ibid*.
52 See Dohar, *The Black Death and Pastoral Leadership*.
53 Dohar, *The Black Death and Pastoral Leadership*, p. 3.
As already noted, in 1349, when plague-related deaths were at their peak in the diocese of Norwich, the mortality rate among its clerics was high.\textsuperscript{55} Added to this loss, there were also those who abandoned their posts.\textsuperscript{56} In considering this, thought needs to be given to the issue of community leadership. Scholars need to take into account the social effect of whether leaders stayed and led their communities or fled; and, in the wake of the Plague, what kind of leaders were left. It is also necessary to reflect upon the issue of community regard for, and faith in, certain belief systems and institutional authorities, and whether this was disrupted by the events.

On a purely practical level, the numbers of clerics that died during the Black Death represents a great loss for the Church. However, there were also additional and considerable consequences of these deaths. Philip Ziegler remarked that during the outbreaks of Plague, ‘the best of the clergy died, the worst survived’.\textsuperscript{57} By this it is meant that logically, it was the ‘best’ of the clergy (those who tended the sick and administered the last rites to the dying) that were most likely to die from the Plague. In contrast to these dedicated local priests were those that fled or isolated themselves away from events.\textsuperscript{58} It was noted by William Dene, a monk in Rochester, Kent, that during the epidemic, many chaplains and clerics refused to serve unless they received excessive salaries. In a mandate addressed to the Archdeacon of Rochester, 27 June 1349, the Bishop of Rochester threatened such individuals with suspension.\textsuperscript{59} In May 1350, Simon Islip, Archbishop of Canterbury, issued his constitution, \textit{Effrenata (Unbridled)}, to the bishops of the southern province of England. John Aberth, who reproduces the document, describes Islip as trying to do ‘for the clergy what the ordinance of labourers did for peasant opportunists, that is,
to stop parish priests from leaving their churches to work for more lucrative salaries elsewhere, especially in private chapels, or chantries.\textsuperscript{60}

In terms of the performance of the clergy in Norwich and East Anglia during the Plague, one of the most important Church leaders in Norwich, Bishop Bateman, provides an example of this.\textsuperscript{61} Bishop Bateman was involved in the peace negotiations with France when the Plague threatened his diocese. He returned by sea to Yarmouth on 10 June, where he was told of the death of his brother, Sir Bartholomew of Gillingham. He hurried to Norwich to find the Plague raging. His Vicar General, Thomas de Methwold, was ‘hiding’ at Terling in Essex. He also found that the new cemetery in the cathedral close (next door to his palace) produced an intolerable stench of death and decaying corpses.\textsuperscript{62} Bateman ordered his Vicar General back to work while he himself retreated to his rural manor at Hoxne, some 20 miles south of Norwich. In the next few months, he spent three days in Ipswich, but he did not visit the capital of his own diocese until the Plague had passed.\textsuperscript{63} This example supports Cartwright’s observations about the quality of the clergy that remained once death had reduced the ranks of the ‘best of the clergy’; that is, those conscientious clergy who tended to their flock. Cartwright noted that ‘the career priest fled. Langland records that “sithen the pestilence time” London has been filled with county clergy touting for high places instead of ministering to their parishioners’.\textsuperscript{64}

In the months and years after the Plague, the state of the clergy in terms of numbers and quality of leadership did not greatly improve. There was a shortage of priests and clergy, not just in Norwich, but throughout England, and this gave rise to an overall decline in ecclesiastical standards. With so many priests and clerics dead and dioceses in competition with each other to secure new priests, there was a lessening of standards in an effort to fill vacancies. The educational levels of the new priests were understandably less than those of their predecessors. Those who were literate

\textsuperscript{60} See Aberth, \textit{The Black Death: The Great Mortality of 1348-1350}, p. 104.  
\textsuperscript{61} See Ziegler, \textit{The Black Death}, p. 169.  
\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Ibid}.  
\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Ibid}.  
\textsuperscript{64} Cartwright, \textit{A Social History of Medicine}, p. 67.
were often middle-aged men with little sense of vocation or calling to the clergy.\(^{65}\) The demise of Latin and the consequent rise in vernacular religious texts was assisted by the fact that very few of these ‘new’ priests and clerics were educated or able to operate in Latin. Writing toward the end of the fourteenth-century, Henry Knighton, an Augustinian canon and chronicler of St. Mary’s priory, Leicester, wrote that:

in very short time there came crowding into orders a great multitude whose wives had died in the pestilence. As might be expected of laymen, many of these were illiterate and those who knew how to read could not understand what it was they read.\(^{66}\)

The story of the priest of the manor of Waltham, the Reverend William, who was appointed in early 1350, provides an example of this decline in standards.\(^{67}\) From his parishioners he earned the nickname of ‘William the one-day priest’, having robbed Matilda, the wife of John Clement de Godychester, of her purse. For this, he was arrested and hanged.\(^{68}\) While clerical misconduct was not confined to the fourteenth century and ‘delinquent priests cropped up in every generation’, in the post-Plague conditions of the 1350s ‘it came as less of a surprise when priests behaved with such a striking degree of impropriety’.\(^{69}\) From the actions of Bishop Bateman during, and the Reverend William immediately after, the Plague outbreak in East Anglia, it is clear that leadership in the community of Norwich had suffered and that the reputation of the clergy was possibly poorer after the Plague than it had been before.\(^{70}\) Not only did Norwich have one of the highest mortality rates in England, but some of their most important institutional leaders fled or failed. Although Norwich was not the only diocese to face such a situation, the level of death it experienced, when coupled with the failings of its community leaders, were factors that would shape the community of Norwich for years to follow.

In recent decades, there has been debate between historians, demographers, microbiologists and biomedicalists about the causes and rates of death that can be

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\(^{66}\) Quoted in Dohar, *The Black Death and Pastoral Leadership*, p. 118.


\(^{68}\) *Ibid*.


\(^{70}\) *Ibid*. 

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attributed to the fourteenth-century Black Death.\textsuperscript{71} For many years, it has generally been accepted that the cause of the Black Death was two varieties of Plague: Bubonic and Pneumonic.\textsuperscript{72} In 1894, the French bacteriologist Alexandre Yersin isolated and identified the plague bacillus thought to be the cause of the Great Mortality: \textit{Yersinia pestis}.\textsuperscript{73} Bubonic Plague was transmitted by the bacteria in the stomach of the flea, carried by the common black rat; pneumonic was spread via airborne droplets from those with contaminated lungs.\textsuperscript{74} This explanation of the causes of the Black Death is not wholly accepted among scholars. Since the early 1980s, several microbiological and biomedical historians have questioned whether Bubonic/Pneumonic Plague was solely responsible for the events of the 1340s. In 1984, Graham Twigg produced one of the first studies to argue that the Black Death in England in the 1340s was not Bubonic Plague.\textsuperscript{75} Following on from his work, several microbiological and biomedical historians have argued that it was far more likely \textit{Murrain}, or a cattle-based disease at work in England at this time. Susan Scott and Christopher Duncan, along with D.E. Davis and Norman F. Cantor, have argued that the Black Death was far more characteristic of a cattle-based disease such as Anthrax, rather than a rodent-based one.\textsuperscript{76}

The debates about the probable causes of the Black Death do not in themselves directly affect this study. What is of importance to this research is that in fourteenth-century England, the populace experienced a great rate of mortality, which both revealed and fuelled pre-existing social dissatisfaction among sections of the


\textsuperscript{73} See Robert Lacey, \textit{Great Tales From English History: Cheddar Man to the Peasants’ Revolt c. 7150 BC–AD 1381}, Little, Brown, Great Britain, 2003, p. 199.

\textsuperscript{74} See John Aberth, in particular, pp. 111–112.

\textsuperscript{75} Twigg, \textit{The Black Death}.

\textsuperscript{76} Further, these scholars, along with G. Karlsson, have produced evidence to support the argument that due to the scarcity of black rats in many Plague-affected areas at the time of the outbreaks, Bubonic Plague could not have been solely responsible for the outbreaks of pestilence. See G. Karlsson, ‘Plagues Without Rats: The Case of Fifteenth Century Iceland’, \textit{Journal of Medieval History}, vol. 22, 1996, pp. 263–284. This argument about the lack of black rats is contradicted quite convincingly by Benedictow, \textit{The Black Death}, pp. 22–24.
community. The recent scholarship in the area is of relevance to this study, as it reiterates the sense of devastation and loss felt at that time, and supports earlier visions of the proportions that died. The key issue for consideration here is how the people of the time perceived the Black Death and its associated events.\footnote{For a close analysis of one parish in Suffolk impacted by the Black Death see John Hatcher, \textit{The Black Death: The Story of a Village 1345–1350}, London, Phoenix, 2009. Using the large number of documents to have survived from the period, Hatcher recreates everyday medieval village life at the time of the Black Death and gives a sense of how the events affected ordinary people.}

While present-day scholars continue to debate the possible causes and rates of death attributable to the Black Death, to assume that medieval individuals living with the epidemics did not also develop valid theories and make important observations about the nature of the outbreaks would be erroneous. Although the medieval theories for the epidemics and the methods of defence against them proposed as a result of these theories are now regarded as inaccurate, this does not mean that medieval peoples did not have valid understandings of the events. Medieval scholars and chroniclers not only studied the outbreaks, they also made important observations and discoveries about their nature and transmission.\footnote{See Jennifer C. Vaught, \textit{Rhetorics of Bodily Disease and Health in Medieval and Early Modern England}, Farnham, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2010.} Although they never identified ‘the cause’ of the Plague, present-day scholars should not be too quick to dismiss their efforts. This point has greater poignancy when one considers that the long-accepted theory of the Black Death as a rodent-based Bubonic Plague is in doubt. Further, how people of the time made sense of what was occurring around them tells us much about those societies and the effects that the events had on their communities and systems of belief. For this reason, and with this point in mind, it is worth briefly examining some of the medieval theories offered to explain the events of the Black Death.

In October 1348, King Philip VI of France demanded an official explanation for the wave of death spreading across Europe. In response, scholars from the medical faculty of the University of Paris pronounced that God, in his anger, had created a deadly planetary conjunction. According to the French scholars, at exactly 1p.m. on 20 March 1345, Saturn, Jupiter and Mars moved into a fatal formation, which in turn released pestilence into the air.\footnote{See Aberth, \textit{From the Brink of the Apocalypse}, p. 115; Benedictow, \textit{The Black Death}, pp. 3–4.} Coupled with this astrological theory put forward
by the University of Paris, some physicians working at the time attributed the pestilence to miasma; the theory of waste and rotting material poisoning or corrupting the air. Medieval physicians believed that miasma could enter people’s bodies through inhalation or through the skin.\textsuperscript{80} In England, King Edward III was so concerned about the threat of miasma and the filthy streets of London that he wrote to the mayor of London in 1349 and again in 1361, urging action.\textsuperscript{81} Many prosperous households at the time hung heavy tapestries over their windows and doorways to keep the corrupted air out.\textsuperscript{82} This response was probably also necessary, as in certain heavily populated areas, or in houses close to burial grounds, the stench of decaying bodies would have been overwhelming. The idea of miasma commonly gave rise to strategies of isolation and quarantine. In the town of Gloucester, the inhabitants attempted to defend themselves by ‘shutting their gates, not allowing any alien person to enter the town’.\textsuperscript{83} Although it was to no avail and the disease soon struck the town, their attempts to keep the pestilence out demonstrates an understanding about the nature of the disease and its possible transmission. This strategy was a response to the idea that people could pass disease through personal contact and clothing, and demonstrates that, although this society had no concept of ‘germs’ or bacteria, they did have a sense of ‘diseases’ and how they spread. Some of these medieval responses to the Black Death warrant further examination as they provide an indication of some of the community mentalities toward, and experiences of, death and the circumstances at that time. They also provide a sense of the scale of the events for people affected by them, both during the 1300s and after. The mortality figures and descriptions of the rates of death referred to by medieval chroniclers and physicians provide a useful starting point.

In 1349 in England, William of Dene wrote that:

\begin{quote}
The mortality swept away so vast a multitude of both sexes that none could be found to carry the corpses to the grave. Men and women bore their own offspring on their shoulders to the church and cast them into a common pit. From these came a stench that hardly anyone dared to cross the cemeteries.\textsuperscript{84}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{80} See Benedictow, \textit{The Black Death}, pp. 3–4.
\textsuperscript{81} See \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{82} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Ibid}., p. 130.
Similarly, in 1348, Agnolo di Tura described his experiences of the Black Death in Siena. Although living in Tuscany, his description conveys the same sense of enormity of the events as William Dene writing in England around the same time. Both authors capture how events were perceived by some at the time. Agnolo di Tura wrote that:

in many places in Siena great pits were dug and piled deep with the multitude of dead. And they died by the hundreds, both day and night, and all were thrown in those ditches and covered with earth. And as soon as those ditches were filled, more were dug. And I, Agnolo di Tura, called The Fat, buried my five children with my own hands. And there were also those who were so sparsely covered with earth that the dogs dragged them forth and devoured many bodies throughout the city. There was no one who wept for any death, for all awaited death. And so many died that all believed that it was the end of the world.\(^{85}\)

Although no specific figures are given by either author, such accounts provide the modern-day reader with an overall impression of the situation. How historians choose to interpret such accounts of death and mortality rates given by chroniclers at the time is open to consideration. Sometimes, the mortality figures recorded by chroniclers seem unlikely, particularly in terms of the population figures of the day. For example, the poet Boccaccio estimated that in Florence in 1348, 100,000 lives were lost within five months, within a city that would likely have contained no more than 80,000.\(^{86}\) Similarly a Paduan chronicler claimed 100,000 individual deaths in Venice, the population of which was at most 150,000.\(^{87}\) In Siena, Agnolo di Tura suggested 52,000 died out of a possible 60,000 inhabitants.\(^{88}\) Robert of Avesbury said over 200 died each day in London and Friar John Clynn claimed 14,000 dead in Dublin.\(^{89}\) With such examples, particularly in those cases where the numbers of dead are quite likely impossible, the question of whether to disregard them altogether arises. However, to do so would be unhelpful, as such sources provide evidence of

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\(^{85}\) Agnolo di Tura, *Cronaca Senese, 1348*, as quoted in Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*, p. 109.

\(^{86}\) Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*, p. 123.

\(^{87}\) Ibid.

\(^{88}\) Ibid.: A Flemish chronicler recorded 62,000 in Avignon within just three months; Gilles li Muisis over 25,000 in Tournai; John Clynn 14,000 in Dublin; Jean de Venette 500 Parisians died each day; and Robert of Avesbury estimated over 200 a day in London (p. 123).

the deep impression made by the Black Death on the minds of the contemporaries, which, as it will be seen, was to be carried forward well into the following century.

In the lives of many medieval people, as with cultures before and after them, death had a constant presence.\(^90\) However, what this meant to fourteenth- and fifteenth-century individuals in particular, and how it affected their thinking and beliefs, needs further exploration. To better understand the effects that this presence of death had on medieval communities and their mentalities, this chapter now considers the rise of Apocalyptic visions and literature at that time. Although concepts of death and the Apocalypse had existed throughout Christian history, many historians argue that during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries these concepts took on a greater intensity than had previously been the case.\(^91\) During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the forces of famine, war, plague and death were heavily present in society, and for many Christians, this signalled the beginning of the Apocalypse. By examining the Apocalyptic and death-based imagery of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, evidence is found of medieval people using these ideas to explain, describe and understand events such as the Black Death. The narrative, imagery and discourses associated with Christian concepts of the Apocalypse provided the language and imagery for people to understand and describe their experiences. Further, in the fifteenth century, this discursive framework remained.

The English anchoress and mystic, Julian of Norwich, despite having lived through no less than eight outbreaks of plague during her lifetime nonetheless declared in the *Revelations of Divine Love* that ‘alle shall be wele’ with the world. As observed by John Aberth in response, not all chroniclers of the period agreed and many wrote of the plague as if the apocalypse, the end of creation was at hand.\(^92\)

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Thomas Brinton, archbishop of Roshester declared that:

Today the corruption of lechery and the imagining of evil are greater than in the days of Noah, for a thousand ways of sinning which were unknown then have been discovered now, and the sin of the Sodomites prevails beyond measure, and today the cruelty of lords is greater than in the time of [Hebrew King] David. And therefore, let us not blame the fails of God on the planets or the elements but rather on our sins, saying, as in [the biblical book of] Genesis, ‘We deserve to suffer these things because we have sinned’.³⁹

Similarly the Archbishop Zouche of York wrote in a letter written in mid-summer, 1348, that:

As human life of earth is warfare, there is little wonder that those who wage war on the miseries of this world are sometimes disturbed by uncertain events, at times favourable, at others adverse. For Almighty God at times allows those he loves to be chastised since, by an outpouring of spiritual grace, strength is perfect in infirmity. Therefore, who does not know what great death, pestilence and infection in the air hangs about various parts of the world and especially in England these days. This is indeed caused by the sins of people who, caught up in the delights of their prosperity, neglect to remember the gifts of the Supreme Giver.⁴⁴

With respect to the Continent, Louis Heyligen, a musician at the papal court of Avignon, wrote a letter that appeared in an anonymous Flemish chronicle in 1348. His description of the arrival of the Plague, which recalls the Revelation of St. John, Apocalypse 8:7. It was as follows:

In the same year [1347] in the month of September, a great mortality and pestilence began … namely that near Greater India in Eastern parts, in a certain province, terrible events and unheard of tempests overwhelmed that whole province for three days. On the first day it rained frogs, serpents, lizards, scorpions and many venomous beasts of the sort. On the second day thunder was heard, and lightning flashes mixed with hailstones of marvellous size fell upon the land, which killed almost all men, from the greatest to the least. On the third day there fell fire together with stinking smoke from the heavens, which consumed all the rest of men and beasts, and burned up all the cities and castles of these parts.⁵⁵

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⁵⁵ Louis Heyligen’s description was part of a letter that was incorporated into a Flemish chronicle, J.J. De Smet (ed.), *Recueil des Chroniques de Flandre*, 4 vols, Brussels, 1837–65. Quoted in Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*, p. 2 and Ziegler, *The Black Death*, p. 14. According to Aberth, Heyligen was also an eventual victim of the Plague. He died sometime in July 1348 (Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*, p. 2).
In a similar vein, the Italian chronicler, Gabriele de Mussis’ description of the arrival of the Plague evoked St. John’s Apocalyptic vision. Mussis’ account includes a ‘thick rain’ of serpents and toads in the East, while in India there were earthquakes and a rain of blood and stones. Although implausible, these images allowed medieval persons to articulate and give meaning to what was occurring. Even if medieval writers and chroniclers did not necessarily believe the Apocalypse was coming, the concept provided a discourse and framework of understanding through which the medieval person could engage with the events of the period. Present-day scholars rely heavily on demographic, biological, medical, microbiological, epidemiological and geographical discourses to describe and understand the Black Death. While necessary, these discourses convey little of the actual experiences of individuals living during the fourteenth century. Where possible, historians need to return to the words and images of the time, which were influenced by the phenomena of the Black Death. They provide a way into some of the mentalities, beliefs and fears of those communities affected.

Apocalyptic concerns and notions of the impending destruction of humanity were not confined to Continental Europe, they had a presence in England also. Reoccurring outbreaks of pestilence, the ongoing war with the French, the 1381 Peasants’ Revolt, the Disendowment Bill and an earthquake in 1382 contributed to a rise in Apocalyptic visions or beliefs during the 1380s in particular. Although, during the fourteenth century, the Black Death was pivotal, it was not the only social event or factor contributing to social upheaval and discontent, and the Black Death itself was not a single, isolated outbreak or incident of Plague. After the initial outbreak in 1348, further epidemics are recorded, including a recurrence in 1361 known as *pestis puerorum*. This outbreak was characterised by a particularly high

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96 Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*, pp. 2–3.
97 John Wycliffe’s devotion to the concept of the Antichrist—a central component in concepts of the Apocalypse—is noted by John Aberth. Wycliffe devoted many of his sermons (especially the later ones) to this concept. His criticism of the papacy and its corruption and wealth extended to the suggestion that the Antichrist was already present and at work through the Pope and his Church. See Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*, p. 5. See also, M. Wilks, “Wyclif and the Great Persecution”, *Studies in Church History: Prophecy and Eschatology*, Ecclesiastical History Society Subsidia, vol. 10, 1994.
98 It is important to remember that the Plague was not confined solely to the 1348 outbreak. In the years that followed the initial outbreak, there were subsequent outbreaks throughout England. Ziegler notes that as well as the outbreak in 1348, there were outbreaks to follow in 1361, 1368–1369, 1371, 1375, 1390 and 1405 (p. 234).
mortality rate among children.\textsuperscript{99} Children aged between one and 11; that is, those who were born after 1350, and who therefore possessed no immunity, suffered heavily. There are indications that one outcome of this outbreak was a significant destabilisation of the fundamental beliefs of the society. Further, there is evidence that within England during this outbreak, some sections of the community believed the end was near and Judgement Day was close.

In England, in an unknown year, an anonymous cleric poet wrote of the three ‘signs’ of God’s Judgement looming in ‘A Warning to Be Ware’. He wrote that:

\begin{quote}
The Rysing of the Comuynes in Londe,
The Pestilens and the eorthe-quake,
Theose threeo thinges, I understonde,
Beo-tokens the grete vengaunce and wrae
That schulde falle for synnes sake,
As this clerkes conne de-clare.
Nou may we chese to leve or take,
For warnyng have we to ben ware.\textsuperscript{100}
\end{quote}

Around 1388, Thomas Wimbledon delivered a sermon at the prestigious St. Paul’s Cross in London. As with the anonymously written ‘A Warning to Be Ware’, Wimbledon’s sermon warned of the nearing Apocalypse, and pointed to certain events in England as signs of this. In his sermon, Wimbledon was far more specific than the cleric poet, as he forecast the arrival of the Antichrist and the Day of Judgement after 12 years, in the year 1400.\textsuperscript{101} His prediction was based on the Book of Matthew in which Jesus tells his disciples to watch for the signs of the coming Apocalypse; pestilence, wars and shakings of the earth. The sermon received a wide audience when it was reproduced and distributed in a printed version.

Evidence of Apocalyptic and Millennial movements can be found throughout the history of Christianity and the concepts themselves are not unique to the medieval period. However, what made the period notable and unlike others in England’s history, was a ‘confluence of crises that threatened to make these visions of the

\textsuperscript{99} Cartwright, A Social History of Medicine, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{100} F.J. Furnivall (ed.), ‘A Warning to Be Ware’ [n.d.], in The Minor Poems of Vernon MS, 2 parts, Early English Text Society, o.s 117, 1901.
Apocalypse real’. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, famine, death, war and plague occurred all at once and on a previously unimagined scale, giving rise to a belief, based on evidence, that the end of the world was coming.

As noted earlier, this chapter responds to a simple observation from the two documents providing the primary source material for this thesis. In Joan Clyfland’s deposition against Margery Baxter, and in Hawisia Mone’s abjuration, two distinct ideas are evident. One relates to the overwhelming presence of images of death, violence, human destruction and the notion of God’s vengeance. The second idea relates to the notion of the corruption of, and the flock’s abandonment by, the Church and its leaders. Reading the two documents, the dominating presence of language and imagery related to death is clear. An explanation for this lies in the earlier events of the fourteenth century (for example, in the Black Death), during which time death on a large scale was a persistent and recurring factor in medieval people’s lives. However, although a significant contributor, it cannot be argued that the fourteenth-century Plague was solely responsible for this focus on death. The intense interest that medieval peoples and cultures had in notions of death, even prior to the Black Death, has been observed by some historians. This interest, in itself, is not particularly significant; all cultures exhibit such tendencies. What is significant, however, is the nature of the interest, how it manifested itself and how the contemporaries dealt with it. During the fourteenth century, there was an intense, hyper-vigilant interest in death and the exploration of all that it entailed.

In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, there was a shift towards a new type of realism and pragmatism with respect to understandings and representations of death. This was influenced in no small part by the events of the Black Death. In 1924, the historian Johan Huizinga remarked that:

ascetic meditation had, in all ages, dwelt on dust and worms. The treatises on the contempt of the world had, long since, evoked all the

102 Aberth, From the Brink of the Apocalypse, p. 6.
horrors of decomposition, but it is only towards the end of the fourteenth century that pictorial art, in its turn, seizes upon this motif. To render the horrible details of decomposition, a realistic force of expression was required, to which painting and sculpture only attained towards 1400. At the same time, the motif spread from ecclesiastical to popular literature.\footnote{Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages, p. 136. This is a dated text and the author almost admonishes Medieval culture for its crude emphasis on putrefaction and decay. His text should be read for the observations about the presence of images of death, rather than for the analysis he brings to those observations.}

By examining the literature, art, architecture and imagery of the period, it is clear that medieval society was intensely interested in notions of death and dying. As a society, medieval England did not shy away from an awareness of death, rather it was an important part of their culture.\footnote{See Houlbrooke, Death, Religion and the Family. Although concerned with a slightly later period, this text is still useful in terms of its exploration of the effects religious change had on English attitudes, values, beliefs and rituals towards death. It considers the area of burial and commemoration, which is of interest to this chapter.} However, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, with the events of the Plague, these ideas about death became more central and immediately relevant to communities. In response to, and perhaps as a way of coming to terms with the amount of death witnessed during the Black Death, medieval communities confronted death in a direct way. This is reflected in some of the social and cultural features of these societies, including their literature, artworks, theology and social rituals.\footnote{See Christopher Danniell, Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066–1550, London and New York, Routledge, 1997.} By exploring some of the representations of death and dying, greater understanding is brought to readings of the Clyfland and Mone texts, and the presence of the concept of death within them.

The phenomenon of the ‘transi tomb’ is a useful starting point for a closer examination of medieval attitudes towards death.\footnote{Bynum, Fragmentation and Redemption, figure 6.4, p. 203, for a fifteenth century illustration of a transi tomb. The illustration, A Disputation Betwyx the Body and Wormes, is a drawing of the medieval funerary sculpture known as the transi tomb. It contrasts the putrefaction of the body in the grave with the pleasures once enjoyed in life. According to Bynum, the contrast of the tomb also offers the hope of the resurrection. John Aberth includes photos and descriptions of several transi tombs; Henry Chichele (d. 1443), p. 233, Richard Fleming, Bishop of Lincoln Cathedral (d. 1431), p. 235, and Thomas Beckington, Bishop of Bath and Wells, Wells Cathedral (d. 1465), pp. 240–241. See also Kathleen Cohen, ‘Metamorphosis of the Death Symbol: The Transi Tomb in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance’, Studies in the History of Art, no. 15, University of California Press, 1973; Boase, Death in the Middle Ages.} When Archbishop Henry Chichele died in 1443, he was entombed in Canterbury Cathedral in a transi tomb,
the construction of which he had overseen during his life. On the upper level of the tomb, lay the carved image of the Archbishop in the full robes and regalia of the primate. Under this level, the audience could see through the Gothic windows into what looked like a coffin. Here lay a carved body; naked, withered, open-mouthed, emaciated and decaying. His epitaph echoed the vision:

I was a pauper born, then to Primate raised
Now I am cut down and ready to be food for worms
Behold my grave.
Whoever you may be who passes by, I ask you to remember
You will be like me after you die
All horrible, dust, worms, vile flesh.

Derived from the Latin verb ‘transire’, meaning to pass away, transi tombs were characterised by their two levels; one, the idealised figure as they existed in life, the other, a macabre yet pragmatic acceptance of one’s mortality and materiality. The transi tombs started to appear in the 1390s and continued through to the seventeenth century.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, prior to the rise of transi tombs, ‘gisants’ were common. Unlike the transi tombs, the images of gisants showed the deceased as they might have looked in life, or as an idealised version of them. The tomb of Edward II, who died in 1327, showed a more idealised view of the occupant by the angels at his head. The demise of the gisant tomb in favour of the transi tomb during the latter part of the Middle Ages points to an important shift in mentalities. It has been observed that:

the wistfulness of remembrance and thought of frailty in itself do not satisfy the need of expressing, with violence, the shudder caused by death. The medieval soul demanded a more concrete embodiment of the perishable: that of the putrefying corpse.

With the events of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, medieval people had witnessed significant death and human suffering. In view of this, it was not enough to simply be aware of death, they needed to confront it as a society and directly

109 Epitaph from the tomb of Henry Chichele (d. 1443), as quoted in Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*, p. 181.
110 Ibid., p. 229.
acknowledge death for what they now understood it to be, post-Black Death. The transi tomb is symbolic of this shift.

Further evidence of the changes that occurred in the fourteenth and fifteenth century is found in the rise of the Danse Macabre or Dance of Death. The Danse Macabre was a pictorial, literary, performative or musical representation of the living being led off to their graves, sometimes according to their social rank, by a personified figure of Death. The notion of the Dance was an important feature of the culture of death that existed at that time. On the one hand, the notion of a ‘Dance’ conveyed a sense of the ‘mocking’ nature of death leading its unwilling partner in a morbid inversion of the courting ritual of dance. However, it also conveyed a sense of the inevitable and inescapable nature of death. In the Dance, individual identities were lost, and death came to all social classes. The first known reference to the Dance was in 1350, almost immediately after the Plague. Further evidence of the Dance’s origins in the Black Death include the fact that the Bubonic Plague, which attacked the victim’s nervous system, sometimes resulted in Chorea. Also known as St. Vitus’s Dance, Chorea produced involuntary muscle spasms sometimes characterised or even masked by a kind of dance. This was similar to ergotism or St. Anthony’s Fire, which was experienced by some during the Great Famine of 1315–1317.

Although the Danse Macabre could be rendered through performance and literature, some evidence of its existence in medieval pictorial or visual form remains. As with other social and cultural mediums:

painting also responded to the plague-darkened vision of the human condition provoked by repeated exposure to sudden, inexplicable death

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113 Aberth, From the Brink of the Apocalypse, p. 206.
114 Ibid.
115 Aston, The Fifteenth Century, includes examples of the role of Death in Medieval artworks. See an illustration of The Triumph of Death c. 1470–1480: a cart being drawn by buffalo, upon which stands Death. Death is also shown treading on the body of a Priest and the head and crown of a King (p. 16). Aston also includes an illustration from an early fifteenth century Book of Hours of a dead man lying naked as he must leave the world (p. 17).
The ‘Dance of Death’ became a common theme for art; and several other macabre motifs entered the European repertory.\textsuperscript{116}

One of the earliest surviving images of the Dance of Death is also one of the most significant representations.\textsuperscript{117} During the English occupation of Paris during the Hundred Years War, a fresco, accompanied by a poem, was painted on the Southern Cloister of the Cemetery of Les Innocents. Painted in 1424–1425, it depicts a personified Death leading the living off to their graves in a dance. The English poet John Lydgate made a loose transcription and translation of the poem and by 1440, pictures to accompany Lydgate’s version of the poem were painted on the north cloister of Pardon Churchyard at St. Paul’s Cathedral in London.\textsuperscript{118} Neither the St. Paul’s nor Les Innocents fresco survived.

The poem and the accompanying images are significant for several reasons. Firstly, they demonstrate that the notion of a Dance of Death existed across multiple forms of representation; that is, performance, music, literature and pictorial. Secondly, they are indicative of medieval mentalities towards death and dying. From the various accounts of representations of the Danse Macabre, it is apparent that medieval peoples were concerned with, and attempting to confront, the nature of death and dying, in a direct and pragmatic way. Thirdly, the frescos were part of a larger visual culture of death, which was enjoying popularity and influence in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in particular. From images such as these, and from the rise of the phenomena of the Danse Macabre and the transi tomb, it is evident that people in England in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were concerned with death, but in a new, intensely realistic way. This shift from being simply a culture (like all others) interested in death and dying to being one that was acutely pragmatic in representing the macabre reality of death is revealing. Theirs was a community trying to confront the realities of death and dying. This in turn created a culture of death, and a more experientially based view of death, which can still be seen in the preserved literature and artwork, and in the surviving evidence of the social rituals, of this period.

\textsuperscript{117} Aberth, \textit{From the Brink of the Apocalypse}, p. 208.
\textsuperscript{118} See Aberth, \textit{The Black Death: The Great Mortality of 1348-1350}, p. 161 and, in particular, pp. 165-166 where Lydgate’s poem is reproduced.
To appreciate why, by the 1430s, some sections of English society had turned away from the Orthodox Christian Church in favour of religious practices and beliefs such as Lollardy, which were grounded in the individual and experiential, this study looks to English society in the fourteenth century, at which time anti-clerical sentiments were becoming increasingly evident. Although the fourteenth century saw an erosion of the general standing of the Church in society, a rise in anti-clerical sentiment and increased interest in heterodox religious movements, this is not to suggest that there was a wholesale rejection of the Orthodox Church by all sections of society. As an institutional power, the Orthodox Church still had a powerful and central role to play in many sections of English society. However, for other sections, the Church’s standing had been damaged. Although it was the effects of the events of the Black Death that contributed most directly to the increasingly negative attitudes towards the Church and the social disarray of the fourteenth century, there were other factors that also contributed to this. At this point, this thesis briefly considers some of these.

Notwithstanding the considerable social, economic and political repercussions of the Black Death, historians generally agree that, even prior to the 1348 outbreak of Plague, fourteenth-century English society was exhibiting signs of social and political strain and economic tension. According to some historians, ‘the Black Death did no more than accelerate, though often violently accelerate, an established and, in the long run, inevitable progress’. By 1340, economic recession, continued warfare, a fall in population growth, famine, high taxation, an archaic system of land-tenure, an unequal class system and an increasingly corrupt Church institution, provided the conditions for a social collapse. By 1340, 60 per cent of European wealth and political power lay in the hands of just 300 noble families, of which about four dozen were in England. In 1340, 90 per cent of England’s wealth lay in land:

121 Cantor, In the Wake of the Plague, p. 59.
40% of land was owned by the King and royal family, and high aristocracy. Another 30% ecclesiastical officers. 30% owned by the rural upper middle classes—called gentry in the fifteenth century.\footnote{Ibid., p. 123.}

Coupled with the inherent inequalities of England’s social structure and economic systems, economic decline had set in before the 1348 outbreak.\footnote{Ziegler, The Black Death, p. 235.} As the result of a rigid system of land-tenure, recession had begun, the standard of living was in decline and population growth was falling. Added to the economic tensions, England had been severely affected by one of the worst subsistence crises on record.\footnote{Cantor, In the Wake of the Plague, p. 63.}

Between 1315 and 1322, the Great Famine struck both Europe and England, with the worst years between 1315 and 1317.\footnote{For mortality figures for England during the Great Famine and pre-Plague see I. Kershaw, ‘The Great Famine and Agrarian Crisis in England, 1315–1322’, in R.H. Hilton (ed.), Peasants, Knights, and Heretics in English Social History, Cambridge, 1976; J.C. Russell, ‘The Pre-plague Population of England’, Journal of British Studies, vol. 5, 1966, pp. 1–21.} East Anglia and Norwich, which were commercially tied to the Low Countries, were devastated by the Great Famine.\footnote{Logan, A History of the Church, p. 281.}

The cost of the Famine in terms of human lives is difficult to estimate. Even with an approximate mortality rate, it is not possible to know what percentage can be directly attributed to starvation. Despite this, during the years of the Great Famine, it is generally accepted that mortality figures were high, sometimes as high as 15 and 20 per cent.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 17–18.} Not only was England subject to the ravages of famine, in 1337 war began with France. The Hundred Years’ War between England and France raged intermittently until 1453.\footnote{See A. Curry, The Hundred Years War, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and London, 1993; R. Neillands, The Hundred Years War, London and New York, 1990; K.B. McFarlane, ‘War, the Economy, and Social Change: England and the Hundred Years War’, Past and Present, vol. 22, 1962, pp. 3–13; M.M. Postan, ‘The Costs of the Hundred Years War’, Past and Present, vol. 27, 1964, pp. 34–53; J.W. Sherborne, ‘The Cost of English Warfare with France in the Later Fourteenth century’, Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, vol. 50, 1977, pp. 135–150.}

As an institution, the Orthodox Christian Church suffered greatly from the social, economic and political breakdown leading up to the outbreak of Plague, as well as from the events of the Black Death. Even before the outbreak of pestilence, there were signs that the Church was falling out of favour with increasingly discontented
Anti-clericalism was of course not unheard of prior to the Black Death. However, after the outbreaks of pestilence, it became more open and widespread. On a practical level, the Church lost many of its clerics, monks and priests to the Plague. On a philosophical and intellectual level, community confidence in its claims to solely know God’s will and explain the mysteries of the world was damaged. The seemingly arbitrary and horrific nature of death from the Plague discredited the Church’s claim to a special understanding and knowledge of God. As an institution that had coveted all medical, spiritual and theological knowledge, the task of providing spiritual assistance and theological explanations, as well as of establishing administrative measures to cope with the devastation, lay with the Church. In this they generally failed. The Church’s inability to avert mass suffering and death destroyed confidence in its miraculous powers. With the Plague, many of the rituals and ‘mysteries’ of the Church that gave it its authority were exposed to some sections of the community as meaningless. Holy Communion, prayer, indulgences and priests could not protect the individual from death and the seemingly random nature of the Plague. The Plague brought medieval people into intimate and sometimes frequent contact with death and suffering. For some, this acute familiarity with death could not be eased or explained with orthodox theology. The Church struggled to maintain its unquestioned God-ordained authority and claims to power when the ‘mysterious’ rituals and knowledge it claimed to possess, were revealed as useless against this epidemic. Consequently, many ordinary Church members shifted away from the Church.

Although unquestioning belief in the power and authority of the Church waned post-Plague, religious belief and the desire for an understanding of God did not, and there was a corresponding rise in religious fervour and heterodox religious movements.

129 Cartwright, A Social History of Medicine, p. 60.
130 McNeill, Plagues and Peoples, p. 185.
131 Cartwright, A Social History of Medicine, p. 67.
132 Rates of Plague-produced mortality were particularly high among the clergy. In some areas, more than two-thirds of the clergy died. See S.M. Houghton, Sketches From Church History, Edinburgh, Great Britain, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1980, p. 66. Historians should consider what message was conveyed to the community when it’s ‘most holy’ and ‘most faithful’ members were dying also, and on a considerable scale.
133 See Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon (eds), The Church, the Afterlife and the Fate of the Soul: Papers Read at the 2007 Summer Meeting and the 2008 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society, Saffron, Walden, Ecclesiastical History Society, 2009.
Traditional ecclesiastical rituals and administrative structures were inadequate in meeting the needs of parts of the Plague-affected population. In response to this, there was a rise in ‘unorthodox’ religions. Interest in mysticism and heterodox religions increased as individuals in need of spiritual understanding realised access to Christ and the Word of God could not be controlled solely by the priests and monks. Further to this, dissatisfied individuals and groups sought to be able to access the Word of God for themselves, without mediation. For some communities that had seen death on a large scale and survived, orthodox teachings and ‘pathways’ for accessing God no longer held unquestioned sway. Many people looked for understandings of Christ that made sense to them in the context of what they had experienced. Orthodox Christianity could not, or did not, offer this, whereas ascetic, mystical and heterodox movements, for some people, could. Interestingly, the desire for vernacular religious texts and access to the Word of God independent of clerics was aided by the fact that many of the clerics and teachers trained in Latin were now dead, and were being replaced with men who were less-educated, particularly in Latin.

Further evidence of the social climate post-Plague is found in the Peasant’s Revolt, which broke out in the Spring of 1381 in England’s south and eastern countries. The rising was largely confined to the heavily populated agricultural areas such as East Anglia and the Home Counties, where the Black Death had caused the highest mortality. A direct link cannot be made between the Black Death and the 1381 Peasant’s Revolt. The social, economic and political factors surrounding the uprising are too many and too complicated to argue a causal relationship between the two events. However, the circumstances of the 1381 uprising provide an indication of the standing of the Church in the community at that time, and provide evidence of the weakening of its authority. Although it is not clear what factors eventually ‘caused’ the Spring Uprising in England, on 14 June 1381, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Simon Sudbury, was beheaded by the insurgent mob. His head was symbolically

136 See McNeill, Plagues and Peoples, p. 183.
138 Cartwright, A Social History of Medicine, p. 66.
displayed above the gate of London Bridge; an act usually reserved for convicted traitors. The murder of the Archbishop signals a fundamental shift in medieval thinking about the relationship between Church leaders and their flock. The Revolt and the murder of the Archbishop is further evidence of the long-term religious dissatisfaction within sections of communities and the erosion of the Church’s standing within them. The murder was symptomatic of the power and authority the Church had lost during that period.

The seeming incongruity of focusing on the fourteenth-century Plague when this thesis is a study of fifteenth-century heresy has already been noted. However, it is important to again emphasise the reason that an examination of the long-term religious dissatisfaction and lasting social effects of the Plague is necessary for reading the court-related documents. The fifteenth-century court statements made by Hawisia Mone and Joan Clyfland provide access to the ideas of Lollard women and the fifteenth-century community in which the Lollard prosecutions occurred. Through their imagery and language, they reveal some of Baxter and Mone’s religious beliefs and activities. They also reveal what some sections of the community understood Lollardy to be and what aspects of the movement in particular concerned them. With close examination of the Mone and Clyfland texts and the imagery and language that reoccurs within them, two particular ideas are clear. The first relates to the presence of imagery and language associated with death, violence, human destruction and God’s vengeance upon humanity. The second relates to the notion of the corruption of the Church and its abandonment of the people. To better understand the significance of these ideas, they need to be contextualised within the fifteenth-century community in which they were uttered and recorded, as well as in the fourteenth-century society in which the fifteenth-century community had its roots.

Thus, this chapter has examined the events of the fourteenth century to reveal that some of the language and ideas evident in the Mone and Clyfland texts stem from the events of this period. It is not the case that the Plague caused the heresy trials of the 1430s or that it gave rise to the beliefs that the trials sought to eradicate. Rather,

139 See Aberth, From the Brink of the Apocalypse, p. 145.
140 Cartwright, A Social History of Medicine, p. 67.
1430s Norwich was a society living in the wake of the Plague and was significantly shaped by the events of the 1340s and 50s. The effects of the initial outbreaks were reiterated by the return of plague at various times. The Black Death, as well as later outbreaks of plague, later provided the people of early fifteenth-century Norwich with the language, imagery and concepts to articulate what was happening around them. The events surrounding the Black Death also played a role in the development of Lollard thought and provided a language for dissent. At this point, the focus of this study again returns to the Clyfland and Mone texts and the thematic clusters evident in them; in particular, the notion of corrupt and ineffectual Church leaders.

Just as violent language and death-based imagery has a noticeable presence in the Clyfland and Mone texts, so too does the notion of the corruption of the Church and images of its leaders fleeing. The language and imagery relating to Church leaders within both documents is important in our reading of them. The language reportedly used by the accused figures in relation to the Norwich community leaders is filled with ideas of sin and vice, and is derived from the Church’s own discourses. In the Mone abjuration, the accused individual admits to having spoken of the priests and clergy as:

lecherous and covetous men and false deceivers of the people, and with their sole teaching and preaching, singing and reading piteously they pile the people of their good, and with that sustenance here pride, here lechery, here sloth and all other vices, and always they make new laws and new ordinances to curse and kill cruelly all other persons that hold against their vicious levying.  

Here Mone uses the Church’s own discourses on vice and sin to speak of their moral corruption. Similarly, the Clyfland deposition speaks of the ‘pride, riot, and idleness’ of the Church officials, ‘endow[ing] the churches with possessions’ and ‘falsely and cursedly deceiv[ing] the people with their false mammerties and laws, to extort money from the simple folk’. The clergy and priests are said by the accused and others within the community to be corrupt, idle and faithless. When Margery Baxter is reported by her neighbour to have called the Bishop of Norwich

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141 Tanner, *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich*, p. 141.
143 *Ibid*.
144 *Ibid*.

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‘Caiaphas’, a powerful religious image is recalled and employed against the Church. By calling the Bishop ‘Caiaphas’ (the high priest of the Temple at the time of the trial of Jesus), the clergy of the fifteenth-century Church in Norwich are likened to the corrupt leaders who allowed the false conviction and execution of Christ. Added to this, the accused individuals in this image are likened to the martyred Christ. Again, the discourses and imagery of the Orthodox Christian Church are reversed and employed by the accused heretics against the authorities seeking to convict them.

It is telling that a significant portion of both the Mone and Clyfland documents were devoted to the idea of Church authorities as deceptive and false. In the Clyfland deposition, the Church leaders are spoken of as ‘false priests’ and ‘false traitors’, and are represented as fleeing or abandoning the people. Archbishop Thomas of Canterbury, or ‘Saint Thomas’, is imagined not ‘dying patiently before the altar’ as the twelfth-century legend had it, but rather ‘slain in the church door, as he was flying away’. It is clearly significant that this important and popular Church figure was represented at the doors of the church, trying to flee. From this, and other imagery present in the document, it is apparent that this was how many of the dissatisfied imagined their Church leaders to be; that is, hypocritical, self-interested and as fleeing their responsibilities to their flock. It is interesting to note that Saint Thomas was regarded as a healing saint and his cult was linked in particular to the Black Death. In the late 1340s, during the period of the Black Death, large numbers of pilgrims brought offerings to the Canterbury shrine. It is doubtful whether a link can be made between Saint Thomas as a healing saint at the time of the Plague and Baxter’s later representation of him fleeing just as some of the priests and clergy during the period did. What is clear, however, is that the figure of the Archbishop was being employed to articulate the beliefs of those discontented.

145 Ibid.
146 Ibid.
147 Ibid.
149 His popularity is suggested by the high number of pilgrims that flocked to his shrine and the number of churches, altars and statues dedicated to his memory. See Robert E. Scully, ‘The Unmaking of a Saint: Thomas Becket and the English Reformation’, The Catholic Historical Review, vol. 86, no. 4, 2000, pp. 579–602.
with the clergy. To understand why a twelfth-century figure was being used to articulate fifteenth-century dissatisfactions with the Church, the figure of Thomas Becket needs to be examined in greater detail.\(^{151}\)

Thomas Becket was born around 1120. The son of a successful merchant, Thomas enjoyed a privileged education both in England and on the Continent. At age 23, he entered into the household of Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury. It was a move that shaped the course of his life and career. Theobald’s household was ‘a cradle for future bishops, including four archbishops and six bishops. It was clearly a place for ecclesiastical high-flyers’.\(^{152}\) In addition to this, Becket was a favourite of Theobald. He was given the opportunity to study canon law at Bologna. He took minor orders and in 1154 was appointed Archdeacon of Canterbury. Within weeks of this he was also appointed Chancellor of the realm by the newly crowned King Henry II (1154–1189), most likely at the suggestion and endorsement of Theobald. By 35 years of age, Thomas Becket had established himself as the close friend, adviser, confidant and secretary to King Henry II. In 1161, Archbishop Theobald lay dying. Despite owing so much of his success and prosperity to the dying man, and despite Theobald’s requests to see him, Becket did not attend him. With Theobald’s death, Henry appointed his good friend and Chancellor of England, Thomas Becket, to the position of Primate of the English Church.

Henry’s decision to appoint his friend to the position of Archbishop of Canterbury went awry. Expecting continued loyalty to the King and the State from his friend, Henry found not a powerful ally in Becket, but a formidable adversary. The newly appointed Archbishop relinquished the position of Chancellor and publically championed the rights of Church. He argued, contrary to the King, that the clergy should remain exempt from common law and that where a cleric stood accused of


criminal behaviour, he should remain the subject of the Bishop’s court. In 1163, Becket chose to oppose Henry on a point of taxation; specifically, the King’s attempt to levy a tax that applied to bishops. He then attempted to reclaim property alienated from his See, including from the Crown. In January 1164, at Clarendon, Henry issued 16 Constitutions codifying the ‘recognised customs and rights of the realm’. ‘The Constitutions of Clarendon’ sought to strengthen and codify the power and authority of the State, including its authority over the Church. Archbishop Becket vehemently and publicly objected to this attempt to curtail the Church’s autonomy and power. In response, the King summoned Becket to appear before the Council at Northampton in early October 1164 on various charges and to account for sums of money. Famously, Becket entered the castle holding the processional cross in appeal. Following his detention, he escaped the castle and secretly fled the country, heading to Louis VII of France and into a six-year exile. While in exile Becket excommunicated those who stood with Henry and even threatened excommunication of the entire English population. Attempts at arbitration were made by papal representatives and an apparent reconciliation was brokered in an area outside of Paris, allowing Becket to return to England.

On 1 December 1170, Becket returned from exile to England and reaffirmed the Church’s autonomy with even greater determination. The King, increasingly fearful that Becket had returned to dethrone him, was said to have uttered the fateful words: ‘will no one of my men rid me of this contemptuous, low-born priest?’ On 29 December 1170, four of Henry’s knights struck off the Archbishop’s head as he stood in Canterbury Cathedral. Becket’s last words were said to have been: ‘For the name of Jesus and the protection of the Church I am ready to embrace death’.

153 Lacey, Great Tales From English History, p. 128.
154 Ibid.
155 Logan, A History of the Church, p. 165.
156 See ‘The Constitutions of Clarendon’, in Carl Stephenson and Frederick George Marcham (eds), Sources of English Constitutional History, vol. 1, New York, 1972, esp. articles 3, 4 and 8. Among the 16 articles, were stipulations that: prevented clerics accused of crimes from circumventing the royal courts; prohibited clergy from leaving England without the King’s permission; and banned ecclesiastical appeals to the papal court ‘without the assent of the lord King’ (Scully, ‘The Unmaking of a Saint’, pp. 580–581).
157 Logan, A History of the Church, p. 171.
158 Ibid., pp. 172–173.
159 Barlow, Thomas Becket, p. 247.

If nothing else, Thomas Becket is a curious and complicated historical figure. The true nature of his life, his death and his legacy has been the subject of historical debate, and accounts of each vary widely. There is some debate about whether he was a martyr for the cause of maintaining and protecting the autonomy of the Church, or a traitor; a Machiavellian-type figure, who died trying to attain greater personal wealth and power. Representations of him include that of a powerful man who openly surrounded himself with wealth, extravagance and luxury, to that of a humble man of God who beneath the Archbishop’s robes wore the hairshirt of an ascetic priest. The question of whether he died penitently in the cathedral before his murderers, or trying to flee death as imagined by Margery Baxter, remains. With few exceptions, it is difficult to find texts that avoid deferring to either of the well-worn narratives, and instead apply critical thinking to the tale. Texts such as those by F. Donald Logan, Robert Lacey, Alfred Duggan and George Greenaway each present the same idealised account of the penitent priest. Unfortunately, such accounts do not consider or help us to ascertain why, approximately 260 years after his death, Margery Baxter and the Lollards would despise the Archbishop to the degree that they did. The work of Robert E. Scully is an important exception to this. Scully examines the legacy of the Archbishop’s death and the rise of the cult of Thomas Becket, and provides some insight into why Margery Baxter held the views of him that she allegedly did, and why these views were reported to the court during her trial. The question of what the figure of Thomas Becket represented in the fifteenth century needs to be considered, as does the significance of, and reason for, Baxter reportedly ‘defaming’ his memory almost 260 years after his death.

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160 See Duggan, Thomas Becket of Canterbury; Greenaway, The Life and Death of Thomas Becket; Lacey, ‘Death in the Cathedral’; Barlow, Thomas Becket; Knowles, Thomas Becket; and Logan, A History of the Church.

161 See Lacey, Great Tales From English History, pp. 133–135.

162 George Greenaway provides an account of Becket’s death based on an eye-witness account. See Greenaway, The Life and Death of Thomas Becket.

In the 1429 Clyfland deposition, Margery Baxter was credited with calling ‘Saint Thomas’ a ‘false traitor’, who ‘injuriaously endowed the churches with possessions’ and ‘raised up many heresies in the church’. Further to this, she was alleged by her neighbour to have suggested ‘he was slain in the church door as he was flying away’, rather than ‘suffer[ing] his death patiently before the altar’. To understand the significance of these statements, they need to be appropriately re-contextualised. Examination needs to be given not just to what Becket did and represented in his twelfth-century life, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to what his legend had become in the 260 years since. Thomas Becket, the actual person, is of less importance here. Instead we need to engage with the idea or legend of ‘Saint Thomas’ as it existed in the fifteenth century. As such, each of Baxter’s alleged claims needs to be relocated; firstly, in the context of the Archbishop’s life and reign, and then secondly, within the context of the fifteenth-century cult of Saint Thomas.

By the fifteenth century, the cult of Saint Thomas Becket was one of the most famous cults in England. It was also a target of Lollard ridicule and attack just like the Shrine of the Virgin of Walsingham.

From about 1400 onward, the Virgin of Walsingham had joined St. Thomas Becket as one of the two most famous cults in England … Walsingham became a primary target of the Lollards, some of whom disparaged the shrine, calling it ‘falsingham’.

In addition to the numerous altars, chapels, statues, paintings and stained-glass windows dedicated to Saint Thomas of Canterbury, more than 80 parish churches in England were dedicated to the popular martyr; more than any other saint. In 1420, on the 250 year anniversary of his death, more than 100,000 pilgrims visited his Canterbury shrine. According to Robert E. Scully:

The importance of the shrine in English consciousness is suggested by the title of the greatest work of English literature of the later Middle Ages: Geoffrey Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales. As Chaucer wrote: from every shire’s end / In England, folks to Canterbury wend: / To seek the

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165 Ibid.
167 Ibid., p. 585.
168 Ibid., p. 584.
It was in this climate of continued adoration, just nine years after the 250 year commemorations of his death, when the cult of Thomas Becket was high, that Margery Baxter was reported to have attacked the foundations of his life, cult and memory. Reiterating Lollardy’s rejection of the Christian practices of pilgrimage, idolatry and shrines, Margery Baxter reportedly counselled Joan Clyfland ‘that she should not go on pilgrimage, neither to our lady of Walsingham, nor to any other saint of place’. If the origin of the remarks was in fact Margery herself, then their meaning is plain. Lollards regarded the practices of pilgrimage and saint worship as meaningless, and opposed the wealth and money-making initiatives that accompanied such practices. If Margery herself was not the source of the comments, but rather they were falsely attributed to her by her neighbour, then their significance is also clear. The statements reported to the court positioned Margery in opposition to a dominant section of the orthodox community that regarded Thomas Becket as a martyr and a saint, further exemplifying for that section of the community the deviant and dangerous nature of Lollardy.

Through the deposition of the neighbour Joan Clyfland, Margery Baxter was credited with having stated that, far from being a martyr and a saint, Thomas Becket was a ‘false traitor’, a ‘false cowardly traitor’ and ‘damned in hell’. The notion that an officially recognised saint in fact dwelt in hell was powerful, especially since the former Archbishop was also being accused of traitorous behaviour. Accepting that Baxter was the originator of the words, there are several understandings to be taken from her repeatedly naming Becket as a traitor. It is possible that the cowardice Baxter was referring to was Becket’s six-year exile after having fled his 1164 trial in Northampton. Perhaps Baxter, and others, saw his exile as an abandonment of his flock. Equally, the treachery she referred to could have been his wealthy lifestyle (which she regarded as traitorous to the sacred position of a servant of God) or his attempts to protect criminous clerks from common law punishment.

171 Ibid.
When Baxter’s reported comment is considered in detail, it is apparent that for Baxter, Becket’s damnation to hell and his traitorous behaviour was directly attributable to his ‘endowing the churches with possessions’. Baxter was alleged to have said that:

Thomas of Canterbury, whom the people called Saint Thomas, was a false traitor, and damned in hell, because he injuriously endowed the churches with possessions.\(^{172}\)

In his lifetime, Becket was linked to considerable wealth and an extravagant lifestyle. Some of his earliest confrontations with the King stemmed from his attempts to reclaim land for his See from the Crown, which would have also increased his power, wealth and influence. Further, as has been mentioned, Becket opposed the King on points of taxation and was eventually summoned to appear before the Northampton Council to account for various sums of money. However, this may not have been the only ‘endowing the churches with possessions’ to which Baxter refers.

In the 260 years after his death, the shrine to Thomas Becket had become a place of wealth and affluence. Remembering that the Lollards strongly opposed pilgrimages, shrines and the veneration of relics and saints, in part because of the wealth that was attached to them, the possible meaning behind the words become clearer.\(^{173}\) In her abjuration to the courts, Hawisia Mone is quoted as saying that:

no pilgrimage oweth to be do ne be made, for all pilgrimage goyng servyth of nothyng but oonly to to yeve prestes good that be to riche and to make gay tap[s]tlers and proude ostelers.\(^{174}\)

The shrine to Becket in the Canterbury Cathedral was a perfect example of this. When the shrine was eventually dismantled in September 1538, the treasures and offerings ‘were packed into so many chests that they filled twenty-six carts’.\(^{175}\) With so much wealth and extravagance concentrated into just one shrine, it is understandable why the Lollards despised the cult of Saint Thomas Becket in particular. Using the figure of Becket, Baxter was able to criticise the fifteenth-

\(^{172}\) Ibid.  
\(^{174}\) Tanner, Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, p. 142.  
\(^{175}\) Scully, ‘The Unmaking of a Saint’, p. 593.
century Church as a whole. She was able to represent them as greedy and treacherous and to question the lucrative nature of certain religious rituals.

Another significant claim reported to have been made by Margery Baxter against Thomas Becket was that he ‘raised up many heresies in the church’.\textsuperscript{176} With this, the question of heresy is turned away from Baxter herself onto the Church and its leaders. Although the trial of Margery Baxter was, as with other heresy trials at this time, largely structured to reveal the heresy of the accused figure, in the deposition of Joan Clyfland, this process is less one-sided. Many of the statements attributed to Baxter, especially those relating to Thomas Becket, allowed Margery’s and the Lollards’ criticisms of the fifteenth-century Church to be publically made. The suggestion that Becket ‘raised up many heresies in the Church’,\textsuperscript{177} might have been a reference to several aspects of Becket’s tenure as Archbishop. However, based on the experiences of an ordinary woman living in Norwich at the time, and what would have been part of her immediate world, it is most probable that Baxter’s intimate knowledge and experiences would have been of the phenomena of idolatry and relic worshiping. In view of this, it is appropriate to assume that Baxter’s reference to ‘heresies’ was a comment on the practices of idol worshiping, the veneration of images, the offerings of wealth and the pilgrimages that she saw in her own world, and which were associated with the shrine of Saint Thomas.

Further evidence that the Lollards regarded certain Orthodox Church rituals as ‘heretical’ is present in Clyfland’s deposition. Baxter is alleged to have said that ‘You do evil to kneel or pray to such images in the churches, for God dwelleth not in such churches … it is but vain to run to the church, to worship dead crosses and images’.\textsuperscript{178} Further:

that the people did worship devils who fell from heaven with Lucifer; which devils, in their fall to earth, entered into the images which stand in the churches, and have long lurked and dwell in them; so that the people, worshipping those images, commit idolatry.\textsuperscript{179}

These remarks support the view that by the fifteenth century, the cult and the shrine of Becket had come to exemplify many of the Orthodox Christian practices that the

\textsuperscript{176} Pratt, \textit{The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe}, p. 595.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., p. 594.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., p. 596.
Lollards despised, with the shrine representing the overt wealth of the Church and its leaders.

Throughout this chapter, several central questions have dominated the discussion. Why in the court depositions of Clyfland and Mone was there such an overwhelming presence of language and imagery related to death, violence, corruption and abandonment? Why did both statements represent Church and community leaders as corrupt and sometimes fleeing? Why were the texts filled with notions of sin, death, violence and doomed fate? With these questions in mind, this chapter has resituated the events of the 1430s in a broad, long-term contextual landscape. To understand the language, imagery and thematic concerns evident in the texts, consideration needed to be given not just to the nature of 1430s Norwich, but also to the nature of English society after the fourteenth-century Plague. Although the Lollard prosecutions occurred almost 80 years after the Black Death, long-term religious and social dissatisfaction from the time of the Plague provided the discourse for dissension in Norwich. The events of the Plague did not ‘cause’ the Lollard prosecutions. However, they did provide the language, imagery and discourse that the Lollards used to define themselves against the Church.

Thus, by examining the social, religious, economic and emotional effects of the 1340s Plague on English society, an appropriate context can be established by which to understand the words of Clyfland and Mone. By the 1430s, English society had witnessed death on a massive and sustained level. The Church had lost power and influence over sections of the community. Anti-clerical sentiments were high and parts of the community sought to access the Word of God independently without the mediation of the Church. The Church was concerned with and took steps to maintain its power and authority in the face of opposition. Against this backdrop, the Norwich Heresy Trials came about.

This chapter also closely examined the remarks allegedly made by Margery Baxter concerning Thomas Becket. The language and imagery used reiterated the notion of corrupt Church leaders abandoning the people, as well as the centrality of concepts of death and violence. The image also provided insight into the views and beliefs of
Lollards like Baxter, and why sections of the orthodox community were so concerned about Lollardy.

The following chapter continues to explore the thematic imagery and language clusters encoded within the court-related records of John of Exeter. Specifically, it considers medieval uses of the images of the bee, tongue, rose, Siren and Eve, to better understand Margery Baxter’s reported comment to her neighbour to ‘beware of the bee that stings the tongue and venoms the soul’. This statement, and the use of these images in medieval culture, provides evidence of the religious beliefs and practices of Lollard women, and an understanding of how women and language were viewed during the period.
Chapter Four: Beware Of the Bee: Medieval Women and the Spoken Word

‘There are three things in nature, the Tongue, an Ecclesiastic, and a Woman, which know no moderation in goodness or vice; and when they exceed the bounds of their condition they reach the greatest heights and the lowest depths of goodness and vice’.¹

In her deposition against Margery Baxter, the Norwich neighbour Joan Clyfland accused Baxter of once having said:

dame, bewar of the bee, for every bee wil styngge, and therfor loke that ze swer nether be Godd ne be Our Ladi ne be non other seynt, and if ze do the contrarie the be will styngge your tunge and veneme your sowle.²

This chapter considers the importance of the spoken word to medieval people. It begins with the comment attributed to Baxter by her neighbour as evidence of the interest medieval people had in the spoken word; in particular, what they believed constituted dangerous or deviant use of it. To explore the possible significance of the comment about the stinging bee, this chapter will turn to other sources of the period for clues about the meanings of the key images involved.

This chapter is presented in three sections. The first focuses on Baxter’s reported claim and argues that the statement, in particular, the imagery of the bee and the tongue it employs, provides important evidence of the second thematic cluster present in the court-related documents of the Norwich Heresy Trials; the presence of dangerous and unregulated use of words and language. The purpose of this first section is to establish medieval understandings of the power and danger of words, including Lollard understandings of this. The second section of this chapter will establish a gendered context in which the reported remark regarding the stinging bee can be read, essentially demonstrating medieval understandings of women’s relationship with words. It explores medieval understandings of women, particularly

² Tanner, Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, p. 44.
as they intersect with ideas about voice and words. It will be argued that medieval people understood words to be powerful and potentially hazardous, but that the gender of the speaker was integral to their meanings and threat. To do this, the image and narratives of Eve, the bee, the rose and the Siren will be explored. These images and concepts were employed in a number of medieval sources to convey certain understandings of, and attitudes toward, women and words. The third section of this chapter considers what happens when the natural linguistic order is overturned by the Lollards, in particular by female Lollards, using the Church’s words in ways that opponents of Lollardy feared they would. It does this by exploring some of the other revelations made to the courts concerning Margery Baxter’s linguistic encounters with Church figures.

There are two sets of understandings to be taken from the remark about the bee which stings the tongue and venoms the soul. First, it reveals the concerns the Lollards had toward empty oaths and meaningless Church words. In this sense the comment about the bee was intended to remind the audience of the significance of each spoken word and that God’s wrath could be ignited by hollow oaths and prayers to false saints. The second understanding to be taken from the statement is what the community and the Norwich authorities feared the remark revealed about the dangerous ways women, such as Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone, were using words. In this sense the comment about the bee reminded the audience of the long history of dangerous associations between women and words. This chapter will explore these two sets of understandings.

The statement warning of a bee that stings the tongue and venoms the soul should a person swear either to God, Our Lady or any other Saint, clearly caught the attention of the court scribe, John of Exeter, as it was one of only four statements in the otherwise Latin document to have been recorded in the vernacular in which it was first uttered. Notwithstanding its interest to Exeter and the prosecuting authorities, historians cannot know whether the origin of the statement was Margery Baxter, as the deponent declared, or the deponent herself, Joan Clyfland. The questionable role played by the neighbour in the court proceedings, and the possible motivations for her statement, have been noted already. What is known, however, is that these words had meaning for the prosecuting authorities, those in the court and for sections of the
Norwich community. For this reason, the remark bears further consideration. It tells historians something about medieval attitudes towards spoken words and, in particular, how and by whom they should be used. The statement also reveals how the meaning and danger of certain words was determined in part by the gender of the person who spoke them.

The particular medieval imagery contained within the statement benefits from close examination. To a modern audience, the image of a bee stinging one’s tongue and venoming one’s soul is perplexing. However, to a medieval audience familiar with these symbols, the notion of a bee stinging the tongue and poisoning the soul tapped into a complex set of meanings about the power of words, the nature of women and the potential wrath of God. To understand the significance of the images involved in the remark, this chapter will consider five medieval sources that use similar imagery and language for clues. For the purposes of this chapter, these images will be considered together, rather than one at a time given they function in the same way in the sources and represent the same understandings of women.

The medieval sources include a court deposition, a theological treatise, a treatise on witchcraft and two popular satirical narratives. Despite their diverse origins, all these sources attest to the dualistic medieval attitude towards women and spoken words. Both are regarded as being capable of sweetness and danger. These sources employ the imagery of the bee and the tongue, as well as other similar imagery, to issue a warning about the danger of words, language and/or voice and allowing certain people or groups unregulated access to these. Importantly, these same images and attitudes are apparent in the Norwich Trial documents.

The first source to be examined is the 1486 treatise on witchcraft, *The Malleus Maleficarum.* Written by the Dominican Inquisitors Heinrich Kramer (Institoris) and Jacob Sprenger, the *Malleus* is a comprehensive treatise for the successful detection, conviction and execution of witches. The document was at the delegation of Pope Innocent VIII’s Bull *Summis desiderantes.* Although an important document for examining the witch hunts, its general historical importance is sometimes overstated by historians due to its colourful narrative and misogynist tones. Even though this text was...
and Jacob Sprenger, *The Malleus*, or ‘The Hammer of Witches’, has been a source of interest to modern historians primarily for its attitudes toward, and representations of, women. Of importance to this thesis are the imagery *The Malleus* employs and the understandings of women and words that this imagery reveals. Although written 55 years after the East Anglian prosecutions, *The Malleus* was produced at a time when Lollard prosecutions in other regions of England were still at their height. The second source is the popular satirical writings of Jehan Le Fevre, in particular, *The Lamentations of Matheolus* (c. 1371–1372). While authored prior to the fifteenth century, *The Lamentations of Matheolus* is of interest owing to its reappearance in some important fifteenth-century debates about women; for example, in Christine de Pizan’s 1405 book written in defence of women, *The Book of the City of Ladies*. The third source is Marbod of Rennes eleventh-century text, *The Femme Fatale* (alternatively titled ‘De Meretrice’/’The Whore’). Written by the Bishop of Rennes in Brittany towards the end of his life, this text uses similar imagery as the other medieval sources considered here, to warn society of the true nature of women. The fourth source relates to the 1391 heresy trial of the Lollard, Walter Brut. During his trial, Brut claimed that *even women* could preach to men assembled in public. In response, several Cambridge theologians produced a thorough repudiation to the...
Although it reflects a more academic theological position than the other sources, the attitudes revealed by it are similarly present in the other sources. The final source to be considered is the court material from the 1428–1431 Norwich trials.  

Joan Clyfland’s claim to have heard Margery Baxter say ‘dame, bewar of the bee, for every bee wil styngge. … the be will styngge your tunge and veneme your sowle’, encapsulates medieval attitudes toward the power of words; including the attitudes of the Lollards towards words. However, to understand the possible meanings of the remark, medieval images of the bee first need to be considered. The reoccurring symbol of the bee was used in the medieval period to separately describe words and women, as well as Christ himself. The dual-functioning of the bee; that is, the potential to produce both sweet honey and a deadly sting, made it a powerful symbol in the medieval era. The modern authors Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant suggest that ‘its honey and its sting ma[de] the bee an emblem of Christ, the one of his mildness and mercy, the other of his role in the Last Judgement’. In addition to representing Christ’s power, the bee was also used to describe women and their words, language and speech. The significance of the image of the bee is that the dualistic nature of the bee allowed medieval thinkers to articulate their fears and misgivings about women and/or speech. That women and words, language and speech were seen to have the power to simultaneously delight and destroy was a matter of great concern to medieval thinkers; both were seen to have a contradictory power for the generation and the destruction of life. As such, the image of the bee, capable of producing both honey and sting, was a useful one for conveying this belief. Interestingly though, in

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9 Tanner, Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich; Also, Pratt, The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe.
10 Tanner, Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, p. 44.
11 In referring to medieval images of either the bee or the tongue, it is not to suggest that there is not evidence of the symbols being used outside of the period, but rather that concern here is with the particular usage and meaning of these terms within the medieval period.
relation to men, the image of the bee did not necessarily carry with it the same dire meanings. Apparently ‘the legend that bees touched their lips as they lay in the cradle, which was told of Pindar and Plato, was revived for St. Ambrose, on whose lips they are said to have walked and into whose mouths they are said to have gone’. While the bee denotes in women dangerous seductresses, with men it represents great thinkers and speakers.

The contradictory, dual power of words, language and speech as represented by medieval images of the bee was also reflected in similar concepts of the tongue. In writing of medieval symbols and their uses, Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant observed the dual power of the tongue. They wrote that:

The tongue is regarded as a flame, being as agile and of the same shape. It destroys and cleanses. As the organ of speech it can create or annihilate, and its power is boundless … Depending upon the words which it utters, the tongue is wholesome or perverse (Proverbs 15:4) … The power of the tongue is so absolute that life and death are in it (Proverbs 18:21).

This dual-functioning or contradictory power of the tongue was present in The Malleus Maleficarum. This text suggested that the capacity for ‘the greatest heights and the lowest depths of goodness and vice’ is:

clear in the case of the tongue, since by its ministry most of the kingdoms have been brought into the faith of Christ … But concerning an evil tongue you will find in Ecclesiasticus xxviii: A backbiting tongue hath disquieted many, and driven them from nation to nation: strong cities hath it pulled down, and overthrown the houses of great men’.

In a medieval context, the image of the tongue functioned similarly to that of the bee and could be used by authors to offer an Apocalyptic warning of the potential danger of misused words.

In her 1997 book, Governing the Tongue: The Politics of Speech in Early New England, Jane Kamensky explored the meanings of speech, words and the tongue for puritan men and women living in early New England. Although Kamensky dealt with 1600s puritan New England, with respect to that society’s preoccupation with

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13 Ibid., p. 79.
14 Chevalier and Gheerbrant, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 1014.
15 Malleus Maleficarum, p. 42.
ideas about the possibilities and perils of the act of speaking, there are important similarities and parallels to be drawn with fifteenth-century England. Of particular note are the representations of the tongue made in New England society during the seventeenth century. For the New Englanders, the tongue was regarded in the same dual terms already observed of medieval England. For New England men and women, ‘the tongue is every man’s best or worst’.

Kamensky recalled a particular parable popular at that time that illustrates this view of the tongue. In the parable, King Amasis instructs his manservant to go to market and buy the best and most profitable meat he could get. The boy returns to the palace with nothing but tongue. The King asks why he brought no other meat, to which the servant replies that he was commanded to buy the best meat, and ‘from the tongue come many good and profitable speeches’. The King then instructs his servant to once again return to market but this time to buy the worst and most unprofitable meat. Again, the servant returns with nothing but tongue, explaining to his King that ‘the tongue was the least palatable meat because from nothing comes a worse venom than the tongue, particularly from such tongues as most women have’.

This representation of the tongue as being both the best and sweetest, and the worst and most venomous cut of meat (particularly in women, according to seventeenth-century puritans), conveys the same notion of the dangerous dualities of speech and words as have been observed above in relation to the medieval images of the bee. Interestingly for later discussions, the puritans reminded themselves that ‘by the tongue of the Serpent was Eve seduced, and her tongue did seduce Adam.

In the statement attributed to Baxter about the bee stinging the tongue and venoming the soul, the use of the symbol of the tongue conveyed a sense of the importance of every word and every utterance. In addition to recalling the physical image of the serpent in Paradise, the statement communicates the idea that the tongue is a direct route to the soul, and a single misspoken word could venom that soul. To a medieval audience, it was a reminder that every word held significance and that one’s utterances could either save or condemn the soul. It possibly also functioned as a confirmation of the medieval Christian concept that women were cursed with

\[17\] Ibid., p. 4.
\[18\] Ibid., p. 17.
naturally ‘slippery tongues’ that threatened their souls and the good order of the community. Just as humanity was expelled from Paradise because of the promises of the ‘slippery serpent’, the ‘slippery’ nature of all women’s tongues was a threat to the peace and concord of the community. This notion is also clearly apparent in *The Malleus Maleficarum*, in which the authors remind their audience that women in particular are cursed with ‘slippery tongues’. The remark also provides some clues about Lollard attitudes toward the dangers of false words and futile prayers (which will be discussed shortly). These attitudes were, however, targeted at the language of clerics and priests rather than women specifically.

Ideas about the dangerous potential of women’s speech, expressed through the imagery of the tongue, are found in the popular satirical writings of Jehan Le Fevre. In his writings, dangerous tongues and deviant speech were once again most particularly associated with women. In ‘The Lamentations of Matheolus’, written circa 1371–1372, Jehan Le Fevre spoke of the tongues of shrewish or ‘jangling’ women who managed to fool even God. He wrote that:

> the devil was told concerning woman that God, in whom all good abounds, would have made the world a peaceful place if he had removed the cursed tongues of women, so ill-trained in the art of speaking … it seems therefore that whoever gave them the gift of speech was out of his mind. If one were to dare accuse God, He would not be able to defend Himself against the charge of giving perverse women deadly weapons when He gave them many tongues … It’s my belief that it would be a miracle to make a mute woman speak. But truly, it would be a much greater marvel, if one were able to shut up a woman once she’s in full flow.

In this passage, Le Fevre spoke of speech and tongues as being ‘deadly weapons’ in the hands of perverse women. Le Fevre’s choice of imagery is revealing in terms of medieval understandings of language, speech and voice. He spoke of tongues, or the ability to speak, as being weaponry capable of killing. This use of military or combative imagery echoes that of Marbod of Rennes, who also referred to women’s capacity for lies, gossip and deceit, as a weapon. He wrote that:

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20 Augustine, ‘Woman as Auxiliary and Subject to Man’ in Agonito, *History of Ideas on Woman*, pp. 73–82 (quote taken from p. 77).
21 *Malleus Maleficarum*, p. 44.
Armed with these vices woman subverts the world; woman the sweet evil, compound of honeycomb and poison, spreading honey on her sword to transfix the hearts of the wise.23

Putting aside the sexualised, phallic imagery at play here, the significance of this passage lies in its representation of words as having a literal, physical presence, which could be harmful. In a medieval context, words were understood as having the capacity to cause physical harm; to ‘sting the tongue and poison the soul’. In this world, words could be wielded like weapons. Therefore, the need to protect the community from dangerous words, and from those women who attempted to brandish them, was paramount.24

In Jehan Le Fevre’s The Lamentations of Matheolus, the author recollects ‘the gift of speech’, which ‘the cursed tongues of women’ came to wantonly misuse.25 In a reference to Genesis and the ‘peaceful place’ lost through Eve’s misuse of ‘the gift of speech’, the same medieval ideas about the nature of women are present, informing the narrative. A speaking woman was conceived of as a perversity of nature and a threat, not only to men, but to the peace of the world. Le Fevre’s comments, in particular the imagery and language he employs, exemplify an important dimension of medieval understandings of language, of interest to this study. Here, words are a ‘divine gift’ from God and women were the unwise choice of recipients for those words. In Genesis 2: 18–2, God gave man the gift of language so that he could name all the birds and animals (including women). However, it was the first woman, Eve, who corrupted this gift when she was the first to use it to gossip, lie and consort with the Devil in the form of a serpent. Le Fevre emphasises to his audience that all women’s tongues are ‘cursed’ by the actions of Eve, and that Eve’s story will continue to define and determine women’s future relationships with language. Thus, when Le Fevre characterised women’s tongues as ‘cursed’, a powerful medieval discourse and a long-standing narrative tying women to notions

24 In Clanchy, From Memory to Written Record, pp. 333–334, the author notes the common medieval practice whereby knights had their swords inscribed with prayers and mysterious letters. He directs his reader to R.E. Oakeshott, The Archaeology of Weapons, 1960, plates 6d and 7b. This would suggest that in the medieval mind, words and weapons were regarded similarly.
of linguistic deviancy and danger was invoked. As with other medieval writers, the author made no distinction between an individual woman (Eve) and all women. Every woman’s speech carried with it and recalled the memory of the first woman’s speech.

Using the images of the bee and the tongue as a starting point, this chapter has so far considered what medieval attitudes generally were toward the spoken word. This has provided some indications as to why the Norwich authorities and sections of the community were concerned about the interactions the Lollards had with words. At this point the focus shifts to examine what the Lollard’s attitudes towards words were.

Throughout the various Lollard-related documents available, including those concerning Hawisia Mone and Margery Baxter, it is clear that the Lollards were generally suspicious and critical of the relationship clerics and priests had with words. The Lollards regarded Church-words, in the form of ‘teaching, preaching, singing and reading’, as lies used to deceive and seduce ordinary people. Particular attention was paid to the ‘ownership’ and ‘authority’ the Church and its leaders had over religious words and texts. This is evident by Walter Brut’s already noted claim that any man or woman could teach the Word of God in public. It should not be assumed by this assertion that Lollards were necessarily in favour of women preachers or that one of their principal beliefs was the right of women to take leading roles in key Christian rituals such as the Eucharist. Instead Brut’s assertion that even women could do it, was a way of further denigrating the office of the Priesthood and its claim of ownership to the Word of God. The surviving court-related documents show that Lollards such as Hawisia Mone regarded the spoken words and preachings of priests and clerics as ‘vicious lies’ and considered them to have no more power of God than those of a lay-person. In her recantation, Mone admitted to believing that the Pope of Rome:

hath no poar of God more than ony other lewed man but if he be more holy in lyvyng, ne the pope hath no poar to make bisshops, prestes ne

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non other orders, and he that the puple callen the pope of Roome is no pope but a fals extersioner and deseyver of the puple.

Also that he oonly that is most holy and perfit in lyvying in erthe is verry pope, and these singemesses that be cleped prestes ben no prestes, but thay be lecherous and covetouse men and fals deceyvours of the puple, and with thar solte techyng and prechyng, syngyng and redyng piteously thay pile the puple of thar good, and tharwith thay susteyne here pride, here lechery, here slowthe and alle other vices, and always thay makyn newe lawes and newe ordinances to curse and kille cruelly all other persones that holden ageyn thar vicious levyng.

Added to this, Mone stated that she did not believ that priests’ words could unite a man and a woman in the form of marriage, or release a person from their sins, ‘for no prest hath poar to remitte synne ne to assoile a man of ony synne’.

For Lollards such as Margery Baxter, the Christian practices of swearing and oaths were viewed as money-making ventures on the part of Church leaders intended to extort money from the laity to support their own idle lives. As such, any attempt at a true dialogue with Christ via these means was necessarily corrupted. Baxter was said to have warned her neighbour that God would give her no reward for such prayers. The danger of these practices was emphasised throughout the Clyfland deposition, in which Baxter’s warnings about God’s vengeance in response to the practices of clerics are recounted. The courts heard that Baxter had warned:

the cursed pope, cardinals, archbishop, and bishops, especially the bishop of Norwich and others that support heresies and idolatry, reigning and ruling over the people, shall shortly have the very same or worse mischief fall upon them, than that cursed man, Thomas of Canterbury, had. For they falsely and cursedly deceive the people with their false mammetries and laws, to extort money from the simple folk, to sustain their pride, riot, and idleness. And know assuredly that the vengeance of God will speedily come upon them.

In using the image of the bee with the venomous sting in her admonition about swearing to God, Our Lady and other saints, Baxter is perhaps reminding her audience of the ‘sting’ of God’s judgement.
In addition to the image of the bee stinging the tongue and venoming the soul revealing Lollard concerns about the danger of oaths and valueless words, there is a second possible way of reading the image. It also reveals what was feared in the community, and by the Norwich authorities, with respect to the dangerous use of words by women. This idea will be taken up in the next section of this chapter. In many ways, whether it is the fifteenth-century Lollard’s attitudes towards clerics and words being considered, or the medieval attitudes held towards women and words, the underlying notions are similar; words, in the wrong hands, were dangerous. They were dangerous either because clerics and priests were able to use them to deceive ‘simple’ folk and sustain their own positions of privilege and lechery, or because women were able to use them to manipulate and deceive men. Both were understood as representing a threat to the harmony of the community and a deviation from God’s will.

In exploring medieval attitudes toward the power of the spoken word, as expressed by the imagery of the tongue and the bee, this chapter has also touched on medieval understandings of the relationship between women and words. This next section considers in more detail the idea that, in a medieval context, the potential meaning and danger of words was affected by the gender of the person speaking the words in question. In order to do this, however, it is first necessary to establish a wider, gendered context for understandings about women in the medieval period. For this purpose, an outline of the general medieval narrative of Eve is especially useful.

The brief story of Eve, as told in Genesis 1–3, has provided an ‘evidentiary’ basis for over two thousand years of commentary on, and speculation about, the true nature of women. Commentators throughout Western Christianity have repeatedly returned to the story of man’s expulsion from Paradise and Eve’s role in it for explanations of all women. How the figure of Eve was viewed and how her image was used by particular societies provides a picture of how all women were regarded by the society at that time. In turn, it offers an important insight into those societies and their values, fears and beliefs as expressed through representations of Eve.

Throughout Western Christian history, the figure of Eve and her role in Genesis has played a significant role in the construction of concepts of sin and social deviancy.
From the Christian and Jewish commentators of the early days of Christianity through to the present, the ‘character’ of Eve has been debated and defined in a way that reveals the concerns and anxieties of the day. Around the second century B.C.E, the speculation between rival Jewish factions regarding the source of evil was at a high. Central to this debate was how to justify and explain the existence of evil while remaining committed to the principal monotheistic belief in an omnipotent God. To acknowledge the existence of evil problematised and even negated the possible existence of an all-knowing, all-seeing, universal creator. To explain the existence of evil and sin, the Jewish fathers fleshed out the previously simple stories of Genesis into epic tales of human disobedience. In so doing, the role and figure of Eve took on greater significance and came to define all womankind. As the historian Pamela Norris recently noted:

in their attempts to understand the implications of ‘man’s first disobedience’, theologians developed a definition of Eve that became the blueprint for Woman, an explanation of her character and possibilities that was applied indiscriminately to all women and embraced a wide range of ideas about female nature.

Within the medieval period, the story of Eve was retold and viewed through the lens of particular social anxieties and preoccupations. Just as the second-century Jewish thinkers had used the image of Eve to articulate their concerns with the existence of evil and sin, so too did the medieval Christian thinkers engage Eve to explain, among other things, their interest in speech; in particular, female speech. For some,

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34 See Norris, The Story of Eve, p. 4.
35 Pamela Norris explains that the Hebrew narratives of the creation of man and the world and the loss of Paradise evolved over a considerable period and that the story told in Genesis 1–3 evolved from originally separate accounts that were amalgamated and edited into the form we now know. See Norris, The Story of Eve, pp. 14–15 for a discussion about the development of Genesis.
37 Following the lead of such Church minds as Augustine and Paul, the thirteenth-century theologian Thomas Aquinas composed his Summa Theologica in the years between 1266 and 1272. With its roots firmly grounded in Aristotle and the early Judeo-Christian and Greek traditions, the comprehensive work presents a view of women heavily reliant upon the ‘defective’ creation of Eve. See ‘Woman as Derived Being’, from Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica (trans) Fathers of the English Dominican Province, London, R and T Washbourne, 1912. Vol 13, part 1, Question 92, as reproduced in Rosemary Agonito, History of Ideas on Woman: A Source Book, New York, Perigee Books, 1977, pp. 83–90. This particular section of the Summa Theologica is also reproduced with some helpful discussions in Chapter 5, ‘Thomas Aquinas and the Scholastic Woman’ in Elizabeth A. Clark and Herbert Richardson (eds), Women and Religion: The Original Sourcebook of Women in Christian Thought, San Francisco, Harper, 1996, pp. 67–89. Also see, Augustine, ‘Woman as Auxiliary and Subject to Man’ in ‘The City of God’ in Works of Aurelius Augustine (trans) Marcus Dods, Edinburgh, T. and T. Clark, 1871, as reproduced in Agonito, History of Ideas on Woman, pp. 73–82. Augustine’s ‘blueprint’ for a truly ideal Christian world, ‘the City of God’, among other
that Eve was alone and out wandering when she happened upon the Devil; that she was the one to gossip uncontrollably with the serpent, even to the point of lying about God’s warnings; that she, by her own admission, sought ‘to become wise’ when she ate from the Tree of Knowledge; and that she then lured Adam to sin against God, confirmed all the physical, legal, economic, social and moral restrictions placed on the daughters of Eve.

In the fifteenth century, hundreds of years of debate about Eve and sin can be seen in narratives such as ‘The Femme Fatale’, *The Malleus Maleficarum* and the refute to Walter Brut. The reoccurring dialogues about Eve are significant to this study in so far as they point to a fundamental ‘unease’ about women and words, and the relationships between the two. Eve was at the origin of all human language and the relationship she had with language was regarded as the model for the relationship all women had with language. For Western Christianity, the lesson taken from Eve’s role in Genesis was the need to control women’s access to language. It has been suggested that:

> For her daughters, for the countless ramifications of future generations, Eve became the model of an arduous relation to language. The dialogue concerning the apple, the first human speech, led to the expulsion from Eden and set humankind on the path of history. Women with voices, speaking for their sisters, would atone for this imprudent dialogue. Thus humanity moved toward censorship, toward control of language.38

The ‘lesson’ of Eve’s relationship with words, and the atonement required of her female ancestors, infiltrates the Norwich Heresy Trials of the fifteenth century. Although the trials did not focus solely on women, the religious and textual activities (practised by both men and women) that the authorities sought out and prosecuted, were associated with and characterised as feminine. Through the language, imagery and discourses of the fifteenth-century prosecutions, ‘Woman’s’ problematic relationship with language is recalled. The trials in part represent and are located within the long-running narrative of continuing ‘atonement’ for Eve’s linguistic sins. To better understand the trials, that discourse needs to be borne in mind.

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In *The Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), the Dominican authors Kramer (Institoris) and Sprenger, anxious to establish a link between women, carnality, deception, weakness and vice, call to mind Eve—‘the first temptress’.\(^{39}\) To support their assertions that women were naturally more susceptible to the Devil and diabolism, they cite many incidents of female deception throughout history: ‘Samson’s wife, who coaxed him to tell her the riddle he had propounded to the Philistines’; Helen of Troy, whose rape saw ‘many thousands of Greeks slain’; and Cleopatra, ‘that worst of women’.\(^{40}\) However, it was the figure of Eve that provided the most damning evidence against all women. For the authors of *Malleus*, the first woman was ‘defective’, ‘an imperfect animal’ and a ‘carnal abomination’.\(^{41}\) Her weakness meant that she was the first to converse with the Devil. Similarly, in Marbod of Rennes’ narrative, ‘The Femme Fatale’, he asks his audience, ‘who urged the first parent to taste what was forbidden?’\(^{42}\) Marbod suggests that, like the deadly Sirens of Circe, Eve’s ‘urgings’ led men to a deadly fate.\(^{43}\) Rennes’ narrative warns Church leaders to protect the ears of the congregation from the ‘sweet sounding songs and dangerous attractions’ that would come from women’s preaching and teaching.\(^{44}\) In issuing this warning he needed only to remind the medieval audience, already wary of female voices, of the first speaking woman, whose utterances brought sin into the world. By this time, centuries of narratives about Eve gave weight to the Western Christian concept of

\(^{39}\) *Malleus Maleficarum*, p. 44.


\(^{41}\) *Ibid.*, p. 44.


\(^{43}\) See Homer, *The Odyssey* (abridged translation) George P. Kerr, London and New York, Frederick Warne and Co, 1947. Circe’s Sirens are a sort of sea-nymph, which sit in their flowering meadow and ‘all around are piled the bones of the dead men they have bewitched’ (p. 70). Any man who hears their irresistible and seductive singing is promised the gift of foreknowledge, but the penalty is death. According to the scholar Jean-Pierre Vernant, the Sirens represent a dangerous combination of linguistic sexual allure in the form of singing, and a brutal god-less death:

> Their cries, their flowering meadow (leimon, meadow, is one of the words used to designate female genitalia), their charm (thelxis) locates them in all their irresistibility unequivocally in the realm of sexual attraction or erotic appeal. At the same time, they are death in its most brutally monstrous aspect: no funeral, no tomb, only the corpse’s decomposition in the open air.


woman as ‘supreme temptress, *janua diaboli*, the greatest obstacle in the way of man’s salvation’.  

A similar argument can also be found in the treatise prepared to disprove Walter Brut’s claim that even women could teach the Word of God in public. The theologians tasked with countering his claim offered many theological, academic and ‘scientific’ reasons women were incapable of performing a teaching or preaching role, particularly over men. One of their arguments was firmly rooted in the lessons of Eve. They wrote that:

>a woman does not have consistency of teaching because she is changeable and easily led astray. Thus, the Apostle said in the first epistle to Timothy 2: 12 and 14, ‘I do not permit a woman to teach’; she is subject because of what happened to Adam: ‘he was not seduced but the woman was seduced’.

This reasoning adds an important dimension to the story of Eve. For medieval theologians, Eve was not just an example of sexual deviancy or a lack of faith in God; she was an example of a perverse ‘teacher’. In trying to sway Adam, the theologians saw Eve as a would-be ‘teacher’, with the lesson to be learned that no woman should ever again be permitted to teach; especially to men. For each of these medieval authors, the malleable story of Eve helped them in articulating an already present and shared medieval understanding of the nature of women. As highlighted by this research, this understanding of women was tied, at least in part, to notions of voice, words, language and their usage.

These ideas about the nature of women, expressed through the medieval narrative of Eve, are also found in various medieval references to the Greek myth of the Sirens. The writings of Marbod of Rennes (c. 1035–1123) are an early example of the use made of the Sirens mythology. His writings also employ imagery of the bee, rose and Eve. In ‘The Femme Fatale’, he writes:

>woman the sweet evil, compound of honeycomb and poison, spreading honey on her sword to transfix the hearts of the wise. Who urged the first parent to taste what was forbidden? A Woman … The Siren is also like this: she entices fools by singing lovely melodies, draws them towards her once they are enticed, and when they are drawn in she plunges them

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into the annihilating abyss. But Ulysses evaded this fate. He closed his crew’s ears to the notorious songs while physically restraining himself from being able to change course, by being lashed with ropes to the mast of the speeding ship. No less successfully did he elude evil Circe’s sweet poisons … Oh race of men! Beware the honied poisons, the sweet songs and the pull of the dark depths … Whoever seeks earth’s calm seas in the ship of the Church in order to arrive at the desired harbour of the homeland—avoiding sweet-sounding songs and dangerous attractions—should block up and protect the hearing with lawful doctrine and stay fastened to the timber with rope of divine fear. The timber is the cross of our salvation, like a ship’s mast. Nor is it without sailyards, which are the arms of the cross.  

This narrative does not directly raise the question of women as preachers. However, the text implicitly engages with the debate. Using the mythology of Eve, whose gossiping with the serpent initiated an Apocalyptic chain of events, and that of the Sirens, the narrative issues a reoccurring medieval warning about women’s speech. If the Church desires ‘calm seas’, it needs to ‘protect the hearing’ of its congregation from the dangerous and alluring voices of women. The words of women are positioned as ‘unlawful doctrine’, and fear of these words is a ‘divine fear’ that will protect God’s Church from harm. Importantly for this chapter, images of woman as the bee, the rose, Eve or the Siren articulated medieval commentators’ ‘double thinking’ about women and female speech. Marbod of Rennes’s continual references to women as ‘sweet evil’, ‘honeycomb and poison’, ‘sweet poisons’ and ‘honied poisons’, signals this familiar conceptual understanding of women and women’s voices as alluring and beautiful; but also dangerous. While a modern audience might be quick to point out the contradiction in this argument, to a medieval audience this dualist nature was the danger. The concern was that a woman’s words could masquerade as pure, while actually being poisonous. 

How the myth of the Sirens and the story of Eve have been used in the sources for this chapter makes clear the interests that sections of medieval society had with ideas of dangerous feminine utterances. In the various narratives of both Eve and the Sirens, women are viewed as possessing an alluring but deadly voice. Both female figures enticed men into terrible fates using their linguistic trickery and verbal wiles. Both narratives allowed authors to express an understanding, common to sections of 

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medieval society, of the need to restrict women’s access to independent and unregulated speech. In the fifteenth century, these myths were further used to articulate a suspicion of secret ‘feminine knowledge’. In the famous encounter between Eve and the serpent, the serpent encourages Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge so that she ‘will be like God and know what is good and bad’.\(^48\) With this promise: ‘the woman saw how beautiful the tree was and how good its fruit would be to eat, and she thought how wonderful it would be to become wise’.\(^49\)

In this dialogue, Eve not only seeks knowledge, she seeks to have the knowledge of God and therefore to be God. Eve eats the apple in the desire for the forbidden knowledge that would make her like God—threatening to topple God from his omnipotent seat in heaven. Similarly, in the Greek myth of the Sirens incorporated into various medieval narratives, the Sirens possess a secret feminine knowledge that allows them to tempt all men who hear them to a deadly fate. Any man who hears their irresistible and seductive singing is promised the gift of foreknowledge, but the penalty is a brutal and god-less death. In narratives of both Eve and the Sirens, women are linked with forbidden and fatal knowledge. Eve’s desire for God-like knowledge brought death into Paradise (symbolised in the wearing of dead animal skins), while the Siren’s promise of forbidden knowledge saw them sitting in their meadow surrounded by the bones of the men they had bewitched.\(^50\) For sections of the medieval community, the mythology of the Sirens and the story of Eve in Genesis allowed them to express a belief that women possessed a secret battery of forbidden fatal knowledge. This knowledge was threatening not only to men, but to the harmony of the community as a whole. Therefore, based on this understanding, it was considered necessary to curb women’s independent and unregulated access to words and knowledge.

In her study of the role of food in medieval religious women’s lives, Caroline Walker Bynum touches upon this fear of the existence of secret and forbidden feminine knowledge.\(^51\) Bynum discusses the belief held by some medieval men that, when left alone, women shared secret forbidden knowledge with each other. Some

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\(^{48}\) Genesis 3:5.

\(^{49}\) Genesis 3:6.

\(^{50}\) Norris, *The Story of Eve*, p. 13.

\(^{51}\) ‘Food as Control of Self’ in Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, esp. p. 190.
believed that women possessed a diabolical knowledge about food preparation that allowed them to ‘control’ or harm their husbands. In Burchard of Worms *Decretum*, compiled between 1008 and 1012, the author lists a series of spells thought to be resorted to by devious wives. Burchard labours on the notion that women could make their husbands impotent or increase their sexual potency by mixing semen or menstrual blood into their food; kneading bread dough with their buttocks was another diabolic activity attributed to women. Given that food preparation occurred within the familial space of the home—an arena in which medieval women exercised a degree of autonomy and control—it is perhaps unsurprising that some men were suspicious of this activity; and, indeed, any activity taking place in that space. Further, it was believed that, without constant regulation and restriction of feminine activities such as food preparation, furtive and powerful feminine knowledge would be transmitted among communities of women. Such a situation would threaten the ‘natural harmony’ within individual marriages and within the wider community.

In the fifteenth-century document *The Malleus Maleficarum*, the authors expressed this fear that all women, not just witches, were in possession of wicked knowledge and were naturally unable to keep it to themselves. They explained that women ‘have slippery tongues, and are unable to conceal from their fellow-women those things which by evil arts they know’. The authors attribute to women secret knowledge and a natural tendency towards uncontrollable gossip; a diabolical combination in the authors’ (and their audience’s) minds. This suspicion of feminine knowledge and discourses came with a corresponding suspicion of autonomous female activities and familial spaces, in which this exchange of knowledge was more likely to occur.

The concern some medieval writers had with women’s gossip has recently been of interest to medieval historians. In Sandy Bardsley’s 2006 text, *Venomous Tongues: Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England*, the author focuses on the medieval discourses that specifically associated ‘speech with evil, with social disorder, and

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32 Ibid.
34 *Malleus Maleficarum*, p. 44.
35 The relationship between feminine knowledge, female discourses and words and familial spaces, will be discussed at some length later in Chapter Seven.
with women’.\(^{56}\) She examines the preoccupation medieval English society had with the notion of secret female knowledge and women’s natural inclination towards uncontrollable and excessive speech. Bardsley highlights a group of poems known as the ‘gossip’s poems’ or ‘alewife poems’, which enjoyed popularity in the fifteenth century. Typically in these poems, women were found together, exchanging news, gossip, secrets and slander, often about their husbands. Similarly, in the fifteenth-century vernacular song known as ‘the Gossips’, women were described as gathering in a tavern to eat, drink, talk and spend their husbands’ money.\(^{57}\) Importantly, ‘songs and poems that purport, like ‘the Gossips’, to represent women’s conversations, reveal fears about the subversive content of female speech’.\(^{58}\) One of the most revealing narratives in terms of the social anxieties underlying gossips’ poems is the late fifteenth-century poem, ‘Talk of Ten Wives in Their Husbands’ Ware’.\(^{59}\) Here, women are imagined meeting in an alehouse to discuss their husbands’ sexual capabilities. As with other poems and narratives in the genre of the gossips, women’s speech is characterised as disruptive and deviant, not just because of its excessiveness, but also because of its subversiveness with respect to male authority. In these narratives, there is a distinct association made between feminine excessiveness (in speaking, eating and drinking), secret feminine knowledge, social disorder and a loss in masculine authority and sexual potency. Connections are also made between feminine deviancy, disorder and space. This idea will be taken up in detail in Chapter Seven.

Susan Philips is another historian to have explored notions of gossip and sins of the tongue in medieval society. In her 2007 text, *Transforming Talk: The Problem with Gossip in Late Medieval England*, she wrote that:

> [t]he talk we now recognize as ‘gossip’ was known as ‘jangling’ or ‘ydel talke’, a Sine of the Tongue that encompassed a range of verbal transgressions: excessive chatter, impudent and unproductive speech, tale-telling, news, disturbing reports, bawdy jokes, lies, and scorning one’s neighbour.\(^{60}\)

\(^{57}\) Ibid., p. 63.  
\(^{58}\) Ibid.  
\(^{59}\) Ibid., p. 64.  
Frivolity, triviality and idleness were what made these sins so dangerous. As Church leaders and ‘penitential manuals were fond of warning, on Judgement Day, gossiping parishioners would be required to render accounts for every idle word they spoke’. Historians have generally underestimated the overall significance of gossip and sins of the tongue to medieval English societies. It has been suggested that:

[among the more surprising aspects of late medieval ecclesiastical authority is the fact that its most serious challenge comes not from heretical uprisings but from the seemingly frivolous discourse of idle talk. Although heresy certainly poses an undeniable threat to the Church in late medieval England, the intense scholarly focus on heresy in recent decades has obscured our view of the less obvious, though no less serious, problems with which authorities grappled. Gossip is the most glaring of these omissions, for concern over it is almost universal. Indeed, complaint about gossip is the most consistent feature of Middle English pastoral literature.]

To medieval English communities, including fifteenth-century Norwich, the sorts of speech typically associated with women represented a risk to community harmony and the authority of the Church. Specifically, the excessive, unbridled and imprudent nature of that speech was a concern, at least in the minds of medieval religious and community leaders.

Moving on from the representations of Eve and ideas about secret female knowledge, this research now returns to the fifteenth-century sources. In particular, The Malleus Maleficarum, for evidence of the imagery used to issue a warning about the potential danger of women’s voices. This imagery includes the bee, the rose and the Sirens. The significance of these three images is that, when used in relation to women, they all invoke a similar dualistic understanding of the nature of women; that is, alluring but dangerous.

In their treatise, the authors Sprenger and Kramer wrote of women in general:

Let us consider another property of hers, the voice. For as she is a liar by nature, so in her speech she stings while she delights us. Wherefore her voice is like the song of the Sirens, who with their sweet melody entice passers-by and kill them … When she speaks it is a delight which flavours the sin; the flower of love is a rose, because under its blossom

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61 Ibid., p. 7.
62 Ibid., p. 13.
there are hidden many thorns … Her mouth is smoother than oil … her speech afterwards as bitter as absinthium.  

This passage incorporates all three images of female perversity and danger to issue the authors’ warning to the community. Using these symbolic images, the authors remind their audience of the true nature, and therefore innate danger, of women. The passage is resolute in its claim that Woman, by her very nature, is a liar; her words are not to be trusted. Like the beautiful but deadly Sirens, Woman uses her sweet words and honeyed voice to entice, then trap men. Like the rose, her voice and her appearance are pleasing, but ultimately riddled with thorns. These three images allowed medieval authors to articulate the paradox of women and language as they understood it. That is, the capacity of both words and women for deception, deviancy and manipulation, while all the while appearing pure. The Malleus Maleficarum also demonstrates, as with other sources, that in a fifteenth-century context, whether a deviant woman be a witch, Lollard or heretic, her ‘crime’ was largely conceived of as a misuse of words and voice.  

At the same time, crimes of language were inherently conceived of as feminine. Thus, whether the accused was labelled heretic, Lollard or witch, fear and suspicion towards him or her was often generated and conveyed through the reoccurring images of the bee, rose or Siren.

In medieval narratives such as The Malleus Maleficarum, women, by their nature, were considered to have an intrinsic capacity for deviancy, deception and manipulation; in particular, of men. Thus, the female witch, Lollard and heretic were regarded as perverse extremes of this natural feminine capacity. It was this idea that all women, even those that seemed the most pure and devout, were ‘liar[s] by nature’ that justified the legal and social restrictions placed on ‘feminine speech’. In the arguments presented to disprove Walter Brut’s claim that women could preach to men, the authorities recalled St. Thomas’s pronouncement that all women, even the most holy and devout, would lead men into sexual desire by their teaching. They

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63 Malleus Maleficarum, p. 46.  
64 See Heidi Breuer, Crafting the Witch: Gendering Magic in Medieval and Early Modern England, New York, Routledge, 2009 for some discussion on the construction of witches along gendered lines by ‘gendering’ certain practices or activities.  
65 Malleus Maleficarum, p. 46.  
warned men not to be fooled into thinking that holy and pure women were without the deceptive and wicked qualities associated with fallen females. For:

although the beauty of her appearance and every movement of woman may lead men to sexual desire, it is chiefly the sweetness of her voice and the pleasure of hearing her words that does this . . . You may say that this does not apply to a holy and devout woman, but to a wicked or foolish one. You are wrong.67

This perverse power to entice and manipulate men was regarded as so innate that it was beyond women’s control; that is, it was passive. This medieval concept of ‘passive enticement’ was utilised to reconcile the notions of women as weak, and women as powerful manipulators of men. The charge of passive enticement, evident in both the arguments against Walter Brut and *The Malleus Maleficarum* ‘was to be one of the major charges laid against women in the Christian tradition’.68 A consequence of this attitude towards women was that patriarchal authorities felt justified in ‘protecting’ both women and the community by regulating women’s independent speech, movements, bodies and access to words.

In the official theological treatise composed in the late fourteenth century to controvert the Lollard Walter Brut’s suggestion that women should be permitted to give public religious instruction to men, arguments and assumptions about the nature of women, already noted in *The Malleus Maleficarum*, are again apparent. In this treatise, the warnings about women’s dangerous voices were articulated using theological, legalistic and ‘scientific’ notions and discourses. At the 1391 heresy trial and the 1393 commission into Walter Brut, a large number of academically trained theologians were assembled to invalidate many of Brut’s propositions deemed to be heretical.69 They did so using the familiar dualistic argument already discussed. Although the resulting treatise does not directly employ the imagery of the bee, rose or Siren, it does speak of the same female capacity for deception that these images convey in other documents, and it provides evidence of the same preoccupation with the nature of women’s words and voices. One of the first of Brut’s propositions to be cited and denounced as heretical was that:

Walter Brute hath openly, publicly, and notoriously, avouch’d, and commonly said and taught, and stubbornly affirmed, that every christian man, yea, and woman, being without sin, may make the body of Christ as well as the priest.\(^{70}\)

To counter this proposition that lay men and women could perform the Eucharist as well as any priest, several Cambridge theologians prepared a response based on the Scriptures and teachings of the Church to disprove this and other of Brut’s assertions. Among the many reasons offered for why women in particular could not be permitted to instruct men assembled in public, these theologians referred to St. Thomas’ observations in the *Summa theologica*:

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\text{[the] reason is that women in general have weak and unstable natures and thus they are incomplete in wisdom; therefore, they are not allowed to teach in public.}\(^{71}\)
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Another reason offered was that:

\[
The\text{ lips of the wicked woman dripping scandal and the conversation of women ignite men like fire … So that men will not be lead into sexual desire by the public teaching of a woman, it is forbidden to them to teach in public because in so doing they would harm men.}\(^{72}\)
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Within this last passage, the figure of ‘Woman’ imagined for the audience emerges as a Siren-like figure; at once sweetness and alluring beauty, but also devious, deceptive and dangerous to men. These Church scholars credited women with a linguistic, carnal power, but argued that, by their nature, women could not use this power wisely (that is, for pleasing men), instead turning it to more diabolic purposes.

Close analysis of various fifteenth-century texts confirms the significance of the spoken word to medieval people. This significance is also revealed by the second thematic cluster in this study; dangerous language usage, and the statement concerning the bee stinging the tongue and venoming the soul. The possible meanings of the remark were examined in this chapter by firstly exploring the imagery of the bee and the tongue and what the images reveal about medieval attitudes toward the power of words. Medieval images of the Sirens, Eve and the

\(^{70}\) Acts and Monuments of John Foxe, p 132.


rose assisted in this analysis of medieval attitudes towards women’s words. This next section returns once again to Joan Clyfland’s statement concerning Margery Baxter and medieval ideas about the power of words. It considers how the community and the Norwich authorities saw the Lollards as subverting the natural relationship between the Church and lay people, in particular, the danger of the Church’s words being overturned by the Lollards, particularly female Lollards. Two linguistic encounters Baxter reportedly had with two Church figures are the focus of this examination; the Carmelite friar from Yarmouth and the dean of the fields. Significantly, in both encounters the audience sees the authority of the Church being subverted through the spoken word and the disruption of the hierarchical relationship between the Church’s words and those of the laity.

In her 1429 deposition to the Norwich courts, Joan Clyfland spoke of Margery Baxter’s encounter with a certain Carmelite friar from Yarmouth. This included Baxter’s apparent warning to Clyfland that she should not disclose to the Bishop the nature of Baxter’s conversation with her (which, presumably was heretical or ‘deviant’ in nature), otherwise Baxter would do unto her what she had once done to a certain friar. Desirous to know what she had done, Baxter boasted that she had rebuked the friar, ‘who was the best and learned friar in all the country’ for begging. She gave him nothing other than the advice to quit his habit and take up the plough instead for it would please God more than following the life of a friar. The friar enquired whether there was anything more that Baxter could teach him, to which she declared to him the gospel in English. Sometime after this encounter, the friar accused Baxter of heresy. In response, Baxter claimed that the friar had attempted to seduce her and, because she would not consent, he accused her of heresy. Fearing Baxter’s husband, the friar ‘held his peace and went his way for shame’.

The encounter with the Carmelite friar is revealing in terms of fifteenth-century attitudes towards Lollards, in particular, Lollard women and their use of language, as well as the threat that they potentially posed to the Church. For the fifteenth-century Norwich authorities, already interested in the unauthorised practices of the Lollards, the revelations confirmed all that was feared about women, their intrinsic nature and

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their relationship to words and language. The inclusion of the story in Exeter’s document may also attest to its significance to the authorities. Baxter’s encounter with the friar and her reported threat to Joan Clyfland confirmed women’s capacity for lies and deception and the consequences that this capacity could have on honest, God-fearing men when it was not controlled and regulated. The lesson was that, given the opportunity to teach or preach to men, women taught lies and heresies and lured men into linguistic, religious and sexual deviancy. In this story, linguistic and sexual deviance and deception are tied together; suggesting that a woman’s perversity in one area unleashes perversity in every aspect of that woman. Ultimately, the story reminds the authorities and sections of the Norwich community of the reason that women are not permitted to teach and why they should not have unregulated access to God’s words and teachings.

Similar meanings can be taken from Joan Clyfland’s statement to the court regarding Margery Baxter’s alleged encounter with the dean of the fields. By Clyfland’s account, Baxter was said to have often feigned confession to the dean of the fields, with him thinking she was ‘a woman of good life’. Furthermore, on occasion, he had given her money. As a Lollard who believed that priests had no power to absolve any man from his sins and that confession should only be made unto God, for Baxter, the act of confessing to the dean was meaningless. For the courts and sections of the fifteenth-century Norwich community, the story would likely have confirmed many of the beliefs held about the nature of women and their tendency towards false words. The danger of this intrinsic capability to Christian men is seen in the fates of the Carmelite friar and the dean in the fields, both of whom were deceived and humiliated.

However, as with the story of the Carmelite friar, for Baxter and other Lollards like her, the messages to be taken from the story of the dean of the fields were likely quite different. For Lollards who believed that priests, clerics and friars ‘injuriously endowed the churches with possessions’, ‘falsely and cursedly deceiving the people with their false mammetries and laws to extort money from the simple folk to

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75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid., p. 595.
sustain their pride, riot and idleness’, and who regarded practices such as pilgrimage and the purchase of prayers and indulgences as ‘heretical’, the act of a simple woman reversing the order of things and taking money back from the corrupt authorities might have been quite powerful.

When considered together, the five diverse medieval sources that form the evidentiary basis of this chapter—the satirical writings of Marbod of Rennes and Jehan Le Fevre; the treatise on witchcraft, *The Malleus Maleficarum*; and the theological treatise composed in response to the trial of Walter Brut—reveal medieval attitudes towards the power and danger of words, language and speech. They also reveal that, with respect to this, the gender of the speaker was important and that, when used by women, words could be particularly dangerous. In the medieval period, images of the bee, the rose and the Siren allowed concerns regarding women and their linguistic activities to be articulated. Having examined these concerns and the way in which they were expressed, this study can now engage with Joan Clyfland’s accusation against Margery Baxter with a greater understanding of what ‘the bee stinging one’s tongue and venoming one’s soul’ meant in a fifteenth-century context, and what meaning the courts, the authorities and the community would likely have taken from it.

Whether the statement is Baxter’s warning to her neighbour of the danger of empty and meaningless oaths, or Clyfland’s articulation of the dangers of Lollard doctrine, because of the imagery used, this statement reveals some important ideas and understandings about the nature of words and linguistic deviancy at that time. The notion of ‘a bee stinging one’s tongue and venoming one’s soul’ can be understood as a warning about the power of words. When misspoken or misused, words can invoke the Apocalyptic wrath of God, like that seen in the Last Judgement. When spoken idly or without thought, they poison and corrupt the soul. When used by women, the Church authorities believed that their danger was greatest, as they could be wielded like deadly weapons, while simultaneously seeming pious and sweet. Taken together, the message is, just as every bee will sting, so every word is important and has the capacity for deception.

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The sources and imagery examined in this chapter assist in reconstructing the intellectual climate of fifteenth-century Norwich at the time of the Lollard prosecutions. They attest to a landscape in which sections of the community and the orthodox authorities were concerned by certain types of linguistic activities, words and speakers. In terms of the court-related documents of the Norwich Heresy Trials, these concerns are reflected in the abundance of imagery relating to dangerous words and language usage, with the statement concerning the bee and venom serving here as an example. While this concern over language does not account for the Lollard prosecutions, it does go some way towards explaining what was being prosecuted. Specifically, just as women were viewed as dangerous, deviant users of language, deviant language and linguistic activities themselves, regardless of which gender was employing them, were also understood as dangerous (and, in this way, as associated with femaleness). The ongoing prevalence of references to Eve, Sirens, roses and bees in medieval and fifteenth-century sources confirms the wide-spread presence of this mentality. This mentality, unsurprisingly, finds its way into the trials of Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone, and is articulated in the warning of the ‘bee stinging the tongue and venoming the soul’. In considering this warning in all its complexity, this study is part way to reconstructing the legal, intellectual and social context through which the Norwich Heresy Trials should be considered and understood.

The following chapter also focusses on the significance of words to this society. However, another dimension to this relationship will be considered; that is, the role and place of the written or printed word. In the following chapter, consideration will be given to the fear of written or printed words falling into the wrong hands. Specifically, the implications of the Lollards being able to more readily and easily access written books, including the Bible, will be considered from the viewpoint of the fifteenth-century authorities and community leaders.
Chapter Five: Christ’s Law That ‘Was Written in a Book’: Medieval People and the Written Word

This chapter examines the repercussions of the Lollards accessing written and printed books, including the Bible, for fifteenth-century English religious authorities. A starting point for this discussion will be Joan Clyland’s revelation to the Norwich court that her neighbour Margery Baxter had invited her and her maid Joan to come to her chamber secretly in the night, where she would hear Margery’s husband ‘read the law of christ unto them, which law was written in a book that her husband was wont to read to her by night’.\(^1\) This disclosure, along with the charges made against Baxter for transporting William White’s books from Yarmouth, and for storing them in her home for five days, provide evidence of the development of a literate culture that was emerging during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and that influenced the development of Lollardy. This growing literate culture gave the Lollards increased access to cheaper, more readily available and more easily disseminated printed books and documents written in their own tongue. The emerging culture represented an inherent challenge and threat to the authority of fifteenth-century English religious leaders, and provided a basis for them to turn their attention to the textual and book-based activities of the Lollards and the laity in general. This culture of budding literacy also provided some of the imagery and language used by both Lollards and their prosecutors during their interactions.

Using several medieval sources, this chapter addresses the third thematic cluster identified from the court-related documents of the Norwich Heresy Trials; the presence of literate mentalities and the interactions and tensions between oral and literate practices and ways of thinking. The claim that Margery Baxter invited her neighbour to hear the law of Christ, which was written in a book to be read by her husband, will provide a basis for discussion of the thematic cluster. In addition to the accusations made against Baxter, this chapter also explores the medieval narratives and images of Tutivillus; the recording demon whose fame was at its height in England in the fourteenth century. Tutivillus’ deeds were captured in various

\(^1\) *Ibid.*
medieval narratives, documents and images. The development and use of the images and narratives of Tutivillus provides evidence of the cultural transition to literacy and the extent of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century authorities’ concerns regarding language usage and the written word. Sources for this chapter also include documents related to the early 1390s heresy trial for the well-known Lollard, Walter Brut. This well-documented trial offers further evidence and understanding of the place of literate practices, books and words in Lollard thinking and the prosecutions of its followers.

As already noted elsewhere in this study, Lollardy and the Lollard movements were primarily textual, book-based cultures and communities organised around the possession, transmission, ownership and transfer of books and the written word. The principal argument of this chapter is that the very nature of Lollardy, its reliance upon books and written texts, reflects the important changes that were occurring in fifteenth-century English society. These changes related to the development of an increasingly literate-minded culture and the general transition from orality to literacy. The rise of universities was also a feature of this period, with learning and intellectual thought extending beyond monasteries. Coupled with this shift away from monastic-dominated learning, was the movement of literate practices and ways of thinking into the province of secular interests and activities, and thus away from the control of the Church. With this, opportunities arose for lay people, including the Lollards, to use printed books and the written word to develop independent and direct relationships with God. In these new relationships, the authority and regulatory role of clerics, priests and Church leaders could be circumvented.

Documents from this period of transition and change capture the tensions, fears and concerns of community leaders and authorities, and some sections of fifteenth-century English society in response to these changes. Their responses are generated in part by the movement from a primarily oral culture to one in which literacy plays a greater role; compounding this was the threat posed to the established social order because of this shift. In this emerging world, the uneducated, unregulated laity was potentially able to access ideas and thoughts previously closed to them. Further, they

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were able to codify and standardise their ideas in written form and transmit them across large distances, connecting like-minded people and communities. In this new world order, social hierarchies were disrupted and the Church authorities could no longer claim sole control of the Word of God.

Within Exeter’s trial-related documents, there are statements and images that provide evidence of the literate mentality and the interactions between orality and literacy. The most significant of these was the claim that Margery Baxter invited her neighbour (and her neighbour’s maid) to come to her chamber secretly in the night, to hear Margery’s husband ‘read the law of Christ unto them, which law was written in a book that her husband was wont to read to her at night’. The revelation serves to expose Margery’s dangerous activities and establish her as guilty of heresy. It does this by exposing that she and her husband owned, or had in their possession, an illegal Bible or religious text written in a language that could be read by Margery’s husband, and that they did so within their home, secretly, among their friends and neighbours, and without the involvement of priests or clerics. In this familial setting, the written book allowed certain non-conformist religious ideas to be shared and words to be read, heard, memorised and repeated. Whereas ownership and use of devotional literature within the family home, often written in the vernacular, was a feature of orthodox female piety and Orthodox Christian practice, the accusations against Margery involved illegal Lollard texts and were for this reason considered heretical. This represented both a threat and an opportunity for the fifteenth-century community. It offered an opportunity for the laity to engage with the Word of God directly and independently of the Church, but it also threatened the established order of things and risked social disharmony. Other evidence of the literate mentality includes the claim that a ‘charter of salvation’ was held in Margery’s body, and the images and language of orality employed, such as ‘tongue’, ‘mouth’ and ‘lips’.

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4 With respect to medieval book ownership see Goldberg, ‘Lay Book Ownership in Late Medieval York’ and Tanner, The Church in Late Medieval Norwich. With respect to the role of the home see Kowaleski and Goldberg, Medieval Domesticity.
5 Ibid., p. 596.
6 Ibid., p. 594.
7 Ibid., p. 595.
8 Ibid.
The development of a literate culture in medieval England has been a subject of interest to historians including M.T. Clanchy and Adam Fox. This chapter builds on some of the understandings contained in Clanchy’s work, *From Memory to Written Record,* and in Adam Fox’s, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500–1700.* Both consider the relationships between orality and literacy in the medieval to early modern periods in England, but take different views of the nature of the interactions between them. Clanchy argues that fifteenth-century England was a transitional period in terms of ideas about language, words and speaking. He suggests that during this period, there was a movement away from orality towards literacy and literate ways of thinking. By this he means that English society was increasingly reliant upon written processes and practices, and that literate ways of thinking were ever more present in ordinary English people’s lives, irrespective of whether they could read or write. This transition to a more literate-minded culture contributed to a new social order, and represented a disruption of the ‘natural’ social hierarchies, in which the ignorant and inarticulate laity was reliant upon, and deferential to, the view of the world and of God painted for them by learned clerics and priests.

Similar to Clanchy, Adam Fox argues that in fifteenth-century England:

no one was immune from the influences wrought by the written word. Everyone who spoke the language, uttered its habitual sayings, sang its popular songs, inherited its commonplace assumptions and adhered its normative beliefs, was absorbed in a world governed by text.

Unlike Clanchy, however, Fox does not see the relationship between orality and literacy as antagonistic or adversarial, but rather as one of co-dependence and co-existence. For Fox, the written word ‘permeated the fabric of popular culture’, in part because of the ‘essential reciprocity’ between oral and literate modes:

On the one hand, both manuscript and printed works enshrined material gathered from circulation by word of mouth and, on the other, they fed back into it. The boundaries between speech and text, hearing and reading, were thoroughly permeable and constantly shifting so that the dichotomy is difficult to identify and impossible to sustain.

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Whereas Clanchy sees an uneasy transition from one to the other, Fox argues for a ‘merging’ whereby the two forces or phenomena become enmeshed and co-dependent. I would suggest that while Clanchy oversimplifies the relationship and sees it as a transition (albeit an uneasy one), Fox does not adequately attend to the considerable tensions generated by the shift. This thesis uses both Clanchy and Foxe’s observations of the period to argue that there was a cultural transition from orality to greater literacy at this time. This transformation in thinking and practice brought about social change and also provided the imagery and language present within certain fifteenth-century sources including those related to the Norwich Heresy Trials. These sources also provide evidence of the concerns and anxieties felt by sections of the community with respect to the changes taking place. Social and religious leaders of fifteenth-century England were anxious that the increasing access and exposure ordinary lay-people had to books and the written/generated word would facilitate the laity in reading, hearing and contemplating the Word of God and the messages of the Bible for themselves, without the paternal oversight of priests and clerics.

It is fair to say that, in terms of the history of literacy, most scholarly attention has been directed towards the invention of printing and the printing press in the late Middle Ages.\(^\text{12}\) Notwithstanding the crucial part that printing played in the spread of literacy, printing prospered and took root because a literate community already existed. The origins of that community lie in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In the eleventh century, within the monasteries of Anglo-Saxon England, as with other parts of Europe, a literate culture already existed. This culture was marked by its illuminated manuscripts. From these roots in the royal and monastic spheres, new forms of writing and new ways of using writing emerged. These modes flourished in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, spreading to and becoming firmly established in the daily social and business transactions of the secular world.\(^\text{13}\) It is this phenomenon that Clanchy is largely concerned with, and where his work contributes to the arguments of this study.


\(^{13}\) Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 1.
From Memory to Written Record examines the development of literate modes in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, including the effect these new modes had on ordinary medieval people’s ways of thinking about concepts of writing, words, language and speech. Clanchy approaches this period in history as a ‘transitional’ one, during which traditional oral procedures shifted towards more systematic and bureaucratic ways of keeping and creating written records. The reasons for, and factors driving, the spread of literate practices and processes into the secular world were practical in nature. Increasingly, secular authorities needed written/printed documents and corresponding bureaucratic procedures to better record, standardise, manage and disseminate the growing volumes of information being generated. Increased commerce and trade, and systems of taxation, land ownership and transfer brought with them an increased reliance on documentary processes. Thus, literacy and literate practices spread and took hold in the secular world of twelfth- and thirteenth-century England because there was a driving need for them. What makes this an important transition, especially for the purposes of this research, is that the growth in literacy and the accompanying ‘literate mentality’ among ordinary lay-folk brought with it both the opportunity for social change, and the threat of social disorder. Consequently, in the period leading up to the fifteenth century, as medieval attitudes towards the written and spoken word were changing, religious authorities and sections of the community were concerned about who could access ‘words’ and what they might do with them when they did.

Around the eleventh century in England, writing was primarily associated with austere religious purposes and sacred Scripture. As such, writing invoked a certain degree of reverence and feelings of ‘other worldliness’ to ordinary parishioners. However, this long-established association between writing and literacy and the sacred Scripture was disrupted in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as many traditional oral modes of the secular world were influenced, and sometimes replaced, by written records and processes. Reflecting on the title of his text, From Memory to Written Record, Clanchy suggested that this period could equally be termed ‘as a shift from sacred script to practical literacy’. As this ‘practical literacy’ (that is, literacy for the purpose of royal and secular business) of the thirteenth century

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14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., p. 333.
became more dominant, traditional attitudes towards writing changed. No longer
divine, writing became far more mundane and lost much of its ‘other worldliness’. For scribes and clerks, writing became mechanical, formulaic and practical.\(^{16}\) In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, writing and literacy were simply the tools of daily secular and religious business. The written/printed word and literate processes allowed secular business to be conducted more efficiently and in greater volumes. The printed word allowed information to be duplicated and disseminated quickly and easily to a number of people, reducing the associated costs regardless of factors of distance and locality. Transfer of property and land, or the payment of taxes, for instance, could be more easily and reliably recorded. As this society became more and more dependent upon and familiar with the written word, the laity (whether literate or not) came to participate in literacy. At that time, rather than being a marker of authority and intellectual enlightenment, literacy and writing was regarded simply as a necessity; a tool for daily business in a society that was increasingly structured around institutional bureaucracies.

Clanchy’s work focusses on how practical literacy and the involvement of the laity in literate practices grew out of the daily business and activities of twelfth- and thirteenth-century society. He introduces the central concept of the ‘literate mentality’; the values and assumptions about writing and the written word that eventually grow out of the increased dependence upon and familiarity with literate processes. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries do not just provide evidence of a basic restructuring of how people conducted royal and secular business, they also reveal a reformation of medieval mentalities and ways of thinking about the written

\(^{16}\) Steven Justice and M. Camille’s observations regarding the formulaic and ‘mechanical’ work undertaken by scribes in the fifteenth century have already been noted. Both Camille and Justice spoke of an apparent ‘alienation’ of the scribe from the processes of writing and recording. Although this notion of ‘the alienation of the worker’ tends only to be associated with the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, I would argue that this experience of alienation is similarly present in fifteenth-century England, most particularly in the growing field of scribal work. By the fifteenth century, the institutions of Church and crown were bureaucratic enough that the need for scribes was high and constantly increasing. Yet despite this high demand for scribal talent, the work itself was becoming more repetitive and menial. The work of scribes became less individual and artful as the scribes themselves became more like copyists and recorders. The intellectual alienation that Justice argues scribes like John of Exeter experienced is very similar to the ‘alienation’ that Clanchy argues this society felt when confronted by literate practices and literate ways of thinking. Clanchy suggests that twelfth and thirteenth century society knew the practical importance of literate modes and they largely submitted to these practices, but that they remained fundamentally suspicious of the written word for a long time. In the medieval mind, the written word remained fallible and slippery, in spite of the central roles it was beginning to take in so many aspects of medieval society.
word and who could/should have access to it. This interest in words and language, and how and by whom they were being used, provides some insight into the reasons that the trials occurred and the climate in which they played out.

Interestingly, Clanchy’s exploration of the development of practical literacy and the literate mentality stops at 1307 with the death of Edward I. He ends here, arguing that the death of Edward I marks the termination of ‘the reign of the most record-conscious king’. For practical reasons, Clanchy’s study needs to end somewhere. However, his choice and reasoning implies, incorrectly, that by the beginning of the fourteenth century the transition was complete, the restructuring of society and medieval mentalities necessary for practical literacy had largely occurred and that by 1307, the written word and practical literacy had taken a foothold in day-to-day religious business. This warrants further investigation. Further, what Clanchy does not explore is how this practical literacy eventually allowed the laity to independently access sacred Scripture and participate in religious debate.

This is where this research seeks to make a contribution. Medieval religious authorities and community leaders were initially not particularly concerned by literacy when it was for secular business; after all, these literate modes emerged out of, and filtered down from, monastic and royal business. What they perhaps did not envisage was that by the fifteenth century this ‘practical literacy’ would extend into the more sacred sphere of religious writing and Scripture. They did not necessarily intend that one day this day-to-day ‘business literacy’ might take on a more religious, theological and philosophical purpose and would allow ordinary parishioners to participate on a semi-equal footing with clerics and priests. Ironically, the religious authorities and community leaders themselves laid the necessary groundwork for the laity to seriously challenge the Church fathers’ control of the religious word.

Historians have debated the social and cultural consequences the rise of literacy and the advent of the printing press had on Western communities, including its relationship to the growth of secularisation and the decline of the Orthodox Christian

\[17\] Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 20.
Whereas some scholars champion the idea of the printing press as the tool that ignited social change and brought about increased secularisation and the downturn of the Christian Church, Adam Fox is less focussed on the technological imperative. He argues that literacy and the printing press were not autonomous agents of changes and did not operate in isolation from changes between oral and literate modes. Adam Fox noted that:

Some scholars have identified fundamental differences between societies which are largely oral and those with long traditions of written culture. Literacy has been claimed to transform the way in which people think and act. It has been linked to the rise of more ‘rational’ modes of belief and the onset of secularization ... In practice, most societies are characterized by a dynamic series of interactions between spoken and written forms of communication and record. At the same time, literacy is most often regarded not as an autonomous agent of change or a monolithic technology the effects of which are always and everywhere the same. Instead, the implications of reading and writing are recognized to vary between societies and over time, and to depend upon the particular circumstances of their dissemination and use.19

In 1979, the historian Elizabeth Eisenstein also argued for the idea of the printing press and the rise of literacy as an agent of social change.20 With the work of historians such as Eisenstein, it is clear that increased literacy offered the laity greater independent access to religious texts and ideas, and the later emergence of the printing press in turn offered a medium and a type of book production that was relatively quick and cheap and that delivered a uniform, standardised product that was easier to disseminate. This contributed to a culture and society in which the laity was able to circumvent the authority and role of clerics and priests and was able to more freely and easily participate in religious debate and practices. Further, the dissemination of standardised texts, particularly the Bible, had the effect of creating a ‘community’ of like-minded readers, bound together across geographical borders (and sometimes across social spheres) by a common text. It has been noted that print was ‘just as likely to be an instrument of social cohesion, as more people were brought into the reading public, and as stories, images and values permeated the multiple tiers of English society’.21 However, despite the effect of a ‘shared culture’, the ‘basic social and economic realities which limited contact with printed works for

18 As an example of this, see Peter Biller and Anne Hudson (eds), Heresy and Literacy, 1000–1530, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994.
19 Fox, Oral and Literate Culture in England, p. 11.
21 Watt, Cheap Print and Popular Piety, p. 5.
much of the populace’ must still be taken into account. While printed books or documents were cheaper and more accessible than manuscripts, they remained inaccessible for many, with price as ‘the major constraining factor in book buying, after literacy’.

In terms of the effects of the rise of literacy and the advent of printing and the consequences for the Church, Gutenberg’s printing press contributed significantly to the waning of the Christian Church’s autonomous authority. Scripture and the writing of the Church fathers could no longer function as it had traditionally. As a religion based around text, Scripture, a book and the word, the Christian Church was particularly vulnerable to the social changes taking place. As an example of this vulnerability, Eisenstein points to the increased scrutiny scribal works (and scribes and copyists themselves) faced as scholar-printers and editors came into contact with their works. Ideas of authorship, authenticity and intellectual property rights emerged. Review and revision of sacred Scriptures sometimes revealed that discrepancies, incidents of plagiarism and forgeries, errors in grammar and alterations had occurred in sacred manuscript production. Eisenstein suggests that ‘enhanced awareness of scribal processes undermined confidence in divine inspiration and direct revelation from God.’ She wrote that:

When the collective authority associated with the ‘auctores’ of medieval clerks was replaced by more individualized concepts of authorship, ancient prophets and sages dwindled in stature. As fallible individuals, prone to error, apparently guilty of plagiarism on many counts, old giants began to look more like modern dwarfs … Given the belief that true eloquence was a token of divine inspiration, Biblical scholars faced a painful predicament: either they had to conceal all the discrepancies and lapses they uncovered, or else cast doubt on the divine authorship of the scripture.

This increased scrutiny of sacred Scriptures, along with greater awareness of the scribal processes involved in the production of such texts, contributed to an erosion of the belief in inspiration and authorship deriving from God. Sacred Scriptures were increasingly recognised as having being subject to, and the product of, the same processes as any other earthly book or document.

22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., p. 1.
25 Ibid., pp. 321, 323.
This chapter has so far established the general significance of an increasingly literate culture in fifteenth-century England and the movement of textual practices out of the monastic world into the sphere of secular business. This study now shifts to examine the importance of textual and literate practices to Lollardy; in particular, the activities and beliefs of Lollard women.

Books, book culture and textually based activities were central to the Lollard movement and the Lollard community to which Hawisia Mone and Margery Baxter belonged. Books and the written word had both a theological and practical importance to the Lollards. They were used to teach, to understand, to proselytise and to demonstrate their faith in Lollard beliefs and doctrine. Lollard communities centred on owning, reading, hearing, sharing, collecting, hiding and transmitting books, in secret and independently from religious and social authorities. Anne Hudson notes that to the Lollards, ‘access to the written word was crucial’; ‘the written word could stay when the persecuted preacher could not; a book is more easily hidden than a man’.26 Contemplation of the Bible and the Word of God was not confined to the act of reading the written word, but also to hearing it spoken and to reflecting upon its physical and aural form.27 In being able to own, view and read (or have read to them) the Bible written in their own tongue, the Lollards were able to directly and immediately access the Word of God with relative ease; they were able to interpret the messages contained within the Bible for themselves, without assistance (or interference) from clerics.28 Therefore, it is not surprising that the various charges against both Baxter and Mone included activities associated with books. Hawisia Mone confessed to having ‘receyved and herberwed in our hous, and thaym Y have conceled, conforted, supported, maytened and favored with al my paor’ various convicted heretics. Also to having ‘ofte tymes kept, holde and continued scoles of heresie yn prive chambres and prive places of oures’.29 Similarly, Margery was charged with having invited neighbours and servants into the innermost

27 Clanchy, From Memory to Written Record, pp. 194–195.
28 The 1402 De heretico comburendo identifies book production as a typical activity of the heretics, while Arundel’s 1407 Constitutions forbade the ownership or dissemination of vernacular biblical texts unless they and their owners had received episcopal licence. See Hudson, ‘Laicus litteratus’, in Biller and Hudson, Heresy and Literacy, p. 232.
chambers of her home at night, to hear the law of God read from a book. In addition, she was said to have transported and secretly stored the contraband Lollard books belonging to William White.

As in Lollard ideology, concepts of words and books were important to the religious authorities of fifteenth-century England. This is seen in the narratives of Tutivillus employed by the authorities to regulate behaviour and word-usage among the clergy and in the general community. Some historians, including M.T. Clanchy, M. Camille, Sandy Bardsley, Susan E. Philips and Margaret Jennings, have argued that the increasing dominance of systems and processes of bureaucracy and documentation in ordinary people’s lives during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, along with the general transitioning to a culture of the written word, is reflected in the corresponding rise of the image or narrative of the ‘recording demon’. Tutivillus was a demon who appeared in various forms in medieval art and imagery, as well as in religious sermons. It is noted that:

although it did not originate in late Medieval England, the story [of Tutivillus] seems to have had significant cultural currency there: among English sermons, plays, and poems of the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, it appears in more than forty surviving manuscripts.

Artistic representations of Tutivillus survive from the second half of the thirteenth century through to the fifteenth, with a peak in the fourteenth century. The most significant feature of his appearances was that he was said to have lain in wait within or near churches, ready to ‘collect up’ in his sack, or to record on his parchment, the misused, rushed or mumbled words of the congregation to deliver to his devil master.

The nature and development of the narratives of Tutivillus are important because of what they reveal about English society at the time when his appearances were most prolific. Medieval English society was interested in the problems of gossip, jangling,

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31 Bardsley, Venomous Tongues, p. 52. Variations on the Tutivillus exempla appear from the twelfth century onwards, as far afield as Iceland, Sweden and Estonia.
32 Ibid., p. 53. These representations appear throughout England, from Yorkshire to Kent to Somerset. Nearly all of the wall paintings of him are found in the East of England, in Norfolk, Suffolk and Northamptonshire.
idle talk and sins of the tongue generally.\textsuperscript{33} It has been suggested that, ‘so pervasive is the problem that it merits its own devil, Tutivillus, the recording demon who is invoked by clerics with such frequency that he becomes part of the cultural imagination’.\textsuperscript{34} Of most significance to the ideas explored in this thesis is that, although he had a presence in English society from the thirteenth century and was associated with misused words, speech and voice, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when his fame reaches its zenith, Tutivillus (and the Devil) were represented and conceived of as literate. As a concept, the Tutivillus of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was the product of a society transitioning to literacy and of religious leaders’ interest in how certain people, or groups of people, were using words and language.

Images of demons and devils have existed in many Christian societies throughout history. However, historians, including Margaret Jennings, suggest that the period from the thirteenth century through to the end of the Middle Ages was a moment during which demons were especially rich in the community consciousness. Jennings wrote that:

in their heyday, especially thanks to the medieval preacher, demons were omnipresent. They rode on ladies’ trains, perched menacingly on pieces of lettuce, hid under beds, immersed themselves in fermented liquids, masqueraded as Don Juans or femme fatales, and remained consistently and perversely attracted to churches and church people.\textsuperscript{35}

Particularly disturbing for the medieval Church and its congregation was the belief that the Devil’s army of scribes, demons and imps were never far from the building and its people. It was commonly thought that both angels and devils were constantly present, keeping score of the sins and virtues of the medieval Christian. In the \textit{De vitis partum}:

\textsuperscript{33} See Philips, Transforming Talk.
\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{35} Margaret Jennings, ‘Tutivillus: The Literary Career of the Recording Demon’, \textit{Studies in Philology}, vol. 14, 1977, p. 7. It should be noted that although demons and devils were associated with all kinds of malevolence and diabolism, and that many cases of sin, witchcraft, disaster and death were ‘revealed’ as the Devils work, medieval images of devils and demons were not necessarily designed to invoke horror and fear. Thomas Wright argued that many of the images ‘are droll but not frightful; they provoke laughter or at least incite a smile, but they create no horror’. Thomas Wright, \textit{A History of Caricature and Grotesque in Literature and Art}, London, 1875, p. 73. While the images might tap into a level of anxiety, they themselves do not always invoke fear and horror. Their message of caution and their reminder of the danger associated with the mis-use of words are achieved just as effectively through parody and humour. While his image was sometimes comical, the underlying message of Tutivillus was not.
it was recorded how angels and demons hovered near monks or nuns at moments of relaxation in order to eavesdrop on their talk. When they spoke of holy matters, the angels rejoiced; when of things far from spiritual, the demons exulted and showed their glee.\textsuperscript{36}

It is precisely because demons were never far from the Churches and Church people, that it was necessary to constantly guard the behaviour and utterances of both oneself and others. In this regard, images of the sack-carrying demon and the recording demon, Tutivillus, were effective tools for reminding parishioners of the dangers of idle talk, gossip and slothful words:

Depending on the congregation to be exhorted, the preacher could concentrate on the inattention expressed through idle talking or through careless recitation of the prayers of the Office. In one version, therefore, when some of the faithful were chattering during the Mass, a demon might be seen recording misdeeds of this nature. In another version, a religious might espy a devil carrying a heavy sack which, as the evil one would explain, was full of the syllables cut off, syncopated, or skipped over by clerics in reciting or chanting the psalms. Of course such stories could be altered at the preacher’s will to suit any special time or place.\textsuperscript{37}

For the medieval preacher, Tutivillus was also a useful tool for rousing an inattentive congregation that had become lax in their prayers and concentration.

Margaret Jennings’ survey of the use of the ‘recording demon’ in sermons, literature, drama and art from the thirteenth century to the sixteenth century revealed that two short and originally distinct narratives were responsible for the characterisation of the recording demon.\textsuperscript{38} The first version was that of a sack-carrying devil that collected the omitted, misspoken and mumbled syllables and words of the clergy from their daily prayers and recitations. Although his presence was sometimes indistinctly evident in earlier materials, the first discernible appearance of the sack carrier is found in the collection of exempla or illustrative stories taken from the \textit{Sermones Vulgares} of the theologian chronicler Jacques de Vitry (c.1160/1170–1240).\textsuperscript{39} Here, in one of his earliest collections, de Vitry said:

I have heard that a certain holy man, while he was in choir, saw a devil truly weighed down with a full sack. When, however, he commanded the demon to tell what he carried, the evil one said: ‘these are the syllables

\textsuperscript{36}Jennings, ‘Tutivillus’, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., p. 8.
\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., p. 10.
\textsuperscript{39}Cardinal de Vitry was born about 1180 and although scholars are unsure about when precisely he died, it was sometime before May 1240. It is unclear when these sermons were composed, but Jennings suggests that ‘most scholars would accept a date in the 1220s’. Ibid., p. 11.
and syncopated words and verses of the psalms which these very clerics in their (Matins) morning prayers stole from God; you can be sure I am keeping these diligently for their accusation'.

The second version was of a demon that captured and recorded words in writing. Instead of physically ‘collecting’ the misspoken words of the clergy, this demon lay in wait for the idle, misspent words of churchgoers engaging in gossip and thoughtless chatter so that he could write their words down. In the Gilbertine Monk, Robert de Brunne’s (or Robert Manning’s) (c. 1275 to c. 1338) penitential piece Handlyng Synne (1303), Brunne wrote of a devil sitting between two women ‘with penne and parchemen yn honde’. This more prevalent image of the recording demon, who, by the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, had acquired the name Tutivillus, was far more literate than his fiendish sack-carrying colleague. Jacques de Vitry’s Sermones Vulgares provides evidence of one of the earliest instances of the writing devil. He notes that:

Certain people, however, think idle things during sermons and speak idle words in church when they should be putting their hearts to those things being said. Wherefore at a great solemnity, when a certain holy priest saw a devil stretching parchment with his teeth, he demanded of him why he was doing so. To whom the devil answered: ‘I am writing down the idle words said in this church which because of the solemn feast today have been remarkably increased, and seeing that the piece which I brought was not sufficient, I have attempted to stretch that parchment with my teeth’. Hearing this, the priest began to tell what was happening to the people who listened with fear and trepidation. While they were thus lamenting and feeling penitent, the devil began to erase what he had written and the parchment was left empty.

As literate practices became more common in ordinary medieval society and its everyday transactions, the story of Tutivillus evolved to reflect the change. Tutivillus abandoned his sack and instead took up pen and ink, and as God’s bureaucratic army of scribes increased, so too did the devil king’s.

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41 Robert of Brunne and Frederick J. Furnivall (ed.), Handlyng Synne, Part 2, London, Early English Text Society, 1902, p. 291. This work by de Brunne was written in Middle English and was based on the original French or Anglo-Norman Manuel des Pechiez, by William of Wadington. It was part of a larger movement away from Latin that emerged during the fourteenth century.
42 de Vitry, The Exempla or Illustrative Stories, p. 10.
M. Camille explores the notion of the Devil’s literacy in, ‘The Devil’s Writing: Diabolical Literacy in Medieval Art’.43 Here, the author examines the illustrated book, the Lambeth Apocalypse (produced before 1281) in which, among other images or illustrations contained within the book, a scribe is seen to sit at the foot of the throned demon king.44 The book, like the Brailes Hours, is part of the legacy of ornate apocalypses produced during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in particular, for aristocratic ladies. In the image, most likely painted for Lady Eleanor de Quincy, Countess of Winchester (c. 1230–1274), who is depicted kneeling at the feet of the Virgin in an accompanying picture, the Virgin wrestles a charter from the hands of the Devil.45 In a perverse inversion, the scribe appears like a clerk, tonsured, writing on parchment like that used for a royal writ, in a diabolical and unintelligible script. From this scene, Clanchy suggests that ‘the devil not only became literate in the thirteenth century … he also established a hellish bureaucracy to match that of the king or the pope’.46 This image of the Devil’s relationship to words, language, speech and writing, so neatly captured in the Lambeth Apocalypse, reflects a view held by sections of English society during the period. In addition to confirming the concerns that the authorities and sections of the community had for written words (that is, relating to how and by whom they could be used), the Lambeth Apocalypse reflects the increasingly bureaucratic and documentary nature of this society. The tools of literacy and textuality are clearly evident. The Lambeth Apocalypse:

shows two types of written record in use at the court of the demon king: there is the charter which Theophilus hands over and also the writ in devilish script. This doubling-up of record keeping accurately reflects the English royal court of Henry III or Edward I, where the charter which a litigant proffered might be copied by a royal clerk into a plea roll or chancery record.47

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44 According to Clanchy, ‘the scene which the scribe in the Lambeth Apocalypse is witnessing is the moment when the medieval Dr Faustus, shakes hands with the demon king and gives him his sealed charter, written in his own blood’. Clanchy, From Memory to Written Record, p. 188. The Lambeth Apocalypse is found in London’s Lambeth Palace MS 209.
45 Clanchy, From Memory to Written Record, p. 189.
46 Ibid., p. 188.
47 Ibid. In light of Clanchy’s observations about the significance of the charter in the Lambeth Apocalypse, Margery Baxter’s claim to hold a ‘charter of salvation’ in her womb, takes on greater significance. Her statement also reflects the increasingly documentary nature of medieval English society. Further to this, her comments could reflect the way medieval people were starting to appreciate the power and finality of the written legal word. Baxter takes the concept of a legal and
For Clanchy, the ‘bat-like demon’ that served as scribe to the demon king might not have looked as sinister if it were not that he emerged in medieval art and literature at the same time as the Inquisition. Ecclesiastical inquisitors often relied upon the written depositions of people’s conversations to prove guilt. In this climate of inquiry and examination and the emerging ‘literate mentality’, medieval audiences knew, or at least appreciated, the finality of the written word, and that with court documents, their fate could be sealed. Thus, the image of the Devil’s scribe reinforced the legitimacy of concerns over access to words, and took a form that could be ‘read’ and understood by both non-literate and literate audiences.

In addition to reflecting the cultural transition from orality to literacy, the development of the core narrative of Tutivillus from the sack carrier to the scribbler also conveys a sense of the concerns and interests that the religious and social authorities of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had in controlling who was accessing written words and how they were using them. Tutivillus was used by clerics and priests as a tool for warning their flock about the dangers of certain people having uncontrolled access to words. This is clearly demonstrated by Jacques de Vitry’s devil, which provided a warning to lax clerics by diligently keeping score of their misspoken words, waiting for the day of judgement. The sack-carrying devil and the recording demon were overt reminders to the congregation that every word and every action counted. He was the ever-present reminder of the need to guard every word, deed and thought. Even historians who are not proponents of Foucauldian panopticon theory will appreciate the power that apparently omniscient, ever-present demons and devils, keeping tally, could have on individuals.

However, in Robert of Brunne’s *Handlyng Synne*, the author writes of a figure more comical than menacing. A deacon, while reading the gospel to the congregation, laughed out loud. The priest thought the deacon was a fool until he explained the reason for his laughter. The deacon explained that when he looked out at the congregation, he had seen two women engaged in idle gossip. Unbeknown to them, a devil sat between them recording their words. The sheer volume of their gossip was

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binding charter away from the courts, and instead uses it to seal her ‘special’ position or relationship with Christ.


such that the devil found himself in need of more space on his parchment. He thus decided to stretch the parchment by pulling at it with his teeth. Stretched to its limits, the parchment snapped, causing the scribbler’s head to bang against the wall behind him. The deacon was so amused by the devil’s accident and the loss of his tally of sins that he broke into laughter. The devil, realising he was the subject of the deacon’s mockery, smashed the roll with his fist and left in great shame. Having successfully defended himself against the priest’s accusations, the deacon was asked if he had been able to observe the presence of any other demons in the church. He claimed he had seen many devilish fiends writing down the offensive words of the congregation, but none had been as clear as the one between the two women. Here, the tale of Tutivillus reveals not only a significant degree of what Margaret Jennings calls ‘monastic wit’, but the tale’s development also captures some of the medieval mentalities towards gossip, language, words and women.50

According to Margaret Jennings, by the fourteenth century, Tutivillus was at the height of his career and fame:

Embracing the whole continuum—from the recorder of evil per se, to the recorder of evil words, to the recorder of feminine gossip—the number of folk tales about the scribbler was prodigious. Doubtless, the simple peasant knew a good bit about the demon who made a cleric laugh, even if he did not know that this same evil one, slightly altered, was the famous Tutivillus.51

But can the existence and nature of the narrative be explained as, or reduced to, simple ‘monastic wit’, or is the narrative of Tutivillus more sinister than simply that of the devil who made a cleric laugh?52 In dissecting the mythology of Tutivillus, the present-day historian can discern several reoccurring ideas that appeared to have occupied the attention of medieval society. A key feature of the Tutivillus narratives is the concept of linguistic deviancy and slothful words. In each of the narratives, the recording demon is found nearest clerics and parishioners that rush or mumble their prayers, or women engaged in idle conversations. The progression of the narrative

51 Ibid., p. 34.
52 Although here this thesis has referred to the ‘narrative’ of Tutivillus, Tutivillus assumed a visual presence as well as a literary one at this time. The Reichenau fresco (St Gregory’s church on the insula felix dated approximately to the fourteenth century) is thought to be the first example of the visible presence of Tutivillus. It features two gossiping women and four writing devils who share a parchment. According to Jennings, ‘the fresco carries a legend indicating that a goodly volume of chatter was in progress—which may in turn account for the presence of four scribes’. See Ibid., p. 33.
from a devil concerned with lax clerics, to a devil typically associated with gossiping women, suggests that while this society was generally concerned with dangerous and misused words, by the fourteenth century, ‘sins of the tongue’ were largely regarded as ‘feminine’. Tutivillus, in the fourteenth century, was usually depicted alongside women, suggesting that although the linguistic faults of clerics were serious, they were not considered as harmful (or perhaps as prevalent) as those of women.

Within this mythology also lies the implied notion of Judgement Day, at which time one’s linguistic sins would be tallied up. The image of the devil gathering up in his sack, or writing up in his ledger, the linguistic sins of a person, created a sense that one’s judgement was written in stone and thus that every word counted. By the fourteenth century, the idea became far more literal, as Tutivillus, like the court scribes or Inquisition clerics, recorded every word to be used against the accused figure on ‘Judgement Day’. By the fourteenth century, English communities had a greater sense of the possible ramifications of documentation and other literate practices. In terms of the development of ‘the literate mentality’, there is evidence that fourteenth-century society had an ‘appreciation’ of the power and finality of the written word. This sense of finality is further emphasised by the omnipresence of the recording devil. Although sometimes located in humorous places and situations, the ubiquitous nature of the devils, demons and imps would not have engendered much comfort in the congregation.

Another important feature of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century English society’s attitudes towards words, language and utterances revealed by the Tutivillus’ narratives, which will be taken up in more detail in the next chapter, is the concept of words belonging to God. In one of Jacques de Vitry’s sermons warning about the sack carrier, he speaks of the clergy as ‘stealing words from God’ when they mispronounce or rush their prayers.\(^{53}\) When considered alongside other medieval attitudes towards words already discussed in this thesis, the message is clear: words are physical and have a literal presence; they are also potentially dangerous. Moreover, once said, they do not disappear; rather, they are collected, to be examined come Judgement Day. Thus, in the context of the medieval Christian’s

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\(^{53}\) de Vitry, *The Exempla or Illustrative Stories*, p. 6.
life, each word stood to be used against them. Considering that each word was God’s word, any misused or deviant word invited God’s judgement. The image of Tutivillus as a buffoon-like imp whose insatiable desire for God’s words caused him to bang his head and make a cleric laugh might seem innocuous to a present-day audience, but to a medieval audience, his omnipotence and ability to record every word served as a warning. He reminded them of the danger of linguistic deviancy and the need for vigilance in guarding God’s words from those who would use them unwisely.

Although Jennings makes some important observations in her paper, for the purposes of this study, there are also some limitations to her arguments. Jennings makes two claims in her study of Tutivillus that are of particular value to this research. Firstly, she notes that ‘stories about [the] sack-carrying and writing devil reached an acme in narrative form from the end of the fourteenth through the middle of the fifteenth centuries’.54 Secondly, she notes that the ‘primary ingredient’ of these stories is the idea of ‘harmful speech’.55 Problematically though, she does not fully explore the reasons behind this. Jennings follows the career highlights of the sack-carrying and recording demon, but she does not explore why the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were his ‘Golden Age’. Similarly, Jennings observes the continued presence of the idea of harmful speech or words in the various stories, but she does not fully consider why this was so and what it reveals about the society of the day.

I would argue that the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were the high point of Tutivillus’ career because it was a transitional time in terms of literacy and ideas about words. In view of this, Tutivillus should be regarded as much more than ‘monastic wit’ (witty though he may be). He was a symptom of the anxieties held by the social and religious authorities regarding how and by whom words and language were being used.56 England in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was experiencing a time of change as traditional oral procedures encountered literate procedures, and as the growth of literacy and vernacular languages allowed the laity greater autonomous spiritual roles in the community. Jennings wrote that:

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55 Ibid., p. 76.
56 Ibid., p. 77.
He [Tutivillus] is a natural outgrowth of the cenobitic preoccupation with demonic possession, infestation, and harassment, and he fits perfectly into the imaginative development of one of the most feared faults of the regular life: spiritual sloth.\textsuperscript{57}

While this might be so, he also reveals greater preoccupations than this. The nature of the narrative and the way in which it was wielded by clerics and Church leaders reveals the same preoccupations with words and language usage as were held by sections of society, and which are reflected in the Norwich Heresy Trials. The language and imagery of the court documents convey the same attitudes and concerns as those revealed by the mythology of Tutivillus. Therefore, an exploration of Tutivillus assists us in understanding the manner in which Lollard thought and practice, particularly among Lollard women, emerged.

Admittedly, it does seem anomalous to focus on the development of literacy given that each of the subjects in this study was what would be termed ‘illiterate’ in a present-day context. Despite this incongruity, the spread of literate practices beyond the sphere of royal business and the development of the ‘literate mentality’ was an important contextual feature of the period. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, there was a ‘tension’ around words and language, particularly in the written or printed form. This is evident in the Lollard Heresy Trials, and is also expressed in the art and literature of the day. This tension partly arises from the changing relationships medieval communities had with the written word, and with the social changes brought about through increased access to books and documents. Gradually, English communities became reliant upon processes of systematic documentation, textualisation and literate practices. Yet, the religious and social authorities of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were not wholly confident in the wisdom of ordinary lay people having access to and participating in these processes.\textsuperscript{58} Even in cases where the individual was not literate, opportunities for autonomous religious experiences, not otherwise afforded to them by virtue of their position of birth, arose

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., p. 77.
from having access to religious books and documents, written in their own tongue, read and/or heard independently of Church officials. For fourteenth- and fifteenth-century religious and social authorities, this was a danger, in that their own authority and legitimacy could be questioned.

In eleventh-century England, literate practices were still largely uncommon in ordinary peoples’ lives. V.H. Galbraith wrote in 1948 that ‘early society is ordered and governed by oral tradition … Then there is a long twilight of transition, during which the written record encroaches more and more upon the sphere of custom’. Despite Galbraith’s misplaced use of the Enlightenment notion of ‘twilight’, which frames literacy as a ‘coming into being’—a process of emerging from the ‘darkness’ of medieval ignorance—the observations of the increasing role documents played in daily life are largely correct. By the reign of Edward I in the fourteenth century, documents such as royal writs were being sent to every bailiff and village in England and there was an increasing familiarity with writing throughout the country. This is not to suggest that every person could read or write, but rather that by the fourteenth century, literate modes and processes were familiar even to serfs, who used Charters for conveying property and whose transactions and activities were beginning to be commonly recorded in documents such as manorial rolls.

The historian Sandy Bardsley notes that by the fourteenth century, many villagers and townspeople were aware of the power that the written word could have over their lives. ‘Those who wanted proof that they were freeborn, for instance, sought verification of their status in the eleventh-century Doomsday Book, in which ancient

60 Clanchy, From Memory to Written Record, p. 2.
61 Ibid.


the processes lying behind the creation of many historical documents mark a fundamental shift in modes of self-presentation, the inevitable outcome of increasingly pervasive literate bureaucracies. The development of surnames, familiarity with public and official processes of manor and parish, techniques of recording the events of personal life in records, growing skill in presenting evidence in courts, all point to the impact of literacy on self-identification, particularly in the early modern period. This has been described as the textualization of social life, in which we are forced to place our live, relationships, experiences, duties and obligations, and so on, in publicly-available texts (pp. 22–23).
rights of manorial tenants were recorded alongside lists of land and stocks’. By the fourteenth century, many, if not most, medieval individuals were participating in and exposed to literacy in one form or another, even if they themselves could not read or write. Adam Fox notes that:

the precedents set in the thirteenth century for collecting documents in local and central archives and for reporting legal cases in yearbooks developed a cumulative momentum. The superiority of written evidence in court was firmly established while local society became ever more used to conveying land in the form of written indentures.

Thus, by the Middle Ages, the written word had penetrated most aspects of social, economic and cultural life.

Despite the eventual familiarity with, and dependence upon, written documents and processes of documentation, the ideological or emotional shift to acceptance of literate practices was not easy. According to Clanchy, ‘confidence in the written record was neither immediate nor automatic’. For modern literates thoroughly immersed in the Western ideologies of literacy, it is perhaps easy to speak of ‘the development of literate ways of thinking’, without an adequate appreciation of the profound effect such a shift would have had on medieval mentalities and intellects. Elizabeth Eisenstein notes that ‘constant access to printed materials is a prerequisite for the practice of the historian’s own craft. It is difficult to observe processes that enter so intimately into our own observations’. In terms of understanding or appreciating a pre-literate world, ‘there is nothing analogous in our experience’. For present-day historians, it is extremely difficult to even imagine a time or a place in which literacy and literate ways of thinking were not omnipresent. Clanchy wrote that:

Literacy is unique among technologies in penetrating and structuring the intellect itself, which makes it hard for scholars, whose own skills are shaped by literacy, to reconstruct the mental changes which it brings about.

64 Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 2.
67 Given that academics and scholars are immersed in the business of words, writing and language, it is especially difficult for them to think their way out of a modern ‘literate’ world.
68 Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 185.
In order for literacy and literate practices to have extended beyond the elite clerical writers of the eleventh century, literate habits and literate values first had to develop and take hold in society. ‘The growth of literacy was not a simple matter of providing more clerks and better schooling, as it [literacy] penetrated the mind and demanded changes in the way people articulated their thoughts, both individually and collectively in that society’. 69 When describing the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in England as a ‘transitional period’, it is not simply because traditional non-literate practices were changing; the very ways of thinking that accompanied those practices were also changing.

Although ‘trust’ in the written word eventually came, and a culture of co-existence between literacy and orality was established in English societies, this development followed from the inevitable familiarity with documents and processes of documentation in ordinary peoples’ daily lives and activities. Importantly, orality and literacy did not exist or operate independently, and notions of speaking and writing, hearing and seeing the word were intertwined. It has been observed that ‘although documents might have been written, the medieval recipient of the document often received it orally … thus reading and speaking were not mutually exclusive language practices’. 70 However, despite the acceptance and integration of some literate practices into peoples’ lives, a point emphasised by some historians, including Clanchy, is that oral procedures were often still favoured over written ones. He wrote that:

> despite the increasing use of documents … traditional oral procedures, such as the preference for reading aloud rather than scanning a text silently with the eyes, persisted through the Middle Ages and beyond. 71

The medieval individual’s tendency to listen to and consider the verbal utterance in preference to scrutinising the written word, regardless of their ability to read, is evidence not only of ‘a different habit of mind’, but also of the paradoxical relationship medieval people had with the written word. 72 Upon considering the roles

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69 Ibid., p. 186.
71 Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 2.
72 Ibid., p. 267. See also Lochrie, *Margery Kempe*. To make the point that in a print culture such as ours, a book is disassociated from oral production, whereas a book in medieval manuscript culture was regarded more as an ‘utterance’ or ‘proclamation’, Karma Lochrie refers to one of Bridget of Sweden’s mystical visions. According to Lochrie, Bridget’s ‘vision of the book speaking from the
that the written and spoken word had in medieval courts, the conflicting and sometimes ambiguous attitudes held towards the written word during the medieval period become clear. On the one hand, by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, customary law, or the law of memory, was replaced by written record and legal documentation. As Clanchy explains:

unwritten customary law—and lore—had been the norm in the eleventh century and earlier in England … Nevertheless two centuries later, by Edward I’s reign, the King’s attorneys were arguing in many of the quo warranto prosecutions against the magnates that the only sufficient warrant for a privilege was a written one, and that in the form of a specific statement in a charter. Memory, whether individual or collective, if unsupported by clear written evidence, was ruled out of court.  

On the other hand, despite the increasing importance of documents and the written word, common law procedure, like many other aspects of society, was still modelled on traditional non-literate oral procedures. Clanchy, along with scholars including Brundage and Rosenthal observe that in medieval court processes, ‘non-literate’ procedures such as oral pleading and swearing were given emphasis. There was a lingering belief that the deponent or accused must speak on their own behalf in court, because only words from their own mouth could be regarded as authentic. In the courts and throughout society, there was a growing dependence upon the written word, especially in terms of legal and official procedures—it seemed more durable and verifiable than the spoken word. Yet in spite of this dependence, and in

pulpit provides a useful trope for the orality of written texts’ (p. 104). As Bridget explained in her Revelations:

which boke, and the scriptur per-of, was not write with ynke, bot ych worde in the boke was qwhik and spak it-self, as yf a man shuld say, doo thyss or that, and anone it wer do with spekyng of the word. No man rede the scriptur of that boke, bot whatever that scriptur contened, all was see in the pulpyte. This book, and the scripture thereof, was not written with ink, but each word in the book was alive and spoke itself, as if a man were to say, do this or that, and immediately it were done with the speaking of the word. No man read the writing of that book, but whatever was contained in the writing, all of it was seen in the pulpit [translation Lochrie’s] (Saint Bridget and William Patterson Cumming (ed.), The Revelations of Saint Brigitta, London, Early English Text Society, o.s 178, 1929/1971, p. 68, as quoted in Lochrie, Margery Kempe, pp. 104–105).

73 Clanchy, From Memory to Written Record, p. 3.
74 Ibid., pp. 272–278. See also: Brundage, Medieval Canon Law and Rosenthal, Telling Tales.
75 Ibid., p. 273.
76 In the Witchcraft trials of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the increasing dominance of the written word and written legal processes initially seen in the fifteenth century is clear. These literate processes and procedures have taken greater hold and, in this later period, the role of the written word in the courts is far more central. See Adam Fox, ‘Custom, Memory and the Authority of Writing’, in Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox and Steve Hindle (eds), The Experience of
contradiction to it, there was still a pre-literate emphasis on the spoken word and the wisdom of community remembrances. This is seen in the documents related to the Norwich Heresy Trials.

John of Exeter’s records of the proceedings against Margery Baxter, in particular, demonstrate that the ‘truth’ (that is, the guilt or innocence of the accused person), was not regarded as being primarily located in, or established by, written testimony or processes. Instead, oral testimony involving memory and recollection held more weight. Witnesses were understood as offering a personal account of the events as they witnessed and recalled them. Thus, Joan Clyfland was able to recount to the courts the utterances and actions of Margery Baxter as she herself witnessed them. It should also be noted that in the trials, a heavy emphasis was placed on traditional oral procedures, especially when it came to the ‘confessions’ and recantations of the accused. Verbal abjurations, such as that of Hawisia Mone, were the norm and, despite the recantations typically being penned by the court scribe, the guilty heretic was required to publicly speak or read aloud their recantation, if they were able to. By this act, the weight that the authorities and sections of the community placed on a publicly verbalised admission of guilt and the promise not to reoffend is apparent.


By the late sixteenth century, court processes were based far more in the written and documented word. Unlike the fifteenth century, ‘in the [sixteenth and seventeenth century] trial, standing by your text was the essence of court appearance’ (Rushton, ‘Texts of Authority’, p. 25). As a general rule, in sixteenth and early seventeenth century law, the substance of a written document could not be altered by oral evidence. See W. Holdsworth, The History of English Law, London, 1906/1982. According to Holdsworth, ‘the process of trial increasingly became a documentary one of witnesses or victims and their statements in writing, all of which had to be assessed for truthfulness and trustworthiness. This shift may have been completed only by the end of the seventeenth century’. Holdsworth, The History of English Law, esp vol. 9, p. 185, as quoted in Rushton ‘Texts of Authority’, p. 25.

Where the penitent person was unable to read their recantation, because they could not read or because their vision did not allow them, they would appoint a cleric, usually the notary public, to read it for them. There was still a requirement for them to acknowledge the truth of the recantation.

In Karen Sullivan’s examination of the trial of Joan of Arc, Sullivan notes how important it was for the investigating authorities to use Joan’s own words against her. Sullivan argues that the interrogator’s intention was to mystify and confuse Joan with their aggressive and repetitious questions, so that her unguarded utterances would eventually reveal her heterodoxy and heresy. In medieval courts, greater weight was placed on using the accused person’s own words to condemn them; to turn their speech into evidence. In cases such as the trials of Joan of Arc and Walter Brut, the scribes and court officials go to some lengths to establish and verify the authenticity and ‘ownership’ of the accused figure’s words. In the judgement made by the courts against Joan, the clerics outlined each of the exhibits made against Joan, and then they offered examples of her speech where her guilt
It can therefore be said that the legal process of this period was one that relied heavily upon orality and memory, although it did have some regard for written text. This is reflected clearly in the trials of the Lollards in which much of the evidence came from oral sources; that is, from the deponents recounting and remembering. However, these oral statements then underwent, and were subject to, processes of documentisation, to be rendered into written form for record and verification, and in the case of Hawisia Mone, for example, she was required to put a cross and her seal to the written abjuration.

Shifting now to focus on the trial of the high-profile Lollard, Walter Brut; in this example, the attitudes and concerns medieval authorities and sections of the community had towards words and who could have independent access to them are apparent, giving further weight to the arguments presented in this thesis for the place of words in this society. Brut’s trial in the early 1390s was one of the more significant Lollard trials to take place in this period. The investigation and trial ran periodically from October 1390 to October 1393 and was recorded in Bishop Trefnant of Hereford’s register and later translated by John Foxe. Its significance is signalled by the number of notable clerical figures present at the trial and the number of legal documents and records to have come out of it. For the historian, the size and scope of documentation related to this trial provides considerable evidence of the ‘literate mentality’ emerging during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. At Brut’s trial, the public notary, Richard Lee Whelar, clerk of Worcester, noted that, along with John, the Bishop of Hereford, those present to assist him throughout the days of the trial included ‘divers prelates and abbots, and twenty bachelors of divinity, whereof twelve were monks, and two doctors of the law’. Among these assistants

on that point was proved. Steps such as this suggest that the most damning evidence in medieval courts was the accused person’s own words.

79 See Hudson, ‘Laicus litteratus’, in Biller and Hudson, Heresy and Literacy, pp. 222–236. Hudson offers a useful examination not only of Brut’s trial, but also of the relationships between heresy and literacy, considering Brut as an example of laicus litteratus.


81 Hudson regarded the assemblage of advisors called when Brut appeared before the Bishop on 3 October 1393: ‘fifteen officials, two masters and three bachelors of theology, two doctors of civil and cannon law, drawn from his own and the Worcester dioceses but also from Exeter, Oxford and Cambridge’ (p. 223), as evidence of the seriousness in which Trefnant took Brut. Hudson noted that Brut was something of a ‘cause celebre’, p. 224.

was the notorious Lollard-hunter, Master Nicholas Hereford; a one-time Oxford Wycliffite turned Inquisitor. The significance of Brut’s trial is further supported by the number of legal documents generated and the official clerical responses it elicited. In response to Walter Brut’s declarations, the Bishop, monks and doctors ‘did gather and draw out certain articles, to the number of thirty-seven, which they sent to the University of Cambridge to be confuted, unto two learned men, Master Colwill and Master Newton, bachelors of divinity’. In view of the importance of this trial to the authorities, enormous care and diligence seems to have been taken with its records. With this attentiveness, the historian is offered access to the mentalities of the time as reflected in the documents.

The documents from the trial of Walter Brut provide evidence of both the bureaucratic reliance upon literate procedures and literate ways of thinking, as well as the residual preference for traditional aural/oral practices. On the one hand, Richard Lee Whelar’s entire document is a testament to the dominance of literate processes and mentalities. The document is constructed to clearly articulate, article by article, the guilt of the accused. The precise language used within the trial documents, and the processes of documenting used implies an understanding by at least the scribe (and most likely the prosecuting authorities as a whole) of the role of the written word and documentation to establish guilt or innocence. Within the documents, Whelar is clear about his need to establish the accuracy of his written word. At the conclusion to each Instrument exhibited against Brut, the scribe writes that:

I, Richard Lee Whelar, clerk of Worcester, being a public notary by the authority apostolic, was personally present at all and singular the premise … and I did see, write, and hear, all and singular those things to be done, and have reduced them into this public manner and form; and, being desired truly to testify the premises, have sealed the said instrument made hereupon, with mine accustomed seal and name (emphasis mine). In terms of Walter Brut’s own exhibits made to the Bishop in his defence, Whelar is again mindful to establish Brut’s ‘ownership’ of these words. For if he is to be condemned by his own words, there is a need to verify them as his words. Whelar writes in relation to Brut’s own exhibits:

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83 Ibid.
84 Ibid., p. 135.
the aforesaid Walter Brute did present and cause to be presented to us … divers scrolls of paper, written with his own proper hand, for his answers to the same articles and conclusions above written; he, partly appearing by his own self, before us sitting in our judgement seat, and partly by messengers, specially appointed to that purpose; of which scrolls, the tenors do follow in order word by word, and be on this manner [emphasis mine].

The processes of documentation applied by Whelar and his assurances as to the accuracy of the words written in the document imply an understanding of the role of the written word and literate modes. However, if this medieval document and the processes of its production are evidence of the increased dominance of literate practices at that time, they are also evidence of the persistence of aural/oral practices and understandings.

In Whelar’s record of the trial of Walter Brut, there is evidence of the endurance of traditional oral procedures and ways of thinking; this is in spite of the more literate modes of conducting legal business. Almost contrary to the emphasis placed on accurately rendering the proceedings to the written form is the weight given to traditional or customary oral procedures within the court. Although the court was given Brut’s substantial defence in writing, by ‘his own proper hand’, he was also required to appear in person to orally verify these words. Further, once these writings had been dissected, and the errors and heresies had been revealed to Brut, his subsequent recantation and submission to the court was predominately an oral process. On 6 October 1393, Walter Brut was required, in the presence of the Bishop of Hereford, various barons, knights, noblemen and clerics, and ‘a great multitude of people’ at the cross in the churchyard, to publicly read aloud in the English tongue, the following:

I, Walter Brute, submit myself principally to the evangely of Jesus Christ, and to the determination of holy kirk, and to the general councils of holy kirk. And to the sentence and determination of the four doctors of holy writ; that is, Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome, and Gregory. And I meekly submit me to your correction, as a subject ought to his bishop.

The ‘public’ and oral nature of this recantation demonstrates that, notwithstanding the growing dependence on the written form, the confidence of sections of the community seemed to still lie with verbal utterances. Further, it demonstrates that

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85 Ibid., p. 136.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid., p. 187.
while the Church authorities were leaders in adopting literate procedures and were fortifying their authority through a comprehensive and ‘literate-minded’ bureaucracy, the oral word in the audience’s and convicted heretic’s own tongue, was still the most effective tool for religious instruction and ‘correction’. Thus it can be concluded that orality and the vernacular were important tools for Orthodox Christianity.

In Joan Clyland’s testimony to the Norwich courts, she stated that her neighbour Margery Baxter had invited her and her maid to:

come secretly, in the night, to her chamber, and there she would hear her husband read the law of Christ unto them, which law was written in a book that her husband was wont to read to her by night.88

The disclosure offers insight into what the fifteenth-century English authorities of Norwich perceived Lollard activities to be and in what way they saw these activities as constituting a threat to the community and the authorities themselves. Along with other evidence to the court, this statement suggested Margery’s deviancy and established her guilt as a heretic. Through this accusation, it is known that Margery and her husband owned, or had in their possession, a Bible or religious text written in a language that Margery’s husband could read and that his audience could understand. They invited people into the innermost rooms of their home, undetected and in secret, where they could hear, read, look at, memorise, recall, share and reflect upon the Word of God, without any Church involvement. The written book allowed them to share ideas with like-minded folk, to identify themselves as belonging to a particular community and to establish individual book-based religious practices.

Whether the Lollards read, heard, touched, viewed or otherwise engaged with the book, the written word was a defining feature of their individual relationships and interactions with God. If, as Eisenstein suggests, literacy is an agency of social change, then the religious beliefs and practices of Baxter and Mone in fifteenth-century Norwich demonstrate that one did not have to be ‘literate’ in a modern-day sense to participate in that social change. The shift from orality to greater literacy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries brought people like Baxter and Mone into a more literate world. Although the Bible and other written Scriptures were still scare,

expensive, prohibited and dangerous to possess, within various Lollard communities and networks, they were sometimes available. In this world, Margery and Hawisia could potentially engage with the written word in ways that allowed them to develop closer and more individual and personal relationships with God, independent of the Church.

This chapter has considered the implications and risks for fifteenth-century authorities of lay people having increasing access and exposure to the written word and to literate or textual practices. In particular, the dangers in lay groups, such as the Lollards, having easier, almost undetectable access to printed books, particularly the Bible, has been discussed. As a religious group for whom books, book usage and textual activities were central, the general cultural transition from orality to literacy that occurred in England from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries onward offered Lollards the opportunity for greater independent access to the Bible and the Word of God. For the religious authorities of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, there was a concern that the greater access to literacy among the laity brought greater opportunity for a religious life and relationship with God without clerics and priests acting as intermediaries. The transition to literacy thus threatened to herald in a new social order in which individuals could refigure their place in the world and resist the ‘roles’ accorded to them by virtue of the position to which they were born. The documents of the Norwich Heresy Trials show this transition occurring and, consequently, emphasis being placed on issues of access to the written word. For the Lollards, this access was crucial to their religious beliefs and practices. For the fifteenth-century religious authorities, it was imperative that deviant contact with the written word be detected, controlled and quashed, to maintain the Church’s position of dominance and authority.

The following chapter again focusses on the significance of words to fifteenth-century English society. However, this chapter will consider another dimension to this relationship, not yet explored; that is, the relationship and connections that existed between God and words in fifteenth-century English society. The following chapter will argue that, in this society, there were important symbolic and literal connections made between Christ/God and words, to the extent that words were
regarded as belonging to God and as being God. This had implications for the way Lollard women engaged with words and books.
Chapter Six: The Word of God: Medieval People and God’s Words

‘For Christ is a sort of book written into the skin of the virgin … that book was spoken in the deposition of the Father, written in the conception of the mother, exposited in the clarification of the nativity, corrected in the passion, erased in the flagellation, punctuated in the imprint of the wounds, adorned in the crucifixion above the pulpit, illuminated in the outpouring of blood, bound in the resurrection, and examined in the ascension’.¹

‘Mary kept all these words and pondered them in her heart’.²

As with Chapters Four and Five, this chapter continues to explore the importance of words to people in fifteenth-century English society. In Chapter Four, concepts of words, language, voice and utterance and what they meant in a fifteenth-century English context were examined. Chapter Five looked more specifically at the significance of the written and/or printed word for this world. In this chapter, the metaphorical, discursive and literal relationships that existed between God and words in fifteenth-century England will be explored. It will be argued that people in fifteenth-century English society made important symbolic and literal connections between Christ/God and words, to the extent that words were regarded as belonging to and being God. The links between Christ and words were reflected in the imagery of the crucified Christ as a book. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the meaning of the book in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries using the notion of Christ as a book as a starting point. As has been argued throughout this thesis, books and the written word were important to Lollards and were significant to the religious beliefs and practices of Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone. However, without an appropriate understanding of what books were and what they meant to the Lollards, the picture of their beliefs is incomplete.

² Luke 11:19
This chapter, as with the previous chapter, derives from the third thematic cluster of the court-related documents; the presence of literate mentalities and practices and the developing role of the written/printed word in society. Specifically, it is concerned with the medieval imagery of Christ/Jesus as a book, which reveals that books, to medieval people, were more than bound parchment. Books were simultaneously physical, material and divine. They could be literally and figuratively consumed and could be held within a person’s mind, memory or body. Trying therefore to regulate the existence, movement and use of books was not an easy thing for those authorities that sought to do so. Examining the book practices of the Lollards in light of the imagery and understanding of Christ as a book assists in achieving a better understanding of the significance of books and words to fifteenth-century English people; in particular, in relation to the implications of Lollard activities with books. These activities include Margery Baxter inviting her neighbours to hear the Word of God being read in secret in her home, the claim to hold ‘a charter of salvation’ in her womb, and Hawisia Mone’s carrying and concealing William White’s illegal books.

This chapter begins with several medieval sources that provide representations of Christ as a book, to establish the presence of the motif. These sources include artistic representations, poems, religious treatises, religious and moral plays, and instructional tools of the periods. What these representations of Christ and books reveal about how medieval people conceived of books and what significance or value they gave them will then be considered. Given the central role that books and the written word played in Lollard culture and practice, this will help provide a better understanding of Lollards and their books. This chapter will examine what other historians have made of the role of books in Lollard communities, particularly with respect to women. And finally, Margery Baxter’s reported claim to hold a ‘charter of salvation’ in her womb will be analysed in light of the images and narratives of Christ the book, and some important parallels will be discussed. ³ In exploring

³ It has already been noted that this particular statement has been subject to varied translations. In Anne Hudson’s highly regarded work on English Wycliffite writings, Hudson quotes from Joan Clyland’s statement. Here Clyland recounts to the courts a claim made by Baxter that ‘she ought not to be burned, even if convicted of Lollardy, because she had and has a charter of salvation in her womb [in utero suo]’. See Anne Hudson, ‘Introduction’, in Anne Hudson (ed.), Selections From English Wycliffite Writings, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978, pp. 4–5. Importantly this text locates the ‘charter’ in her ‘womb’. In The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe, edited by the sixteenth-century Protestant Reverend, Josiah Pratt, the statement appears differently. Here it is reported ‘that she should not be burned, although she were convicted of Lollardy, for that she had a
Margery’s reported claim, what the image represents and the connections that were being made between her body and both Christ and the Virgin Mother’s bodies, will be discussed. Consequently, the significance of Lollard women’s religious practices, in particular, the practice of transmuting Scriptures and Lollard texts via their bodies, will be better understood.

In developing this argument about Christ’s crucified body as a book, it is firstly important to establish the presence of this idea. The image of the crucified Christ was important to the medieval Christian. It functioned as a site of reading, remembering, reflecting upon and connecting with Christ. Viewing and contemplating the image of the Crucifixion was regarded as an act of reading, and for Christians who wanted an individual connection with Christ, the image was an important tool for achieving this. The historian Giles Constable recalls Girolamo Savonarola’s sermon, ‘Feed Thy People’, in which, after discussing reading, prayer and meditation, Savonarola told those who could not read that they should ‘take the crucifix for your book and read that, and you will see that this will be the best remedy to keep this light for you’.\(^4\) Caroline Walker Bynum’s work in the areas of medieval female embodiment, depictions of the body of Christ, and the practices of ‘imitating Christ’ also makes this point clear. In a medieval context, the practice of *Imitatio Christi* could often be a literal and very physical re-enactment of Christ’s Passion. Through acts of self-mutilation and self-mortification, the medieval individual sought to imitate Christ, ‘to plumb the depths of Christ’s humanity at the moment of his most insistent and terrifying humanness—the moment of his dying’.

To the modern historian, cases of extreme asceticism can be both horrifying and intriguing to our sensibilities. Perhaps because of this, greater historical attention tends to have been given to the material, self-punishing side of *Imitatio Christi*. However, *Imitatio Christi* as a concept was diverse and uncoded, and, as a charter of salvation in her body’. See Pratt, *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, p. 596. It is most likely that sixteenth-century sensibilities necessitated this particular translation and alteration of the statement, and Hudson’s translation can be reasonably regarded as more accurate.\(^4\) Girolamo Savonarola with Vincenzo Romano (ed.), *Prediche sopra Ruth e Michea*, 25, Rome, Edizione nazionale delle opera di Giorlamo Savonarola, 1962, vol. II, p. 277 as quoted in Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 239. Chapter 2 of Constable’s book deals with the imitation of the body of Christ.\(^5\) Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 131.
practice, it was varying and inconsistent. The medieval practice of imitating Christ was not just limited to the self-inflicted physical re-enactment of his suffering. Imitation and connecting with the crucified Christ could also occur at the intellectual, imagined and emotional level, and, in this relationship, Christ’s body functioned like a book. *Imitatio Christi* could be grounded in ‘the semiotic pilgrimage of the memory and the imagination’.⁶ Whether the individual heard a sermon on Christ’s Crucifixion; saw a retable, cycle play or image of the crucified Christ; heard a devotional treatise; or undertook a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, *Imitatio Christi* was primarily about memory and imagination. Accordingly, ‘imitating Christ was conceived of as a kind of reading and remembrance [and] … it is at the site of Christ’s body that the central act of reading takes place’.⁷ This notion of reading and remembering Christ’s suffering was so central to sections of medieval Christian society that significant evidence of the material body of Christ metaphorically and literally existing as a book, remains. There are various examples that will be examined here in which Christ’s body was conceived of as an open book from which the pious could read the Passion of Christ. His body functioned as a material text; his torn flesh the parchment, his blood the ink and his wounds the words.

For a medieval Christian audience, heavy emphasis was placed on the corporeal body of Jesus in the Passion and Crucifixion. The desire for a connection with the suffering of Christ led some pilgrims to take the long and dangerous trip to the Holy Land. This same desire to identify and connect with Christ gave rise to an interest in the embodiment and materiality of Jesus. Historians such as Caroline Walker Bynum have strongly argued that some medieval audiences immersed themselves and revelled in the imagery of the decaying, beaten and bloody body of Jesus as a way of moving closer to an understanding of him.⁸ This study, however, is focussed more on how the crucified body is linked to the ideas of recording, reading and remembering, and how Christ’s body, like a book, is conceived of as a ‘written’ record. It must be remembered that in a medieval context, reading as a practice was far different from that which we understand in the present day, and their concepts of

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⁷ Ibid.
⁸ See Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*. 
a written record are not necessarily compatible with our own understandings. Clanchy noted some of the reading strategies of the period, many of which were discussed in the previous chapter. He wrote that ‘reading’ involved a number of aspects:

hearing the text read aloud while looking at the lettering and images on the pages; repeating the text aloud with one or more companions, until it was learned by heart; construing the grammar and vocabulary of the languages of the text silently in private; translating or transposing the text, aloud or silently, into Latin, French, or English; examining the pictures and their captions, together with the illuminated letters, as a preparation for reading the imagery.9

Further, reading itself was not necessarily regarded as a solely literate habit and it did not automatically involve the presence of a written text. Pope Gregory the Great promoted the use of images in worship by arguing that the pictures and images allowed the ‘illiterate’ to ‘read by seeing (videndo legant) on walls in churches what they are unable to read in books’.10

In Bridget of Sweden’s Revelations, an example of the orality/aurality of written texts in medieval book culture is evident. This text exemplifies the culture’s tendency to regard books as an ‘utterance’ or ‘proclamation’, rather than dissociating them from their oral production as modern print culture does.11 In one of Bridget’s visions, the mystic describes a book speaking to the congregation from the pulpit. She writes:

Which boke, and the scriptur per-of, was not write with ynke, bot ych worde in the boke was qwhik and spak it-self, as yf a man shuld say, doo thys or that, and anone it wer do with spekyng of the word. No man redde the scriptur of that boke, bot what euer that scriptur contened, all was see in the pulpyte.

This book, and the scripture thereof, was not written with ink, but each word in the book was alive and spoke itself, as if a man were to say, do this or that, and immediately it were done with the speaking of the word.

9 Clanchy, From Memory to Written Record, pp. 194–195.
10 Ibid., p. 191.
11 See Lochrie, Margery Kempe, p. 104. Elizabeth Eisenstein discusses this idea of reading books or script aloud as a form of ‘publication’. Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Social Change, p. 11. Her book also includes some important discussions of the inter-relationships between literacy and orality and the written and spoken form of words, which produced a ‘hybrid half oral, half literate culture that has no counterpart today’ (p. 11).
No man read the writing of that book, but whatever was contained in the writing, all of it was seen in the pulpit.\textsuperscript{12}

In a medieval setting, ‘reading’ could involve all the senses, and the notion of a book itself was not limited to the idea of parchment or paper with text or images written/printed on it. Therefore, individual Christians who encountered the scene of the Crucifixion, in whatever form it appeared, were engaging in the practice of ‘reading’ the body of Christ and ‘hearing’ his story.

By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, medieval audiences ‘reading’ Christ’s body like a book were engaging with a story of suffering. In this period there was an increasing interest in the presence of the body of Christ in the Crucifixion and corresponding ideas of Christ’s humanity and embodiment at the moment of his death. This interest was new in the history of Christianity. For the first thousand years of its life, Western European Christianity was largely unconcerned with the notion of Christ’s bodily suffering. Rather than dwelling on Christ’s torture and Crucifixion, Christians focussed on and celebrated his triumph over death.\textsuperscript{13} As such, central images, including those of Christ’s Crucifixion, portrayed the King of Kings as noble and divine, without pain or suffering. His Crucifixion was regarded, and therefore portrayed, as the moment at which he attained divinity, left his mortal body and defeated death. It was noted that in:

the early centuries the Church seems rarely, if ever, to have asked artists to focus on the suffering of Christ … what strikes the modern eye is the utterly dispassionate nature of the Passion. On the rare occasions when the early Church did represent Christ on the Cross, it was not to dwell on his suffering.\textsuperscript{14}

Neil MacGregor and Erika Langmuir recall one of the earliest known depictions of the Crucifixion, dating to around 420 AD in Rome. The ivory carving depicts Christ standing upright on the cross, his eyes open and ‘his body unmarked by suffering: a victor over death’.\textsuperscript{15} In images of Christ prior to the fourteenth century, there was little attempt to portray the humanity or material body of Christ. His image was


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 123.
ethereal, usually in majestic reds, blues or gold, sometimes surrounded by angels.\footnote{An excellent example can be seen in an illumination of Christ made in 1093–1097 at a very early Benedictine house at the abbey of Stavelot in Belgium. See Christ in Majesty, London, British Library, The Bridgeman Art Library, reproduced in Owen Chadwick, A History of Christianity, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995), p. 134. See also Pierre Descargues, German Painting from the Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Centuries (trans) Stuart Hood, London, Thames and Hudson, 1958. Many examples of this type of representation of Christ can be found in the colour plates of works of this era.}

In those images of the Crucifixion in which the body of Christ was present, they portrayed no pain or bodily presence.\footnote{See Giotto’s 1305 image of the crucifixion from the Arena chapel, Padua, The Bridgeman Art Library, reproduced in Chadwick, A History of Christianity, p. 151.} However, Gavin I. Langmuir observes, along with other scholars, that:

> From then on, the sufferings inflicted on the physical body of Jesus of Nazareth became important to Christians as never before and were reflected everywhere. In the following centuries, iconography, literature, and mystery plays would depict the agonies of Jesus ever more gruesomely and the sorrows of His mother ever more piteously.\footnote{Langmuir, ‘The Tortures of the Body of Christ’, in Waugh and Diehl, Christendom and its Discontents, p. 290.}

From around the 1300s onwards, as individuals sought a closer personal connection and identification with Christ, the doctrine of the ‘real presence’ of Christ, or ‘Christ in his humanity’, came to dominate, and the image of the man of sorrows replaced that of Christ in majesty. Giles Constable suggested that this development contributed to ‘the emergence of a more ethical chapter in Christianity’.\footnote{Constable, Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought, p. 169.}

In terms of images of the Crucifixion, this shift was profound. In examining religious art from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in particular, an intense bodily emphasis within many of the images of the Crucifixion can be observed. This ‘medieval intent’ continues into the sixteenth-century. In Matthias Grunewald’s The Crucifixion (from the Isenheim altarpiece, 1510–1516), and Ruben’s later work, Descent from the Cross (from the altar in Antwerp Cathedral), the audience witnesses what Caroline Walker Bynum called ‘the moment of his [Christ’s] most insistent and terrifying humanness’, and the medieval and early modern Christian’s fascination with it.\footnote{Matthias Grunewald, The Crucifixion, detail of the Isenheim altarpiece, 1510–1516 (Musee d’Unterlinden, Colmar, France), as reproduced in MacGregor, Seeing Salvation, p. 129. The German artist Mathis was commissioned to produce this work by the Antonines of Isenheim, a small locality in Alsace. The image discussed here is one panel of an intricate and complex folding altarpiece. The intense bodily emphasis of the work is clear. However, it is the nature of the Antonines themselves that helps us to understand why they commissioned what has been described as ‘perhaps the most terrifying Crucifixion in Western art’ (MacGregor, Seeing Salvation, p. 129). The Antonines nursed lepers and victims of the plague and, most famously, victims of the horrific skin disease, St. Antony’s Fire. Those afflicted with St. Antony’s Fire would suffer from burning and itchy skin, and their limbs would eventually turn black with gangrene and fall off the body. Perhaps in the desert, St. Antony would wear a special garment that protected him from this misery—remarkably similar to the protective garment worn by Christ.}
In Grunewald’s image, there is an intense emphasis placed on bodily suffering as the artist and his audience meditated upon the torture, the mortified flesh and the pain of Christ. The medieval ‘reader’ engaging with the image saw Christ’s sinewy arms drained of blood and the flesh torn. His head lay at an unnatural angle, the tongue protruding. The thorns of his crown were embedded in his skull. His ribs were visible and his entire body was a macabre grey-green. The artist enlarged his skeletal hands to heighten the effect of them grasping and being lifted in pain towards the heavens. His body, covered only by a torn loincloth, was reminiscent of the swaddled infant in his mother’s arms. Blood appeared to flow down his body. This was not a Romanesque image of Christ in majesty, a King among Kings; rather, this was an image of Christ the saviour in a moment of intense agony, pain and suffering; a moment of complete humanity and materialism as he died. As with Ruben’s *Descent from the Cross*, Grunewald’s image did not shy away from the bodily suffering of Christ. On the contrary, it asked its audience to dwell on and revel in it. For their audiences, these images of the moment of Jesus’ death, in which he was the least divine and the most embodied and tied to his imperfect human form, offered a connection to God. In this image of a physical, material Jesus, he was most similar, connected and, therefore, accessible to the audience.

Matthias Grunewald’s 1510–1516 image of the Crucifixion is of further importance to this study, not simply because it exemplifies the continuation of the medieval emphasis on the material or fleshly presence of Christ in the Crucifixion, but also because it offers us a useful starting point for considering the close medieval and early modern association between Christ’s crucified body and books. In Grunewald’s depiction of the Crucifixion, John the Baptist is present, dressed in blood-red robes, standing next to the body of Christ. In one hand he holds an open book, and with the other he points to the crucified body of his leader. It is tempting to argue that by John’s actions the artist is seeking to make a direct link between the crucified Christ and the book; the Word of God made flesh and the Word in a book. However, the moments of severe bodily pain, the medieval patient would recognise their own bodily sufferings reflected in Christ’s and find comfort in the knowledge that Christ also suffered. For further discussions of this see MacGregor, *Seeing Salvation*, pp. 129–137; Ruben, *Descent from the Cross*, from the Antwerp Cathedral, The Bridgeman Art Library, as reproduced in Chadwick, *A History of Christianity*, p. 232; Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*.

21 John the Baptist had been beheaded some years before Christ’s crucifixion.
The artist was unlikely making such an overt visual parallel. The work can, however, be considered part of a medieval religious culture and an ongoing dialogue in which a close association between books and Christ is understood. As this chapter progresses, it will be clear that the association between Christ’s crucified body and books could at times be overt and literal.

In the fifteenth-century depiction of the mocking of Christ on the walls of the Dominican convent of San Marco in Florence, the importance and value given to books by the order and the association between Christ and books is represented. For the Mendicant Order of Preachers or Dominicans founded in 1215, books, reading and writing played an important role in their daily religious practices. This is apparent not only by their well-maintained libraries, but also by some of their frescoes. In the convent of San Marco, the Dominican brother Fra Giovanni (Brother John), known better as Fra Angelico (the Angelic Friar), painted a series of frescoes in the cells of the novices. Used as places of solitary study and reflection, the instructional art of the novices’ cells reflects the beliefs and values of the order. The fresco in cell 7, *The Mocking of Christ*, circa 1441–1443, is of particular interest, as it depicts a moment infused with notions of textuality and literacy. In this fresco, the order’s founder, Dominic, is present at the mocking and scourging of Christ. Interestingly though, Dominic is not looking directly at Christ while he is mocked and scourged; rather, he is at Christ’s feet, reading and reflecting on a written account of the events. To the medieval novice, this image would have conveyed a sense of the importance of books, study and reading. However, it might also have suggested the interconnections to be made between Christ’s Crucifixion and ‘the book’. To be sure of this, this study turns to other images and writings of the period.

In the fourteenth-century writings of the Monk of Farne, the author represents Christ’s beaten, suffering and humiliated body as a book to be read and consumed by the faithful. Addressing his comments to the medieval Christian, the Monk wrote:

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22 Several texts note the presence of the book in the image but draw no inferences from it. MacGregor, in *Seeing Salvation*, suggests that book is simply present to represent that John is ‘witness to a timeless truth’ (p. 134).

23 Fra Giovanni came from the sister convent in Fiesole.

Study, then, O man, to know Christ: get to know your Saviour. His body, hanging on the cross, is a book, open for your perusal. The words of this book are Christ’s actions, as well as his sufferings and passion, for everything he did serves for our instruction. His wounds are the letters or characters, the five chief wounds being the five vowels and the others the consonants of your book. Learn how to read the lamentations—and alas! too, the reproaches, outrages, insults and humiliations which are written therein.\(^{25}\)

This imagery suggests that medieval peoples thought of texts/books quite differently from peoples in present-day Western society. Far from regarding books within the limited parameters of modern, mass-produced book culture, medieval audiences regarded books in ways that did not observe the boundaries of the physical, the imaginary and the symbolic expected by a modern literate individual. In a medieval context, books could be physical, corporeal, material, literal, imagined and symbolic. The act of reading, hearing or seeing a book could also be conceived of in carnal or material terms; that is, as a literal consuming or eating of Christ. This concept of consuming Christ is also found in Apocalypse 10: 9–10, when an angel comes to John:

> And I went to the angel, saying unto him that he should give me the book. And he said to me: Take the book and eat it up … And I took the book from the hand of the angel and ate it up; and it was in my mouth, sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it my belly was bitter.\(^{26}\)

According to the French Dominican Friar, Hugh of St. Cher (c. 1200–1263) and the French author Pierre Bersuire (c. 1290–1362), the act of eating Christ the book was an act of recalling the life and death of Christ.\(^{27}\) In 1985, Jesse M. Gellrich wrote that this ‘digestion is simultaneously a reconstruction’ of Christ’s life.\(^{28}\) Similarly, in 1991, the historian Karma Lochrie wrote that:

> like receiving the eucharist, ingesting the book of Christ is an act of remembrance. The bitterness of the reading/eating is directly proportional to the increased knowledge gained from it. Sorrow attends

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\(^{26}\) See also the early fourteenth-century illustration of John receiving the book (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Cloisters Collection, 1968. MS 68. 174, fol. 16) as reproduced in Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages*, p. 16


the knowledge produced by this reading, causing the reader to be seized with compassion for the crucified Christ.²⁹

The act of reading, remembering and consuming Christ was linked to knowledge and understanding, but this knowledge was bitter-sweet. The ‘bitterness in your belly’ was the intense sorrow of understanding and knowing Christ’s Passion and suffering. The notion of bitter-sweet knowledge gained from reading the corporeal text of Christ is again evident in a passage from the fifteenth-century mystic, Richard Rolle’s *Meditations on the Passion*, in which Christ’s body figures as a book to be read by the mystic. He wrote:

Moreover, sweet Jesus, your body is like a book written entirely with red ink; so is your body entirely written with red wounds. Now, sweet Jesus, grant me to read upon your book, and to understand somewhat the sweetness of that writing, and to take delight in the studious consideration of that reading … And, sweet Jesus, grant me this study in each time of the day, and let me upon this book study at my matins and hours and evensong and compline, and always to be my meditation, my speech, and my dalliance.³⁰

As with John and the angel in Apocalypse 10: 9–10, this passage speaks of the bitter-sweet knowledge that comes with reading the corporeal text of Christ. Just like physical *Imitatio Christi*, here the medieval individual dwells on the pain, suffering and humiliation of the material body of Christ as a way of remembering and knowing. The crucified material body itself records the Passion and death of the son of God. Rolle’s passage reveals an intensely corporeal and material understanding, not just of Jesus, but also of books. However, it is this materiality of the book that makes it difficult for the modern reader to comprehend the concept of Christ as a book. The modern literate individual does not have the same intense personal relationship with their books that a medieval book reader/user did, nor do they conceive of books themselves in the same way. Unlike medieval cultures, present-day Western cultures conceive of, and understand, books, reading and writing narrowly, as they are defined by mass-produced print culture.³¹

Another medieval example of the analogy drawn between Christ’s body and a book can be seen in the fourteenth-century Franciscan preacher, John of Grimstone’s preaching book. Among the verse lyrics contained in this text, ‘An ABC Poem on the Passion of Christ’ stands out for the purposes of this thesis. As in the texts of the Monk of Farne and Richard Rolle, in Grimstone’s text, the corporeal book of Christ records Christ’s Passion and asks the audience to remember and learn from it. This example places emphasis on the notion of learning and Christ’s body as a didactic tool. He writes:

In a place, as men may see, when a child is seated at school, a book is brought to him nailed on a board. Men call it the ABC, and it is skilfully made. On the outside of the book are fixed five large letters decorated in rose red. This signifies Christ’s death, no doubt. The red letter in parchment allows a good child to look and see, [for] by this book men can understand that Christ’s body which died on the rood was full of pain. On the tree he was marked very splendidly with great letters, that is the five wounds, as you may understand.\(^\text{32}\)

The speaker of the poem then further asks whether ‘I might these letters read / without any difficulty’.\(^\text{33}\) These same ideas are also seen in the penitential poem of poet and monk, John Lydgate (c. 1370–1451), ‘The Fifteen Ooes of Christ’, in which the ‘writing’ on Christ’s body is linked to the act of reading and remembrance. The speaker of the poem addresses Christ, saying:

Merciful Jesus! of your grace do consider
With the blood which you did bleed,
To write them [the wounds] through remembrance in my heart
That I may read them once each day,
Comprehend the writing under your purple garment
With often thinking in your bloody face,
Through my entrails let your passion spread,
That I may be marked with those wounds when I shall pass hence.\(^\text{34}\)

In this passage, the speaker’s desire for understanding and knowledge is portrayed as writing on his own heart; thus, remembering Jesus in his heart is paralleled to the act of writing. Importantly, these examples provide evidence of how notions of writing,


recording, remembering and understanding were intertwined with ideas about the body.

The reoccurring motifs of Christ’s body as a parchment, his wounds as letters and his blood as ink can also be seen in various late medieval religious plays. In the fifteenth-century Digby play of ‘Christ’s Burial’, found in the famous Digby 133 manuscript, evidence of this imagery continues. In this particular play, the mother of Christ urges Joseph to behold the beaten body of her crucified son, saying:

> Joseph, look closer, behold and see,  
> In how little space how many wounds there be!  
> Here was no mercy, here was no pity,  
> Only cruel dealings painfully!

Then:

> Come here, Joseph, behold and look,  
> How many bloody letters are written in this book—  
> This is a small margin!

Joseph responds by saying, ‘Yea, this parchment is stretched out of size!’35 Thus, with the body of Christ being understood as a book, here that book told the story of the cruelty of Christ’s enemies. Moreover, once again, the knowledge of Christ’s suffering is conceived of as a kind of reading, and the body of Christ as the central site of this reading.

The prevalence of images of the crucified Christ as a book from the fourteenth century onwards raises questions about the likely meanings of the motif. One possible explanation for the presence of the imagery is that it was further evidence of the increasingly literate mentalities of medieval English society already discussed in the previous chapter. To imagine Christ in terms of a book reveals some of the concerns and interests of people living in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England. As already discussed, at this time, medieval society was changing in terms of how language, words, voice and books were thought about, used and regulated. These changes disrupted and altered the ways in which people conceived of themselves and their place in the world. As literacy became more common and literate practices

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more dominant, people even started to understand Christ in terms of textual/literate concepts and imagery. Accepting this view, ‘Christ as a book’ can be regarded as further evidence of an increasingly literate-minded medieval society. However, it should also be noted that the relationship between Christ and books has a long history throughout Western Christianity and was not confined to the medieval period. Nevertheless, in fifteenth-century England, ideas about the interrelationships between Christ, books, judgement and knowledge were particularly popular. The remainder of this chapter is thus concerned with the heightened interest in Christ’s body as a book at this time.

To understand what the imagery of the book meant to medieval Christians in the fifteenth century, and why the idea found particular cultural significance at this time, it is useful to consider the role of the book in wider contexts. Ideas about ‘the book’ within Christianity were not new; they had a long history and close association with notions of salvation and judgement throughout Western Christianity. In Apocalypse 10: 9–10 (discussed earlier in this chapter), John eats the book to gain knowledge. This close association between books and knowledge is seen elsewhere, especially in narratives about Judgement Day. Since the Middle Ages, iconography has depicted the association. Adam Fox wrote that:

near the entrance to heaven was imagined a man, like the official by the gates of an earthly city, sitting ‘at a table side, with a book, and his inkhorn before him, to take the name of him that should enter therein’, and somewhere ‘a record kept the names’ of all those who had passed successfully that way before.36

Further, in Apocalypse 5.1, the visionary witnesses ‘in the right hand of him that sat on the throne, a book, written within and without’. In Apocalypse 20.12, the significance of the book is clearer. Here the author writes:

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing in the presence of the throne. And the books were opened: and another book was opened, which was the book of life. And the dead were judged by those things which were written in the books according to their works.37

37 This image of judgement resonates in the legal processes of the medieval heresy trials. Like the image of Christ on his throne, book in hand, the Bishop or his clerics sat in judgement perhaps with the written text of the trial in their hands. In both the image of legal process and that of Christ’s judgement, the finality of the written word, the power of the written word and the association between the book and the truth, are evident. The act of legal judgement was surrounded by, and perhaps
In this image, the dead themselves appeared as books in which every deed and action was recorded. Further, God held the book of life containing the fates of those before him. This association between life and the written word is again seen in Psalms 68.29: ‘Let them be blotted out of the book of the living [liber vitae] and with the just let them not be written’. The historian Jesse M. Gellrich recalls the words of St. Ambrose (c. 330 AD – 397 AD), who stated that the chosen elect were as ‘one book’, the liber vitae; as opposed to the ‘condemned’, who are ‘opened books’, through which their evil is exposed.38 Similarly Hugh of St. Cher described Judgement Day as the day where:

Christ is opened, because then he will appear to all showing what now is still hidden. This book, I say, is the gathering together of the living … The book of life is the presence of God, which is hidden from us now, but then will be opened to all, because they will see all who are being saved and all who are being damned.39

Historical images of the presence and role of the book on Judgement Day extended beyond Christ holding a book with the names of the chosen and the damned. Hugh of St. Cher described Christ as a book whose contents would be revealed to the elect upon judgement. In the text of conscientia, Hugh added to this Christ as ‘the book of the heart’, that would be read at the end of time. Here, it was said that Christ would come and open the book of ‘things secret’.40

The examples considered thus far have centred on images of the faithful engaging with Christ as a book. However, there is evidence that this relationship between the individual and ‘Christ the book’ was not always one-directional. In the medieval period, there is evidence of women, in particular, using their bodies like books to tell of Jesus’ Passion, judgement and salvation. Rather than simply regarding the book from a distance; that is, ‘reading’ the story of Christ inscribed on his beaten body, there is evidence of individual women inscribing themselves into the book of Christ, or becoming the book. This occurs in the cases of some medieval female mystics and visionaries, including the fifteenth-century mystic figure, Margery Kempe, as well as

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38 Gellrich, The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages, p. 159.
39 Hugh of St. Cher, Opera Omina, (vol 7, Venice, 1732), p 422, as quoted in Ibid., p. 160.
40 Ibid.
some of the Lollards. At one point in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Christ assures Kempe that:

no man shall slay you, nor fire burn you, nor water drown you, nor wind harm you, because I cannot forget you and how *you are written in my hands and feet* [emphasis mine].

A powerful validation of Kempe’s authority and mystical identity was to be metaphorically written into the body of Christ; in particular, in his wounds. In so doing, she became part of the book. Further, when she encountered images of the Crucifixion and ‘read’ the book of Christ, her own body took on the role of telling Christ’s story. In the case of Margery Kempe, the mystic ‘makes a spectacle of her reading of the body of Christ’. Her plentiful tears and loud sobbing at the sight of the crucified Jesus signifies Christ’s body as a book, recalling the memories of humiliation and suffering. Moreover, frequently, particularly when Kempe suffers social ostracism and physical attacks or when she falls to the ground in fits of tears, her own body is telling the story of Christ’s Passion. In this way, her body visually recalled for her audience the story of Christ. Similarities can be drawn between this and the accounts of women whose bodies bore the *insigne* of Christ’s Passion.

Likewise, similarities can be seen in Margery Baxter’s reported claim to hold ‘the charter of salvation’ in her womb, or in the activities of Lollard women who carried Lollard texts, or memorised and recited the Scriptures to their friends and neighbours. They and their bodies became the fleshly and material book of Christ, and via their bodies, they recalled and retold the story of Christ.

Two more examples of medieval religious women using their own bodies like books to recall or retell the story of Christ’s Crucifixion are seen in the lives of the

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42 This relationship between Christ, Kempe and textuality puts Kempe’s quest to have her life story written down in a book into a different light. Kempe was unable to write her own story and, after the death of her first scribe, had to rely on a second. Kempe’s desire for a written recounting of her life is of interest. Why would an illiterate lay woman such as Margery go to great lengths to have her story written down? In light of these discussions, it might be suggested that her desire to be like a book was part of her larger desire to move closer to Christ. Just as Christ’s body told the story of his ostracism, humiliation and martyrdom, Kempe might have wished her book to tell the story of her suffering and humiliation, and ultimately her special relationship with Christ. This further supports a particular medieval attitude towards the power of the book.
44 The heart of Clare of Montefalco (d. 1308) was said to have borne the image of the cross. See Lochrie, *Margery Kempe*, pp. 33–34.
fourteenth-century mystic, Julian of Norwich (1342–1416) and the French Carthusian nun and mystic, Marguerite of Oingt (c. 1240–1310). Although they did not make direct mention of themselves as books or texts, their bodies function like books and they write themselves into the story of Christ. In the example of Marguerite, the female visionary ‘writes’ herself into the account of Christ’s death when she says:

And when I see that the evil crowd had left, I approach and take out the nails and then I carry him on my shoulders down from the cross and put him between the arms of my heart… And in the evening, when I go to bed, I in spirit put him in my bed and I kiss his tender hands and feet so cruelly pierced for my sins. And I lean over that glorious side pierced for me.45

For the English mystic, Julian of Norwich, bodily illness allowed her to use her own body like a book recounting Christ’s story. After having prayed for the gift of literal Imitatio Christi on 13 May 1373, Julian received her wish:

Then suddenly it came into my mind that I ought to wish of the second which would as a gift and a grace from our Lord, that my body might be full of recollection and feeling of his blessed Passion, as I had prayed before, for I wished that his pains might be my pains, with compassion which would lead to longing for God … And at this, suddenly I saw the red blood running down from under the crown, hot and flowing freely and copiously, a living stream, just as it was at the time when the crown of thorns was pressed on his blessed head. I perceived, truly and powerfully, that it was he who just so, both God and man, himself suffered for me, who showed it to me without any intermediary.46

From these accounts, it is clear that not only was the crucified body of Christ conceived of as a book, reminding the faithful of his suffering; the bodies of medieval religious women could also be used like books to tell the story of his torment. Women such as Margery Kempe, Marguerite d’Oingt and Julian of Norwich used their bodies to recount the story of Christ’s execution, and like a religious text, their bodies become sites of recording and the remembering of suffering and salvation.

In Thomas of Cantimpre’s vita of the thirteenth-century figure Margaret of Ypres (d. 1237), the term ‘recordatio’, meaning remembrance, was used to describe her acts of

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extreme self-mutilation; in particular, her self-flagellation. Margaret’s efforts to move closer to an understanding of Christ through painful and physical *Imitatio Christi*, although not unique, are made significant for this thesis by Cantimpre’s description of them, which reveals particular attitudes towards words, knowledge and physicality. In her individual act of imitating Christ, Margaret’s own beaten and bleeding body became a written record recalling Christ’s Passion and suffering. As in the case of the female Lollards, the body of Margaret was like a book or a written record of Christ’s life, teachings and, most importantly, his death. The spectacle of the body allowed it to become a teaching tool, through which women, taking the otherwise unavailable role of teachers or preachers, could ‘speak’ to the audience about Christ. In the cases of Margaret of Ypres, Margery Kempe and the Lollards, the audience sees a recording, recalling, recollection and remembrance of Christ’s life, teachings and death through a complex system of actions that did not always observe the expected boundaries of the physical, the imaginary and the symbolic. For the Lollards, the central texts and Scriptures did not exist solely as physically tangible texts. Rather, they could become material, corporeal, symbolic, carnal and literal. Activities with these texts included memorising and retelling narratives from the Scriptures; reinterpreting and questioning Church doctrine relating to matters such as Transubstantiation and abstaining from meat on Fridays, drawing on knowledge and experiences of household activities; and concealing books in their homes and on their persons. Such activities were a significant threat to the ecclesiastical authorities, who represented learned, structured and masculinised hermeneutics. Thus, these authorities were compelled to prosecute this violation.

In considering the reoccurring medieval imagery of Christ’s crucified body existing as a book, Bridget of Sweden’s vision of the book speaking to her from the pulpit, Margaret of Ypres acts of *Imitatio Christi* and the reading/book culture of medieval England make the attitudes and values of the period apparent. These examples offer a way into this culture and its mentalities. It is a world in which the Bible, the Word of God and Jesus himself were not necessarily understood or represented as wholly distinct from one another, the crucified Jesus on the cross was not necessarily conceptualised as being any different from the Bible, as they were part of the same

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48 Copeland, ‘Why Women Can’t Read’. 
discourse. Just as the medieval practice of reading involved multiple senses (that is, reading, seeing, hearing, touching and sometimes eating), understanding Christ as a book involved seeing his body and wounds, hearing his words, eating his body and touching his book. In this medieval culture, it is difficult to discern what medieval individuals understood books to be. However, it is clear that their understandings were not bound by the same limited parameters as exist in modern societies.

The focus of the next section of this chapter is on how other historians have viewed the relationships between female Lollards and books. Although some historians have observed the part that books and book usage played in the particular religiosities of female Lollards, including Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone, few have given this observation meaningful consideration. Furthermore, few historians have recognised and regarded this connection with books as being more than continued confirmation of the secondary and dependent role ‘illiterate’ Lollard women played in their religious communities. This view is partly born of narrow and modern understandings of books, literacy and textual activities and a failure to recognise that in a fifteenth-century English context, books, and activities involving books, were varied and conceived of in multiple ways. In contrast to previous work on the subject, this study recognises that Lollard women were able to engage with books and texts in diverse and varying ways, which in turn shaped and gave meaning to their activities and beliefs.

Chapter One of this thesis examined the work of various historians that have focussed on fifteenth-century Lollardy; in particular, it assessed the consideration they gave (or did not give) to the role of women in Lollard communities. Criticism was made of the historians Ralph Hanna III, Rita Copeland and Margaret Aston in particular, for their sometimes modern and narrow understandings of the medieval concepts of authorship, writing, books and book practices. It was suggested that these historians did not recognise and take appropriate account of the ‘positive’ and ‘non-masculine’ ways in which the Lollard women of Norwich were able to participate in the book-based community. In their discussions of women and books in the Lollard community, Hanna, Copeland and Aston inappropriately applied modern meanings and values to medieval actions and words. In so doing, this thesis has suggested that the significance of many of the female book practices evident
within the Norwich Lollard society were overlooked by them. In his study of ‘Some Norfolk Women and Their Books’, Hanna regarded the role of women such as Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone, in the ‘textual exchanges’ of their ‘book-bound’ community, as being limited to carrying and concealing books on their persons and in their homes, sheltering Lollard suspects in their homes and holding Lollard schools within their households.49 Hanna regarded women’s central and physical relationship with books as a reminder of their inability to independently read and write those books. He also judged it as a further sign of their secondary status in the community. He wrote that;

both Baxter and Mone’s involvement with books remained in one sense secondary. Neither woman appears to have been literate in either the medieval Latinate sense or in our own. They were not ocular readers but aural ones, dependent on someone else’s reading to access the text. Thus, although physically proximate to the volumes that inspired their faith and, on at least some occasions, apparently responsible for the very safety of such volumes, they were forced to rely upon males for any understanding of the books’ contents. Whatever their importance to constructing the situation in which books might be read, these women could not perform that reading on their own.50

Hanna’s view is one that assumes that the medieval individuals of Norwich could only meaningfully engage with books as literate readers. Such a position imposes modern day understandings of what it means to be literate, and prevents the historian from recognising the unexpected and constructive ways in which ‘socially powerless women’ did actively and positively engage with books. As already discussed in Chapter One, Hanna’s central position is flawed and should alert the historian to the need to avoid bringing modern, patriarchal and literate notions of books, authorship and writing to our analyses of this topic.

It is clear from the abjuration and deposition relating to Hawisia Mone and Margery Baxter that books and textual activities were crucial to the theologies and religious practices of these Lollard women, irrespective of their apparent ‘illiterate’ state. For them, the physical concealment and dissemination of Lollard books was an important part of their individual religious identities.51 They both carefully concealed books on their persons and in their homes, protecting them from their enemies and formed

50 Ibid., pp. 291–292.
meaningful relationships between their bodies and Lollard texts. Interestingly, despite his narrow reading of Baxter and Mone’s respective roles in the book-community of Norwich, Ralph Hanna does draw a noteworthy point about the way in which Baxter, in particular, came to embody the texts of her Lollard community. Hanna suggested that Baxter and Mone ‘used their secondary status to develop what may be construed as a more powerful model of book dispersal than men, dependent on a written text, might conceive’. 52 He argues that:

purely aural access to the book did not form simply a passive activity … [r]ather, both Baxter and Mone had developed mechanisms for absorbing what they had heard … they absorbed texts in the interest of possible oral performance, whether that was internal meditation or overtly vocal teaching. In so doing, they became in fact the book (or the useable portions thereof): they rendered the physical volume in some measure superfluous and incorporated it within themselves. They embodied texts and transported them in their corporeal persons, gave then a life beyond mere vellum, and thus attained a flexibility (if not perhaps what masculine scholars might consider an accuracy) of use that their male coreligionists might not have achieved [emphasis mine]. 53

Despite the inherent power imbalances involved in the production of the deposition against Baxter, the document does reveal that:

Baxter was not just a woman deprived of her subjectivity and merely a vocal vehicle for truths of male origin. For in addition to such transmittal of male texts, her idiosyncrasies suggest she had formulated for herself a version of Lollardy that privileged both the mechanisms by which she had attained this belief system and the way she disseminated it, the female body as evangelical vehicle. Ultimately, Baxter patronized books by living them and dispersing them through her living example [emphasis mine]. 54

Although Hanna makes this important observation about the manner in which women used their bodies like books, he does not take it to its meaningful conclusion. He does not explore the theological and intellectual validity of this method of book dispersal and textual engagement. Hanna instead retreats to the standard conclusion that these activities were a sign of women’s secondary and subordinate role in the Lollard movement. Like Hanna, in this study, I am interested in the notion of the


53 Ibid.

54 Ibid., p. 293. Hanna also notes that ‘such an embodiment of the book forms nearly the entirety of the bishop’s complaint against Baxter. For the whole charge against her reflects a single occasion of proselytizing’ (p. 292).

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female body as an evangelical vehicle. However, unlike Hanna, it is the feminine and familial theology for which that body was a vehicle that is of interest here.

This thesis also diverges from the work of Hanna by recognising that women used books in ways that are different and unexpected to the modern literate audience. Baxter and Mone’s activities in this respect should not be seen as aberrations from their otherwise secondary and lesser role in the community. Instead, it is argued here that both Baxter and Mone had important physical relationships with books, and that these were valid and meaningful in the context of the Lollard movement; that is, the participation of these women was real and full. To understand and appreciate these relationships, it is first necessary to reconsider our preconceptions, as modern day literates, regarding both books and the act of reading. Baxter and Mone’s religiosities reveal that medieval persons conceived of books and reading in quite different ways from present-day individuals and that those activities not typically recognised as ‘reading’ were not secondary or less valid. The motif of Christ as a book assists in understanding this. This chapter now considers some of the actions and words attributed to Baxter in particular, in light of the medieval imagery of the crucified Christ as a book. Both the book practices of Mone and Baxter, and the reoccurring medieval image of Jesus as a corporeal text, reveal particular medieval understandings of books and reading that are important to this thesis.

For female Lollards and other religious women of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, representations of Jesus’ crucified body and their own bodies, meant that connections between them could be made. Metaphorically, there was a close relationship between Jesus’s body and Lollard women’s own bodies and activities. At first glance, the medieval image of the crucified Christ as a bloody corporeal text and the book practices of an ‘illiterate’ medieval housewife such as Margery Baxter appear to have little, if anything, in common with each other. However, with closer examination they both reveal and are evidence of the same medieval understandings of books, bodies, writing and authorship. Further, they both exemplify a potentially dangerous and subversive, feminine and literalist hermeneutic. Thus, examination of the imagery of Christ the book in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries contributes to a better appreciation of what books, bodies, writing and authorship meant to English
peoples in this period, and why Lollard women engaged with books in the ways that they did.

The reoccurring image of Christ as a corporeal text hanging from the cross is a highly feminised image. The image of Jesus as a book can be considered as feminine, as it represents Jesus using the same characteristics by which women and femininity were also defined during the period. As a book, Christ is open, literal, carnal, material, fleshly, mortal, and, like women, his body is porous and leaking from its boundaries. The danger of this understanding of Jesus is that the image is open and available to be read by the ordinary parishioner. The book practices of Baxter and Mone represent a similarly feminised view. As with the book of Christ, in the case of Baxter and Mone, meanings, knowledge and understandings of Christ were conveyed through material, carnal and open female bodies, thus allowing the bodies of Baxter and Mone, like that of Christ, to become ‘instructional’ texts. Further, in both cases, instead of sacred Scripture being locked away in monasteries to be dispensed at the discretion of priests, the ‘books’ wander around unregulated, open for popular consumption and interpretation. At one point, the most sacred of Christian texts, ‘the charter of salvation’, takes up residence in the body of a lay, unschooled, wife and mother. The overall significance of the Lollard women using their bodies like ‘Christ the book’ is two-fold. Firstly, if women used their bodies to convey religious texts to ordinary people, then the idea that Lollard women were inactive, secondary participants in the movement is destabilised. Secondly, the religious ideas they conveyed using their bodies were theirs. They explained, understood and shaped Lollard theology using their own experiences, thus making them more than just ‘evangelic vehicles’.

Baxter’s reported claim to hold a charter of salvation in her womb is important and warrants close examination, in particular, what this claim reveals about the complex and close medieval relationship between books and bodies. The declaration attributed to Baxter by her neighbour Joan Clyfland is one of the most important for my research. It goes to the core of Lollard women’s beliefs and practices and the reasons for their prosecution. There is a view that although Lollard women were not prosecuted more harshly or more frequently than male Lollards, the Lollard trials
nonetheless represented the persecution of feminised hermeneutics and feminised religious textual activities. It has been suggested that:

the suppression of Lollard books was not necessarily or exclusively directed against women ... the real enemy, the object of official repression, is the Lollard hermeneutic itself. This is a feminine hermeneutic: it is open and popular, vernacular, and literal. All participants in this hermeneutic, women and men, are discursively feminized, in sociolinguistics as well as in metaphysical terms.55

Using this argument as a starting point in examining the case against Margery Baxter, it is apparent why the Church authorities might have felt justified in fearing the popular, literal, material and carnal nature of Lollard hermeneutics and Lollard book practices.

The image of the ‘charter of salvation’ taking up its place in the womb of Margery Baxter can be read in multiple ways. Firstly, Baxter (and/or others) may have been seeking to invoke and claim for herself the image of the Virgin Mary, holding the Incarnation of the Word in her own womb. Taking a similar position to this research, Rita Copeland argues that in making such a claim, Baxter is demonstrating the ‘dangerous’ literalism of Lollard hermeneutics. She wrote that ‘the central mystery of Christian doctrine involves a consummate literalism, the Word that was God becoming incarnate, the spirit becoming flesh, in the body of a mortal woman’.56

Baxter, an unlearned lay woman, takes this doctrine to its literalist extremes and locates it in her own life and religious practices. If Clyfland’s report was accurate, Baxter was claiming to hold the very Word of God in her own ‘corrupt’ body. Accordingly:

in terms of its effect in the official deposition against Baxter, it doubtless served as another example of the egregious extremes of Lollard textual culture, an ignorant woman invoking the salvific power of a mysterious and unspecified text lodged within the secret places of her womb, a text that cannot be officially authenticated or even traced. But it is also a provocative image of the power of literalism.57

However, this thesis goes further than Copeland, contending that the statement not only exemplifies the danger of Lollard hermeneutics, it also reveals the intensely feminine and familial nature of the religious practices of its female members. As a

56 Ibid., p. 277.
57 Ibid.
woman and a mother, it is possible that Baxter best understood and articulated Christian doctrine and her relationship towards God’s Scriptures in these terms, using familiar images. In her religious beliefs and practices, books were central and her role was to learn, transmute and protect them. Thus, arguably, she located them in her innermost being; she became a part of them and they a part of her. At that point she became indistinguishable from the book and from Christ.

A wider examination of medieval culture, not offered by Copeland, shows that the close association of words and books with the material bodies of religious women was not limited to within Lollard culture, and was not uncommon. Medieval representations of the role of the Virgin Mary often focussed heavily on the notion of Jesus as the Word existing in the womb of the Virgin. In her devotional treatise, the twelfth-century mystic Hildegard of Bingen referred at length to the process whereby ‘the Word of the Almighty Father went down to the Womb of the Virgin and took on flesh’ and ‘the Father who with gentle power (in suavi veriditate) sent the Word into the womb of the Virgin from whom he took flesh’. Clanchy noted that the Virgin Mary is never depicted in the Annunciation scene making a written note of the Angel Gabriel’s message from God (although in certain scenes of the Virgin and Child, the Child is sometimes shown to be writing). Rather:

> the Virgin was expected to remember the angelic message by taking it into her innermost being: ‘Mary kept all these words and pondered them in her heart’.

In his treatise on memory Hugh St Victor explained how knowledge is a treasury and ‘your heart is its strong-box’ *(cor tuum archa)*.

59 Luke 11:19
60 Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 193.

The close medieval religious association between words, books and writing and the female body is further emphasised when one considers the female asceticism and mysticism of the period. Clare of Montefalco and Margaret of Citta di Castello provide examples of this. When Clare of Montefalco died and her religious sisters were preparing her body for burial, they removed her heart and were said to have found the insigne of the Passion ‘etched’ into it. In the case of Margaret of Citta di Castello, three precious stones with images of the Holy Family on them were
supposedly found in her heart after death.\textsuperscript{61} This association is also apparent in a vision experienced by the French nun, Marguerite of Oingt. In her vision, Marguerite envisioned herself as a withered tree, until Christ, as a great river of water, inundated her. ‘She then saw, written on the flowering branches of herself, the names of the five senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch.’\textsuperscript{62} These examples of female experience provide further evidence of the close relationship between words, books and writing and female materiality apparent in a medieval religious context. Understanding this can help the historian understand and appreciate the book practices and hermeneutics of female Lollards; in particular, Margery Baxter’s claim to hold ‘a charter of salvation’ in her womb.

Another way in which the allegation concerning the ‘charter of salvation’ might be interpreted relates to the late medieval phenomena of the \textit{Charters of Christ}.\textsuperscript{63} Whether it was her intention, Baxter’s reported assertion evoked the concept and controversies of the \textit{Charters}. The \textit{Long Charter of Christ} was a Passion Lyric that appeared in Oxford around 1350. The poem was an apocryphal recounting of Christ’s life from Incarnation through to Post-Crucifixion, told directly through Christ as the poem’s speaker. Here the events of his life were:

allegorized as the production of a land-grant: the Incarnation is the initial ‘sesyng’ or formal occupation of heaven, the Crucifixion is the bloody inscription of the charter on Christ’s body, the Harrowing of Hell is the re-negotiation of the contract, and the Eucharist is the indentured copy of the charter (for security and remembrance). The charter itself, the centrepiece of the poem, grants heavenly bliss to all readers and listeners in exchange for a ‘rent’ of sincere and absolute penance.\textsuperscript{64}

Although the \textit{Long Charter} was copied continuously until the end of the fifteenth century, by the end of the fourteenth century its appeal and popularity was such that an abridged version, known as the \textit{Short Charter}, and a vernacular prose tract called the ‘Charter of Heaven’ had been produced. Sometime after 1400, the \textit{Long Charter} was twice revised and expanded, partly in response to the feared appropriation of it

\textsuperscript{61} See Bynum, \textit{Fragmentation and Redemption}, p. 187.
\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 155.
by the Lollards, and partly owing to concerns about the ideas of mediation and interpretation that the Charters had come to represent.\textsuperscript{65}

The Charters played a role in both the Orthodox Christian and Lollard agendas. Although the Long Charter was originally and ostensibly a tool of Orthodoxy, the Lollards came to seize upon the image of Christ and the Charter to express their own dissenting ideas about authority and the relationship between Christ and the laity. The historian Emily Steiner noted that:

\begin{quote}
Despite the fact that the Charters originate in mainstream preaching texts and promote strictly orthodox doctrine on controversial issues, the image of Christ as a legal document posited a relationship between author and audience that by the 1410s and 20s served orthodox and heterodox agendas alike. Lollard sermon-writers and polemicists seized upon the image of Christ’s charter to express radical theories about official texts (indulgences, letters of fraternity, royal charters, Scripture).\textsuperscript{66}
\end{quote}

The 1400 revisions of the Long Charter made by an anonymous author responded to the threat posed by the Lollard agenda and introduced a new narrator, an intermediary clerical voice that intrudes into and comments on the narrative. For Steiner, the revisions were prompted not only by a fear that the text would be misread by errant or dissident readers, but also because:

\begin{quote}
The tropes and vocabularies by which that particular text is supposed to convey doctrine—in this case Christ’s charter—have become common property, and, as such they elide distinctions not only between heterodox and orthodox doctrine, but, more insidiously, between heterodox and orthodox reading practices.\textsuperscript{67}
\end{quote}

The danger of the original Long Charter in terms of its use by Lollards and polemists is that it represents a direct dialogue between Christ and the audience. The Christian authorities recognised this and, through a series of revisions, wrote themselves and their authority as mediators and interpreters of God’s message back into the narrative by introducing an intrusive clerical narrator who, at pertinent moments, interrupts the narrative to provide direction on the story. The intent and effect of the clerical voice within the text is to restabilise the relationship between Christ, clerics and the laity.

It is interesting to consider why the Lollards would have been attracted to, or want to appropriate for themselves and their own agenda, the image of Christ and Charters

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., pp.155–176.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., p. 156.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., p. 157.
when such images are fundamentally at odds with Lollard beliefs. If one considers that Lollards rejected relic worshipping and the veneration of religious images and icons, including crucifixes, the question is then why were they drawn to ‘the image of Christ’s body as a bleeding charter nailed to the cross’; an image that ‘comes from an iconographical tradition antithetical to Lollard sensibilities’? The answer is found in the relationship Lollards had to official texts and documents and their desire to devalue those used by the institutional Church to maintain its hegemony and dominance. This included abjurations and indentures used against Lollards during their trials, and those ‘true’ texts that were publicly available and between Christ and his audience. Unsurprisingly, ‘Lollard writers were notoriously hostile to legal documents, particularly to indulgences but also to preaching commissions, certifications, and trial depositions, all of which could bring no end of grief to Lollards on trial’. However, Christ as Charter represents a different kind of ‘text’. It was a publicly available document telling the story of Christ’s life. It did not need mediation or interpretation by clerics and preachers, as it was a direct dialogue between Christ and his audience. Moreover, it contradicted orthodox notions of document production as controlled by the authorities. Margery’s claim, intentionally or otherwise, enters into this contest between orthodoxy and heterodoxy for the image of Christ’s Charter. By her claim, she seizes this image, appropriates it for her own agenda and locates it in a space hidden from the view and control of the authorities:

Baxter’s bodily ‘charter’ is, in a sense, a conceptually ingenious if ultimately ineffectual answer to the texts of the sealed indentures of their abjurations given to the Norwich heretics to remind them, in part, of the fatal punishment for relapse.

Baxter’s claim ‘replaces the visible church with the female body as a possible locus of salvation’ and the female body becomes a potential ‘site of grace’. Steiner’s argument is useful for this research as it offers another way of reading Baxter’s claim to hold the charter of salvation in her body. Importantly, it supports the arguments of this study in terms of the centrality of words, books and textuality and the female body in Baxter’s religious beliefs and practices.

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68 Ibid., p. 159.
69 Ibid., p. 160.
71 Ibid., p. 219.
This research has explored the importance of books and activities involving books to fifteenth-century Lollard communities and to women such as Baxter and Mone. What has been less clear is what books meant to them, and to the authorities who attempted to regulate and control the production, ownership, transmission and use of books. By examining the medieval representation of the crucified Christ as a book, it has been established that, in a medieval context, books were more than bound parchment or paper. Books could be material, literal, imagined and physical, and people’s interactions with books went beyond ‘reading’ in a modern sense. For women, the encompassing nature of books offered them in particular, a close, personal connection to Christ. In this chapter, a key statement attributed to Margery Baxter was examined as evidence of this. Her claim is important, as it offers insight into fifteenth-century English culture. By locating this statement in an appropriate context, it explains why Lollard women engaged with books in the ways that they did. It also partly explains why the trials occurred, what was being prosecuted and why Lollardy was so threatening to the authorities. However, this statement would make little sense if not examined in the context in which it was created. To make sense of this claim, the nature and meaning of books in medieval culture has been explored; with the first step being the abandonment of modern-day perceptions of books as bound papers. Through an examination of the reoccurring imagery of Christ as a book, this research has shown that, in a medieval context, books could be carnal, literal, symbolic, imagined and material. Further, words and books came from God and, indeed, could be God himself. An awareness of these medieval concepts has allowed for a better understand the potential danger of any medieval authorship, especially when those ‘authors’ were lay men and women, ‘uneducated’ and operating away from the regulating gaze of the ecclesiastical fathers.

The aim of this chapter, in conjunction with Chapters Four and Five, has been to explore the significance of words, books and texts in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century English society. This was a culture infused with (often paradoxical) notions of the importance, power, danger and sanctity of words, books and texts. They feared and worshipped, revered and were suspicious of, words, texts and books. Moreover, in the words of R.N. Swanson, ‘medieval christianity, from which the heresies of the contemporary Latin West necessarily derived, was a religion of a Book; but of a
Book which lacked textual rigidity’. To start to understand this culture and its relationship to the Book, this study examined various theological treatises, court depositions, popular satirical narratives, artwork, sermons, mystical treatises and preaching books. Each of these sources revealed a contextual landscape in which words, text and books held an important position. Further, it must be remembered that this was a world in which sacred words were inscribed onto the swords and shields of knights; where monks would dedicate years to producing lavish and intricate illuminated texts; where pilgrims would save every scrap of parchment to worship like holy relics; where sacred books were shackled to the library shelves in chained libraries; and revealingly, where the body of Christ the saviour was conceived of as a book, hanging from the cross, to be read by the faithful. It is in this context that a group of unschooled, unlearned, lay men and women threatened the established order with their own unsanctioned and unregulated textual practices. They sought to become authors, preachers and teachers at a time when authorship in any form was a dangerous proposition. Furthermore, at times they sought, like Christ, to become the religious books they coveted.

As with this chapter, the following chapter uses as its starting point the fourth thematic cluster; images of the disruption of sanctified and unsanctified spaces. The following chapter again explores Margery Baxter’s reported claim to hold a charter of salvation within her womb, but from a different perspective to that considered so far. In Chapter Seven, consideration is given to ideas of ‘space’ (literal and metaphorical), how various consecrated and non-consecrated spaces were used by Lollards (in particular, by Lollard women), and what this reveals about the religious beliefs and practices of fifteenth-century female Lollards. These discussions focus on

73 In Clanchy’s From Memory to Written Record, pp. 333–334, the author notes the practice among medieval knights whereby they had their swords and shields inscribed with prayers and sacred words. Clanchy directs the reader to Oakeshott, The Archaeology of Weapons, 1960, plates 6d and 7b. See also, Elements of the Passion, pages from an ivory devotional book, c.1330–1340, reproduced in MacGregor, Seeing Salvation, p. 159. Also, James Harpur, Inside the Medieval World: A Panorama of Life in the Middle Ages, Australia, Cardigan Street, 1995, pp. 92–93. Francis of Assisi was said to have collected and worshipped letters and scraps of parchment saying ‘letters are the things from which the most glorious name of God is composed’. See Thomas of Celano, ‘Legenda prima’, in S. Francisci, Assissiensis vita et miracula, Lefebure, Rome, Desclée, 1906, p. 83. The medieval practice of chaining books began in the fourteenth century and continued into as late as the eighteenth century. The medieval collection of chained books in the Hereford Cathedral Library in England still survives today. See ‘Chained Book: 15th Century’, Treasures from the World’s Great Libraries, Canberra, National Library of Australia, 2001, p. 50.
spaces within the medieval family house and in the female body. These discussions reveal further evidence of the dangerous, individual and experientially based religiosities of some female Lollards in fifteenth-century Norwich.
Chapter Seven: ‘In Thine Own House’; Female Religious Practices and Beliefs, and Medieval Spaces

‘And if you desire so much to see the true cross of Christ, I will show it you at home in your own house’. Which this deponent being desirous to see, the said Margery, stretching out her arms abroad, said to this deponent: ‘This is the true cross of Christ, and this cross thou oughtest and mayest every day behold and worship in thine own house; and therefore it is but vain to run to the church, to worship dead crosses and images’.

With this claim, reported to Bishop Alnwick’s court in April of 1429 by the neighbour Joan Clyfland, this study finds itself at the very core of the Lollard prosecutions in Norwich; namely, the question of whether Lollards could legitimately read, preach and hear the Word of God, not in sanctified Churches, but rather ‘in thine own house’. For the Lollards of Norwich, the ‘true cross of Christ’ was not found in possession-filled churches surrounded by ‘dead crosses and images’, but rather in the simplicity and integrity of their own homes. For the community and the prosecuting authorities of Norwich, this claim exemplified the dangerous naivety of Lollard hermeneutics and textual activities. By locating their religious activities outside of the consecrated spaces of the Church, the interpretation and preaching of the Scriptures was not easily regulated and controlled by the Church fathers; instead, being left to the ‘uneducated’ laity. Under such circumstances, the laity could apply their own experiences and views to the Word of God, without the regulating influence of the Church authorities. The statement attributed to Baxter is important, as it is firmly situated within one of the major controversies surrounding the Lollards at the time; their use of particular fifteenth-century physical and metaphysical spaces. This chapter investigates these ideas regarding space.

The basis for this chapter is the fourth thematic cluster; images and language associated with the disruption and violation of certain spaces. Here, some of the

comments attributed to Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone that related to their religious and textual activities are examined; in particular, how these intersected with concepts of space. The comments to be considered include the reported claims that Baxter could worship the ‘true cross of Christ … in thine own house’ rather than in any church;\(^2\) that her husband was wont to read to her at night, in her chamber, ‘the law of Christ which was written in a book’;\(^3\) and that she possessed a ‘charter of salvation’ in her womb.\(^4\) Mone’s confession to having ‘receyved and herberwed [harboured] in our hous, and thaym Y have conceled, conforted, supported, maytened and favored with al my paor’ various convicted heretics, and to having ‘ofte tymes kept, holde and continued scoles of heresie yn prive chambres and prive places of oures’ is also examined.\(^5\)

Developing historical understandings about space in previous cultures is a relatively neglected area of historical enquiry. While historians are quick to examine the historical significance of certain events, the issue of where those events occur, tends to receive little attention. Amanda Flather suggests that the ‘links between space, social relations and power are a well-established field of enquiry among scholars of disciplines other than history’.\(^6\) However, attention to how ‘space and place shaped and were shaped by social relations’ has only been a subject of recent interest for medievalists influenced by sociologists, geographers and other social scientists.\(^7\)

Central to this approach is:

\(^{2}\) Ibid.
\(^{3}\) Ibid., p. 595.
\(^{4}\) Ibid., p. 596.
\(^{5}\) Tanner, *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich*, p. 140.
the conceptualisation of the complex and ‘malleable’ term space in terms of social relations. A space is more than, and different from, a physical location or place. A space is an arena of social action. Natt Alcock explains that ‘space is a practised place. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers. Similarly, Hannah More has argued that ‘meanings are not inherent in the organisation of … space, but must be invoked through the activities of social actors’. A place is transformed into a space by the social actors who constitute it through everyday use.8

What this means for historians is that the organisation of space influenced, and was influenced by, social interactions. To understand those interactions, their spatial context must be taken into account. In 1980, Robert David Sack, along with other geographers and social theorists, suggested that to ‘explain why something occurs is to explain why it occurs where it does [emphasis mine]’.9

Using Sack’s contention as a guiding principle, the purpose of this chapter is to explore the significance of ‘space’ to the fifteenth-century Norwich Lollards; in particular, how space would have been understood by Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone. This chapter examines how the Lollards used, negotiated and occupied three particular spaces as a way of revealing the nature of fifteenth-century Lollardy, the danger it posed to the religious and social authorities, the reason for the prosecutions, and the reason for the extent to which these prosecutions were pursued by the authorities. These spaces are consecrated spaces; the family home (especially the inner chambers); and the metaphorical and metaphysical space of the womb (in particular, Margery Baxter’s womb). This chapter argues that the manner in which Lollards engaged with these spaces reflects a larger intellectual and religious shift away from the community mentality of Orthodox Christianity towards a more personal, individual and experiential interaction with God. Further to this, for some of the Lollard women of Norwich, their particular religious beliefs and activities were bound to specific familial, household spaces and their roles within those spaces. Rather than simply observing that most of their religious practices and textual activities took place in or were confined to particular spaces within the home, this

research will argue that some female Lollards took meaning from those spaces; specifically, that they could commune with Christ directly and individually and that their bodies and their homes were the religious sites in which this could occur. Using their homes and their bodies they could form an intimate relationship with Christ, coveting, concealing and engaging with his words and texts. Such understandings were integral, defining features of the theologies of these Lollard women.

This chapter has multiple aims. Firstly, using specific examples from the documents related to the Norwich Heresy Trials, it considers how Lollards generally, and Lollard women specifically, used and negotiated consecrated spaces, the inner chambers of the family home and the metaphorical spaces of the female body in their religious and textual activities. The surviving documents relating to the prosecutions of Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone provide insights into the ways in which these Lollard women used the spaces available to them and incorporated them into their religious models. The spaces they occupied both shaped, and were shaped by, their religious beliefs and textual activities. Consequently this chapter provides another means by which to access the religious philosophies of Baxter and Mone and to make sense of why they were prosecuted. However, to achieve this, it is necessary to first examine what certain spaces meant to people in fifteenth-century England. As already noted, it is problematic to apply the public/private dichotomy to discussions of medieval spaces. This chapter therefore uses the terms ‘non-consecrated’ and ‘consecrated’ to discuss medieval spaces in a more meaningful and appropriate way.

There is a paucity of primary source material available in terms of the arguments and ideas of this chapter. As such, this chapter is dependent upon present-day commentary regarding the medieval house, notions of ‘domestic’ spaces, and concepts of private and public spaces in a medieval setting. This chapter also considers internal spaces relating to the female body and their meanings.

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10 This research is concerned with how medieval women used and negotiated the metaphorical spaces of and within the female in their textual and religious practices. This focus on the female body as a site of meaning and understanding, notions of female embodiment and construction of ‘the feminine’ lends from, and is heavily influenced by, work that has occurred in the feminist tradition over the last forty years. For example: Feminist scholars such as Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Susan Bordo, Judith Butler, Moira Gatens and Elizabeth Grosz. As a starting point see: Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (eds) *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, second edition, Blackwell Publishing, Massachusetts, 2007.
To better understand the religious practices and views of Lollard women, issues of space, how certain medieval spaces were constructed and regarded, and how female Lollards made use of those spaces, is central. For some female Lollards, how they used the spaces available to them was important to their religious beliefs, identities, explanations and experiences. However, in considering the ways these women operated within particular spaces, this chapter moves beyond the idea that the female Lollards practised their religion within the family home purely because, at a practical level, they were forced to by circumstance. This study does not deny that, because of certain social realities, Lollard women’s lives, like most fifteenth-century women’s lives, were predominantly played out within the spaces of the family home. Similarly, as will be discussed further in this chapter, it cannot be denied that the so-called domestic spaces played an important part in both orthodox and heretical female piety. Rather this study emphasises that Lollard women, such as Baxter and Mone, used their social situations and their experiences within the home and applied these to their religious beliefs and thinking. Fifteenth-century women like Baxter and Mone were, in many respects, physically, morally, economically and socially bound to the home. Even within the walls of the home, women often only physically and socially occupied certain limited spaces. Historians such as Ralph Hanna have regarded this as evidence of women’s ‘secondary status’ in general society and within the Lollard movement. However, historians should not regard this reality as an indicator that women were unable to actively participate in the Lollard movement. In spite of, or perhaps because of these ties to the home, spaces within the home became an integral and defining feature of these women’s individual religious expressions. Historians should avoid the assumption that individual women’s ‘confinement’ to the home meant their religious and textual activities were without intellectual or theological meaning. For Baxter and Mone, their homes and their roles within them shaped and were integral to their individual religious beliefs and practices.

The medieval family home, as both a physical structure and a social concept, is central to this chapter. The medieval home was a complex conceptual space that was defined by social codes and rules that are not immediately apparent to the modern-

11 See Oliva, ‘Nuns at home: the domesticity of sacred space’.
day historian. The home is best understood as a space defined by unstable, shifting and fluid degrees of concealment and gender stratification. While certain spaces of the home were at times kept concealed, secluded and secret; at other times, or for other spaces, the house was open, permeable and accessible to the community and its members. The central argument of this chapter is that by moving their Lollard activities into the inner chambers of their houses, rather than conducting them in the hall of the house, the actions of Baxter and Mone reflect the ‘dangerous’ individualist, experiential and personal nature of the Lollard theology and women’s practice of it. Further to these arguments, this chapter examines the conceptual and metaphysical space of the female body, in particular, Margery Baxter’s womb and her reported claim to hold a charter of salvation in it. Through this conceptualisation of the womb as a metaphysical space, the connections between it and the inner chambers of the medieval house become apparent. Certain sections of medieval English society conceptualised the womb and the inner chambers in similar ways, and these ideas echoed certain understandings of women and words. In making these similarities between the concepts of the womb and the inner chamber of the home visible, it will be argued that fifteenth-century ideas about space intersected with ideas about speech, gender, language, materiality and the nature of women. These ideas are important to our understandings of Lollardy and the fifteenth-century Norwich Heresy Trials.

It was vital for the authorities in fifteenth-century Norwich to attempt to regulate certain spaces, as there was a practical and ideological correlation between expression of heretical ideas, discourses and activities and those spaces. The community leaders and authorities of fifteenth-century England, including those of Norwich, understood that in their battle against Lollardy, the need to control and regulate issues of space was foremost. They recognised that both orthodox and heretical discourses were inherently bound to, and defined by, notions of space. In 1497, Bishop Thomas Langton’s Chancellor, Master Nicholas Mayhew examined the Lollard and ‘religious renegade’, Thomas Maryet of St. Olave parish in Southwark, in the diocese of Winchester. It was noted that Mayhew, the investigating cleric, was far less concerned by Thomas Maryet’s apparent errors in doctrine, and far more concerned that Maryet ‘secretly kept and hold and privily rede withyn myn house booke, volumes, tretes and other werke wretyn in English
compiled by John Wykiliff a dampned heretik’ [emphasis mine]. Thomas Maryet’s offence was not solely that he had possessed and read religious texts in his common tongue, but rather that this reading took place ‘secretly’ and away from the immediate gaze of the Church fathers and sections of his community. Without this regulatory gaze and paternalistic influence, the power to interpret the texts was his alone. Thus, while it was crucial for the authorities to ‘regulate’ the production and transmission of vernacular religious texts, it was equally as important for them to control and regulate the spaces that supported heretical activities, especially the activity of preaching, to allow for early detection.

Unfortunately for the fifteenth-century religious authorities, it was not possible to regulate spaces through the differentiation of ‘private’ and ‘public’ settings; no such differentiation existed. Furthermore, the preaching they feared was occurring in both consecrated and non-consecrated spaces. For the authorities of the day, denoting lawful and legitimate preaching by making a distinction between private and public spaces was of little use as no easy distinction existed in the medieval world. The boundaries between the concerns of the community and those of the family were not simply or sharply delineated by the physical limitations of the front door and the four walls of the home. Shannon McSheffrey points to medieval households in which the workshop was integral to the home as evidence that the model of a private, domestic sphere and a public, exterior male sphere is not accurate for this context. Similarly, Sarah Stanbury and Virginia Chieffo Raguin, in their collection of essays concerning

14 The example of Thomas Maryet is interesting, as it refers to a man being questioned for his textual activities within the relative seclusion of the home. It needs to again be noted that Lollard men also participated in activities that were regarded as ‘feminine’. Reading/hearing texts within the home was not confined to just women, but regardless of the gender of the individual involved, the activity itself was regarded as feminine.
15 Anne Hudson notes the importance, indeed the apparent centrality, of preaching to Wycliffism and Lollardy. See Anne Hudson, ‘“Springing cockel in our clene corn”: Lollard Preaching in England around 1400’, in Waugh and Diehl, Christendom and its Discontents, p. 145.
16 It is important here not to make the mistake of assuming that there was an easy and practical distinction made between private and public spaces, and that the authorities defined ‘correct’ preaching along those lines. It is inaccurate to speak of ‘private’ spaces or a ‘public/private’ distinction in the medieval world. Spaces such as the home were, in reality, an extension of ‘public’ spaces, and were no less regulated and defined. However, it is possible to make some distinctions between ‘consecrated’ and ‘non-consecrated’ spaces, while acknowledging that both are highly regulated by the authorities.
17 McSheffrey, Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London, p. 121.
issues of space and gender within the church and its buildings, explore what it meant to have a chantry constructed by the endowment of a female testator, whereby a familial space, intended for private use, is constructed within a public building. Consequently, Archbishop Arundel’s 1407 Constitutions sought to combat the practice of ‘illicit preaching’ in consecrated spaces through the licensing of preachers. This was a response to actions of Lollards such as William Taylor, who, in November 1406, publically delivered a Wycliffite sermon in the heart of London at its most prestigious pulpit, St. Paul’s Cross. With Arundel’s decree, legitimate assembly spaces narrowed and Church-sanctioned preaching could theoretically only occur in spaces easily regulated by the Church; namely consecrated Church-controlled spaces. As Anne Hudson explains:

> Arundel’s Constitutions were directed at two targets, the university world and the world of ordinary parishes; in regard to the latter he singled out two objects for control: biblical translation into the vernacular and preaching.

To be able to control the practice of heterodox preaching, Arundel had to go further than the licensing of preachers. He also had to control the spaces in which the preaching occurred. Moreover, Arundel faced the more difficult problem of regulating the ‘non-consecrated’ spaces of family homes and community settings. Teaching and preaching in non-consecrated spaces was already an established practice before Arundel’s draconian 1407 Constitutions. Afterwards, however, heterodox preaching in consecrated spaces became much ‘more difficult to arrange and more necessary to conceal’. As such, the practice of Lollard preaching moved into people’s homes. In her paper, ‘Lollard Preaching in England around 1400’, Hudson regarded the use of citizens’ homes as the venues for Lollard preaching primarily from a practical point of view. That is, that the move was born out of the

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18 Virginia Chieffo Raguin and Sarah Stanbury (eds), Women’s Space: Patronage, Place, and Gender in the Medieval Church, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2005, p. 6. Although Raguin and Stanbury offer this interesting example in their introduction, their work does not generally challenge the public/private dualism or question its application to the medieval period.
19 Arundel’s Constitutions were developed in 1407 and promulgated in 1409. Illicit preaching in important consecrated spaces was possible up until the eve of this legislation. See Hudson, ‘Springing cockel in our clene corn’. Archbishop Arundel’s 1407 Constitutions was in part a response to the practice of ‘illicit preaching’ that was occurring until the promulgation of the legislation.
21 Ibid., p. 145.
22 See Ibid., p. 135.
23 Ibid., p. 140.
pragmatic need for concealment and ‘privacy’. She argues that ‘privacy was imposed by opposition, and the tighter the bishops’ net was drawn to catch heretics, the greater the need for secrecy’.  

While Lollard preaching and Lollard schools were no doubt organised in people’s homes for the practical purposes of ‘easier’ concealment, Hudson’s argument is problematic for two key reasons. Firstly, the argument is dependent upon an apparent distinction between public and private, in which private spaces are free from public monitoring and regulation. Hudson refers to so-called ‘private’ and ‘public’ spaces without adequate analysis of the appropriateness of these modern distinctions. The unquestioned use of the male/public and female/private or domestic dichotomy ‘runs the risk of an unhistorical, contextually insensitive application of those terms’. Historians need to ensure that any application of the terms fits with the experiences of the historical figures themselves. Using the example of Margery Baxter and the deposition made against her by her neighbour, it is clear that a distinction between private and public spaces was not the case in fifteenth-century Norwich. Through the ‘eyes’ of Margery’s neighbour, who made allegations and provided evidence of impropriety against her, the gaze of sections of the Norwich community and the interrogating clerics found its way into the innermost chamber of Margery Baxter’s home to expose the nightly activities between Baxter and her husband. Through her prosecution it was revealed to the court that Margery’s husband was wont to read to her at night, in her chamber, ‘the law of Christ which was written in a book’.

The second reason that Hudson’s argument is problematic is that she does not examine the theological or political reasons for preaching in the concealed and non-consecrated spaces of the family home. Although Hudson acknowledges that the act

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24 The historian Theresa D. Kemp takes a similar position to that of Hudson. Kemp suggests that the rise of the vernacular for religious purposes facilitated a shift in theological spaces; that is, that theological discourses shift from clerical spaces into the concealed spaces of the homes of the laity. As such, she suggests that the vernacular is ‘dangerous’, not just because it allows the laity to participate in religious discussions, but because it allows these discussions to occur in spaces and places not so easily controlled by the authorities. Kemp, ‘The Lingua Materna’, p. 233. Unfortunately, Kemp also accepts that these so-called ‘private’ spaces were ‘safer’ and away from the controlling gaze of the Church authorities without applying any analysis to these ideas. I would suggest the reality was far more complicated than this.


of unorthodox preaching in highly visible and ideologically significant consecrated spaces was an important part of the religiosity and politics of the early Wycliffites, she does not extend this possibility to the lay-Lollards preaching and teaching in their own homes. Just as William Taylor knew the intellectual and political significance of using the highly prestigious pulpit at St. Paul’s Cross in London to deliver his Lollard sermon, and just as Nicholas Hereford, John Aston, Robert Alyngton and Laurence Bedeman knew the challenge they were issuing to the authorities by preaching to the laity in the fields and commons, so was preaching and hearing sermons in their homes an important part of Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone’s individual religious beliefs and activities. In their homes, they were able to create an intimate, individual relationship with Christ and could use their own experiences to understand his teachings and communicate this to others. They could use their homes to covet, hide, nurture and protect God’s words and texts, as well as his persecuted followers, as if they were nurturing Christ himself. From the ways in which Baxter and Mone speak of and use the non-consecrated spaces of their family homes, there is evidence of an experiential, personal and familial faith in which space plays an important part. While particular Lollard men preached in highly visible, consecrated spaces as an act of defiance against the Church’s claim that only particular people had the right to preach and teach, Lollard women also practised their religion for the same reasons, but in their homes. Although Lollard women tended to be involved in teaching rather than preaching, it was the non-consecrated nature of their activities that is important.

It is apparent from the actions and words of Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone that they knew the ideological significance of the spaces in which their individual religiosities existed and operated. Even though Baxter and Mone’s religious practices centred primarily on the family home, their religious activities were both defined, and sometimes confined, by notions of space. There is evidence that they therefore sought to negotiate the theological meanings of this space. In the deposition against her, Margery Baxter is alleged to have remarked that she was better able to ‘behold and worship the true cross of Christ’ in her own home, than in any Church. 28 This statement drew an important distinction between consecrated and

28 Ibid.
non-consecrated spaces, to deny the relevance of consecrated spaces altogether. The ‘author’ of this statement seemed to be aware of the implications of preaching and speaking in non-consecrated, household spaces. The meanings of their words were at least in part determined by the space in which they found articulation. For Margery Baxter, it seems that an important feature of her religious practices was the idea of taking spirituality, theology and hermeneutics away from:

the cursed pope, cardinals, archbishop, and bishops, and especially the bishop of Norwich and others that support and maintain heresies and idolatry, reigning and ruling over the people … to sustain their pride, riot, and idleness.\(^\text{29}\)

For Baxter, ‘God dwelleth not in such churches’,\(^\text{30}\) the implication being that he is instead found in the homes of the ‘simple folk’.\(^\text{31}\) One can take from this that, for Baxter and perhaps for other Lollards, the act of consecrating a space was a largely meaningless and hollow Church act that had little to do with where God actually resided.

The medieval familial home was important to Lollard women and their activities. Therefore, regulation of this space formed a crucial element in the battle against Lollardy. The historians Steven Justice and Ralph Hanna observed the significance of space in defining and shaping the religious practices of the Norwich women. However, they do not take full, meaningful account of this observation. Justice argues that Margery Baxter’s faith was ‘elaborately and consciously, a *domestic* faith, with the house, family, and the maintenance of both at the centre of her religious values, a yardstick to take measure of doctrine’.\(^\text{32}\) Similarly, Hanna notes the extent to which the Norwich women were tied to and defined by their roles in the home and the family. However, they go on to regard this as a sign of their inability to attain a more ‘fully fledged masculine realm of activity’.\(^\text{33}\) As it was an important part of their religious self-identities, at both the ideological and the practical level, the Norwich religious authorities understood the importance of regulating the spaces in which Lollard textual and linguistic acts occurred. The Norwich trials provide evidence of the community and the authorities ‘entering’ the family home and

\(^{\text{29}}\) Ibid.
\(^{\text{30}}\) Ibid., p. 594.
\(^{\text{31}}\) Ibid., p. 595.
household to achieve this. However, the textual activities of Lollard women violated spatial ‘laws’, not only at a physical level, but also at a metaphysical level.

At a physical level, the uniquely feminine, family-based and household positions the women occupied in the home become a defining feature of their personal theologies. In his ‘forced’ deposition/recantation to the courts, the Norwich Lollard William Wright made certain revelations of heresy against his colleagues. While he accused various men, such as William Taylor of Ludney, Hugh Pie and William White, of ‘having often conference upon the Lollards’ doctrine’, Hawisia Mone’s ‘crime’ was apparently having ‘favoured them [other Lollards], and receiveth them often’ into her home. A gender distinction seems to have been made between the textual activities of men and women, and between what constituted heretical criminality for men and women. As a woman, Mone’s ‘crime’ was in allowing the home to be used for politically subversive and religiously heretical activities. The danger for the Church was not just that Lollard activities were frequently located within the home, but that their location was indicative of the more personal religious experience women such as Mone were seeking. The question is whether the court placed emphasis on women’s activities in their homes because they regarded such activities as particularly deviant for women, or because this was, in reality, the only way that women participated in Lollardy. In either case, the household and the home form an important part of women’s religious philosophies and practices, especially for Baxter and Mone, and this bears further analysis.

For Lollard women, as with Orthodox Christian women of the period, their homes were central to their religious lives. This was not just for reasons of practicality, but also for philosophical purposes. For Baxter the ‘true cross of Christ’ was found in ‘thine own home’. The Church by comparison was a place of vanity and dead images. As individuals wanting a more experiential and personal relationship with Christ than Orthodox Christianity could offer them, for both Hawisia Mone and Margery Baxter, their families and their homes were pivotal to their religious

theories and beliefs. As women unable to attend university like the Oxford Wycliffites; unable to leave their children, families and their homes to travel to London to converse with William White about Lollard doctrine; and more than likely incapable of autonomously reading the coveted vernacular New Testaments, they had to construct their own ways of understanding and practising Lollardy. As such, they both turned to their homes as an extension or expression of Lollard doctrine and their individual religious beliefs. In turn, their homes allowed them to articulate and exemplify a feminine and familial faith. This was a faith grounded in the roles they performed and experiences they had as women, mothers and wives within the family home. They used those experiences to explain and shape their religious beliefs and to create an experientially based connection to Christ. For Margery Baxter, the bulk of her spiritual story unfolds in the space of her family home. It is here that her husband reads to her by night ‘the law of Christ’; that she is able to worship ‘the true cross of Christ’; that her neighbour Joan Clyfland’s servant Agnes Bethom finds her cooking bacon despite the Lenten fast; and that she speaks to Clyfland about Lollard beliefs, while sewing before the fire. Moreover, it is the space into which she repeatedly invites the servants Joan Grymell and Agnes Bethom, as well as Joan Clyfland, and presumably her own family as well, to join in the family’s faith. It is also the space in which she concealed and gave refuge to William White and his books.

For Hawisia Mone, the family home was so central to her family’s religious activities that their house became a key meeting place and a Lollard school. At her trial Mone confessed to having ‘receyved and herberwed in our hous, and thaym Y have conceyled, conforted, supported, maytened and favored with al my paor’ various convicted heretics; and also to having ‘ofte tymes kept, holde and continued scoles of heresie yn prive chambres and prive places of oures’. Unfortunately, in deriving meaning and religious understanding from feminine household roles and the familial space of the home, these women violated their society’s spatial laws; that is, the laws

39 Ibid., p. 140.
that defined good speaking and the proper use of space. This brought them under close legal scrutiny, with the authorities labelling their activities as deviant and illicit.

As noted already in this thesis, the presence and use of domestic spaces, roles and language in medieval religious women’s lives was not unusual and nor was it confined to the heterodox religions. For this reason it cannot be suggested that Baxter or Mone’s activities were considered heretical simply because they often took place in the family home or were fused with domestic activities and roles. Orthodox female piety was often infused with domestic imagery and could take place in feminised and domestic spaces. In her study of nuns at home, Marilyn Oliva examined thirteenth- and fourteenth-century accounts and fifteenth- and sixteenth-century inventories of English convents, and, by looking at the decorations of their monastic interiors, argued that medieval English nuns’ spiritual domesticity was grounded in the physical elements of their medieval houses. She argued that although literary scholars and theologians interested in the development and promotion of the Eucharist and the Sacred Heart, in particular, had examined the literature, rituals and visions that sacralised domestic settings, scholars were yet to address the implicit domesticity of nuns’ lives.\textsuperscript{40} Oliva wrote that:

The language, literature and rituals of medieval female monasticism are imbued with domestic imagery. Family ties, for example, are evoked when monastic superiors are enjoined to act as mothers to their spiritual daughters, the nuns in their convents. A fifteenth-century English translation of the devotional work \textit{The doctrine of the hert}, addressed to a community of nuns, allegorises household chores as spiritual exercises. Even the image of the \textit{Sponsa Christi} – Bride of Christ – and the symbols that thus inscribe a nun’s vocation and profession – the veil, ring and salutations for her groom – though usually discussed in terms of a mystical union with Christ, nevertheless conjure the domesticity which marriage implies.\textsuperscript{41}

Oliva’s study includes examples of nuns’ household furnishings and decorations often painted, engraved or embroidered with images of Christ or images of religious devotion. For example, tables in the nuns’ individual sleeping quarters which had wooden crucifixes attached to them, silk coverlets embroidered with images of Christ and spoons engraved with the face of Christ. She also includes examples of

\textsuperscript{40} Oliva, ‘Nuns at home: the domesticity of sacred space’, p.146.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Ibid.}, p.145.
prayer books and wall hangings within the chapels and churches decorated with similar material and imagery. These provided ‘a link between the the domestic and sacral spaces of the convents, making the chapels and churches extensions of the nuns’ domestic space’.\(^\text{42}\) For Oliva, this demonstrates what she calls a continuum of sacred/domestic space and suggests a permeable boundary between the two spaces.\(^\text{43}\)

Oliva’s study is important for this thesis as it again reinforces the intersections between the domestic and the sacred in medieval religious women’s lives. Domestic language, spaces, imagery and roles were important features of both orthodox and heterodox female piety and practice. Women owning and reading devotional literature and praying to and contemplating God within domestic settings was not in and of itself deviant or heretical behaviour. However, when the books were contraband Lollard books and the quiet contemplation of God and his Word gave way to women preaching, teaching and interpreting the Word of God for themselves and for others, the question of heresy could arise. For Hawisia Mone and Margery Baxter the question did.

To understand how the individual religious practices of Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone came to be regarded as dangerous and heretical by the authorities and sections of the community, this study needs to examine the nature and social significance of the medieval home and the spaces within it. One of the primary assumptions of this chapter is that the medieval home, regardless of its size or social rank, was much more than a structure built for human habitation and shelter. A society’s assumptions and values towards gender, class, family, education and religion are expressed and encoded in the very structure, spatial form and use of particular spaces within the home. Maryanne Kowaleski and P.J.P. Goldberg noted, with respect to medieval England, that:

> Whereas ‘house’ could be understood as a primarily functional structure providing warmth, shelter and a place to sleep, but not necessarily the focus of significant social interaction, of intimacy, or of private devotion, ‘home’, the locus of domesticity, was an ideological construct that invested much greater cultural significance in the physical structure as a stage for playing out a range of social and gender relations. The physical

\(^{42}\) Ibid., p.156.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., pp.160 and 148.
form of the house and the arrangement of rooms had meanings that were shaped by and shaped the lives of the people who used them.44

Physical spaces, such as those within the medieval home, took on social meaning according to how and by whom they were used. As the geographer Doreen Massey expressed: ‘It is not just that the spatial is socially constructed; the social is spatially constructed too’.45

Any ideas of the medieval home being a private, domestic sphere, free from ‘public’ scrutiny do not hold. Pre-modern households were not ‘areas of privacy’ but rather ‘public political institutions’.46 It has been noted that, in England, the:

- borders of early modern houses had considerable social, legal, metaphysical and gendered significance … but … the internal affairs of households were considered to be a matter of legitimate ‘public’ interest and interventions by neighbours were relatively routine. It was perfectly permissible for neighbours to spy through windows or cracks in walls to secure proof of sexual misdoings.47

Thus, the boundaries between the outside and inside worlds were physically and metaphysically porous. Medieval houses:

- were much more permeable, the walls thinner, and the borders between a house’s interior and exterior more porous than modern domestic spaces. Witnesses in ecclesiastical courts testified about what they had seen when looking through a window or peeking through a hole in the wall, or what they has heard when deliberately listening at a door, or inadvertently because the walls were far from soundproof.48

It his 1999 study, A History of Domestic Space, the historian Peter Ward emphasised this notion of the home as a complex social space. He suggested that:

The relationship between the house and the lives it enfolds is complex. Now as in the past—we choose, build, or alter our dwellings in order to meet some of our needs beyond the basic one of shelter. In turn, because our homes are physical spaces, they impose constraints on us just as they create opportunities for us. In a sense the home is the theatre of our domestic experience, the stage on which we enact much of the drama of our lives.49

To understand the possible ‘opportunities’ and ‘constraints’ imposed on the Lollard women of Norwich by the spaces of their homes, the structure and nature of the

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44 Kowaleski and Goldberg, Medieval Domesticity, p. 9.
47 Flather, Gender and Space in Early Modern England, p. 42.
48 McSheffrey, Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London, p. 127.
49 Ward, A History of Domestic Space, p. 3.
fifteenth-century house; in particular, those of the ‘middling sort’ or domestic craftsman, need to be investigated.

This next section examines two social spaces within the medieval home and what historians have made of them; that is, the hall and the inner chambers. These two spaces are significant, as they existed at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of concepts of visibility, enclosure and permeability. How medieval people negotiated and ‘violated’ these spaces makes visible the codes and conventions that defined them.

According to historians such as Mark Girouard, Nathaniel Lloyd, Joan Thirsk and Reginald Turnor, the typical medieval house plan consisted of a central hall open to the roof timbers, a central hearth on the floor of the hall, and either a single or upper and lower-end inner chamber, usually lofted over. The pivotal part of any house, regardless of size or status, whether a country or town house, was the hall. It was here that the majority of activities occurred and that the comings and goings of the household took place. In reference to the medieval hall, the historian Nathaniel Lloyd wrote that:

the word hall was applied to any extensive roofed space, and in the medieval period not only to the principal apartment of a large house, but equally to that of one so small as scarcely to be more than a cabin. In this respect the line from Chaucer, c.1386, ‘Fful sooty was hir bour and eek hire halle’, refers to the humble home of a widow, consisting only of two apartments—the living-room or hall and the sleeping-room or bower, both grimy from the smoke of the fire which burned on the hall floor.

Apart from the inner chambers, all that the family needed for daily living was located in the hall: two framed tables, two chairs, stools and benches or forms; the pots and pans used for cooking, pewter items for the table; and pails, churns and

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51 Lloyd, A History of the English House, pp. 41–42.
wooden equipment used for milk.\(^{52}\) Household activities such as eating, cooking, sewing and often sleeping, all took place in this space. Further to this, household activities and chores constantly brought people in and out of this space. For domestic craftsmen such as tailors, clothiers, weavers and brewers, their trade could often affect their living arrangements and could even bring their trade into the home; particularly into the hall.

The tailor worked in the hall/living room of his house, since he was no purveyor of material but made up the cloth brought to him by the customer. Where the weaver carried on his craft depended on the scale of his operations. He most commonly had two looms, and certainly when he had more than one his weaving was usually done in a shop—that is a room or building additional to his house. Occasionally poor weavers with only one loom worked in the living room of their house, or else in what would otherwise have been the parlour or downstairs chamber.\(^{53}\)

In short, the hall was an open, accessible and permeable space in which the comings and goings of the household occurred. It was a space frequented by the immediate family, servants, workers, apprentices, customers, neighbours and community members. The hall was very much a thoroughfare and a space of community access and activity.

Located off the central room or hall in a typical middling English house of the fourteenth and fifteenth century was the inner room, inner chamber or privy chamber. This was primarily where the family slept. Unlike the hall, these inner rooms were not rooms of general access and activities. They accorded the family or individual a certain degree of ‘privacy’ from outsiders. P.J.P. Goldberg and Maryanne Kowleski note the ‘intimacy’ of this space. This was not only where ‘a wife and her husband slept, but also where she gave birth to her children, entertained female friends and kin, and said her prayers and other devotional practices’.\(^{54}\) Notwithstanding this, these rooms should not be regarded as being ‘private’ as such. There were no doors, in a modern sense, to separate spaces or rooms from one another, and members of the household; servants, kin, and those considered ‘family’, could come and go from these rooms. As Peter Ward observed:

Family or household privacy also took quite different forms then than it does today. A home, of course, was its residents’ space, the place where

\(^{53}\) Ibid., pp. 760–761.
they ate and slept, worked and played, loved and argued. But as historians of the family have long known, these homes often harboured more than the nuclear family. Kin, boarders, and servants commonly formed part of the household as well, at least at some point in family life’s long cycle. The boundaries of the household were once more porous than they’ve become, and all those who regularly slept under one roof could claim some rights of membership in the group.\footnote{Ward, \textit{A History of Domestic Space}, pp. 153–154.}

Conversely, Mark Girouard suggested that:

\begin{quote}
the idea that there was no privacy in a mediaeval house is based on a total misreading of the mediaeval plan. There was little privacy from personal servants, but a great deal of privacy from everyone else. What may appear to be passage rooms were in fact usually rooms of public access, such as halls or parlours.\footnote{Girouard, \textit{Life in the English Country House}, p. 54.}
\end{quote}

Despite the problematic nature of the term and concept of ‘privacy’, Girouard’s comments here about the nature of spaces in a medieval house are important. As historians, it is important not to unintentionally apply present-day understandings of ‘privacy’ to medieval housing; ‘privacy is a slippery term and it must be used with some care’.\footnote{Ward, \textit{A History of Domestic Space}, p. 4.} There was no clear distinction between so-called public and private spaces in medieval society, as there was no concept of privacy itself. What can be observed however is that, within the medieval house, certain spaces afforded greater isolation and concealment to the family or to individuals than other spaces. At one end of the spectrum existed the hall, which was accessible to neighbours, customers, servants, apprentices, friends and other members of the community. These were passage rooms or thoroughfares in which the comings and goings of the house legitimately occurred. At the other end of the spectrum existed the inner rooms, such as the inner chamber or the privy chamber. These rooms were far less porous and penetrable. Although still accessible to kin, servants, boarders and family, these rooms were not legitimately accessible to the general community. The social significance of the inner chamber and any possible activities that occurred within this space was that they were far more enclosed and concealed from the community. Whereas the hall was an open thoroughfare, the inner chamber was an end point and a space that could not be penetrated in the same way.
Similar ideas about space, privacy and publicity, gender, intimacy and enclosure in the medieval home are evident in Shannon McSheffrey’s 2006 examination of marriage contracts in fifteenth-century London. McSheffrey examined records in London’s ecclesiastical courts relating to marital litigation. Her work focussed on where couples exchanged consent and where ‘domestic contracts’ were made. McSheffrey noted that these records provide exact detail about where this occurred ‘precisely because it meant something’.\(^\text{58}\) She wrote that:

> whether a contract of marriage was made in a chamber or in a hall, in a tavern or in the street, in the house of the woman’s employer or her father, in her own house, or in the house of the man—all were locations with social meaning. Studying these nuances more closely yields new understandings of the nature of marriage in fifteenth-century England and our own conceptualizations of privacy and publicity in late medieval social relations.\(^\text{59}\)

Most commonly, contracts of marriage were made in the house of the woman’s parents, denoting that although it was an intimate and private relationship to be entered into, the transaction was an open and public one of some interest to the community. The precise location within the home was also telling in terms of notions of propriety, publicity and respectability:

> In many houses, the hall was both the largest and in some ways the most public of rooms, and predictably it was the most common venue for the exchange of marital consent. Halls were public enough places that in some cases deponents did not even know the name of the person whose house they entered to witness a contract of marriage.\(^\text{60}\)

Marriage contracts formed in other, more enclosed spaces within the home, such as in the inner chambers, bedchambers, the garden or even in the buttery, were usually (but not always) problematic in some way; either because they were occurring without the consent of the woman’s parents, or because the woman was confined to bed because of childbirth.\(^\text{61}\) McSheffrey’s examination demonstrates that in terms of fifteenth-century England and ideas about propriety and respectability, where something occurs is as important as what occurs. Her work also demonstrates the illicit nature of the contracts made in the inner sanctum of the home. The medieval familial home was not a private space. While the spaces within it can be understood

\(^\text{58}\) McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London*, p. 121.


in terms of varying degrees of enclosure and intimacy, they were still heavily socially prescribed and shaped the morality and legitimacy of the activities that occurred within them.

Just as certain spaces are significant, so too are movements within spaces important to our understandings of Lollard women and their religious and textual activities. In her 1986 work, *Space, Text, and Gender*, Henrietta Moore wrote of the relationship between ‘knowledge, power, and space’ in her analysis of domestic space as the “text” within which movement and action are analogous to speaking and reading (ie., interpreting) a literary text.\(^6\) The textual practices of the Lollard women in question saw them moving their religious activities away from the sanctified spaces of the Church, but not to the relatively permeable and open space of the hall; rather, they moved into the more concealed and closed space of the inner chambers. The social implications of this physical shift are enormous. The physical movement of the Lollard individuals into the inner most spaces of the medieval house has two implications. Firstly, it shows a need for concealment for reasons of safety and secrecy. Secondly, it indicates the larger intellectual and psychological movement away from the dominant community mentality.

In a desire for individual salvation and a personal understanding of Christ, Lollards moved away from an orthodox community-based religiosity, towards a more insular and family-based theology, built on a greater personal interaction with God and his texts. This is symbolised and reflected in their relocation to the inner chambers of their homes. Sections of the Norwich community and its religious leaders were fearful of this physical removal because it represented a rejection of community and community thinking in favour of a potentially dangerous individual and experiential relationship with God. While these movements, both physical and psychological, may not be wholly indicative of a desire for ‘individualism’ in the Enlightenment sense of the word, and while they were borne of a need for secrecy and concealment, they do suggest a more general move away from collective thinking. This is supported by the court-related documents for Baxter and Mone in which these Lollard women refute the need to participate in Orthodox Church activities such as

confession or Lent, and instead opt to clandestinely worship God among their families in their homes.\textsuperscript{63} For sections of the community of fifteenth-century Norwich, this was the danger of the Lollards and the Lollard hermeneutic; on many levels, Lollardy promoted the physical and intellectual rejection of ‘the community’. In the case of the Norwich Lollards, their physical movement within the spatial structure of the family home reflects their religious beliefs.

Throughout this study, Hawisia Mone and Margery Baxter’s individual religious beliefs and practices have been described as being feminine and familial in nature and inherently bound to the family home and their roles within it. It has been suggested that the family home offered them, as women, a greater degree of religious autonomy and self-definition than they were otherwise accorded by Orthodox Christianity. As women, often socially, metaphorically and physically bound to the home, their religious identities were understandably intertwined with notions of and experiences within the home. However, this is not to say that being tied to the home limited these women in terms of their religious freedoms and expression. On the contrary, the non-consecrated spaces in which their religious activities were located allowed these women a more personal experience with God, which is exactly what they were seeking.

Further evidence of the primacy that feminine, household-based activities had in certain Lollard women’s lives can be seen when, at particular points in the documents relating to Hawisia Mone and Margery Baxter, there is evidence of their roles and functions within their families and their homes. References to their familial roles ‘intrude’ into the documents and the legal processes recorded therein, and remind the audience of the nature of the lives of those captured within the document. Some historians, Hanna in particular, regard women’s ties to the home as a further indication of the limited and ‘inactive’ support roles some Lollard women played in the religious movement. However, there is much evidence to argue contrary to this and to see women’s roles in the home as enabling them certain religious expression and understanding. When writing of the anxieties of female authorship and spirituality in Christine de Pizan’s work, \textit{Livre de la Cite des Dames}, the historian

\textsuperscript{63} Tanner, \textit{Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich} and Pratt, \textit{The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe}.

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Maureen Quilligan made some interesting observations about the presence of what she calls a ‘humdrum domesticity’. Quilligan noted that in *Cite des Dames*, just as Christine comes across the works of Matheolus, an integral moment in both the text and her spiritual development, Christine’s mother calls her to supper. Quilligan asks her reader to:

Imagine anyone calling any of the protagonists of allegorical dream visions to supper just after he has picked up the text which will be his authority in the subsequent journey … Unlike Dante (or Chaucer, or the narrator of the *Rose*), Christine takes time out to eat.

Similarly, throughout the depositions made by and against Hawisia Mone and Margery Baxter, there is important evidence of this ‘humdrum domesticity’. However, unlike for Christine de Pizan, for Baxter and Mone, the presence of household roles, chores and activities does not represent an unwelcome intrusion into their religious lives, but is rather a pivotal part of it. It has already been noted that most of the heresy charges made against the women related in one way or another to their family homes and the activities occurring within them. For example, Baxter concealed Lollard texts in her home, invited people into her home for the purposes of hearing/reading Lollard texts, proselytised individuals while sewing by the fire and broke Lent in her home. Similarly Mone organised for the ritual breaking of Lent in her home, allowed her household to participate in and conduct ‘schools of heresy’ and harboured known heretics in her house. Added to this, both women invited outsiders into the privy chamber or inner chambers of their homes to participate in religious and heretical activities.

While not the basis of the charges against them, Baxter and Mone also came to use their daily household chores to explain and bring meaning to larger doctrinal and theological ideas. This is exemplified by Margery Baxter’s reported assertions

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69 Tanner, *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich*, p. 140.
70 *Ibid*.
denying the sacraments and the Church Doctrine of Transubstantiation. She is reported to have said that:

if that sacrament were God, the true body of Christ, there would be infinite gods, because a thousand priests and more everyday make a thousand gods, and afterwards eat those gods, and once they are eaten discharge them through their hinder parts into the stinking latrine, where you can find plenty of such gods, if you care to sift through.72

This statement represents not just the apparent danger of Lollardy’s literalist hermeneutics, but also the astuteness of Baxter’s comprehension and explanation. Baxter’s analysis of and counter-argument to the Doctrine of Transubstantiation are shrewd and intelligent, while simultaneously being framed in terms of female household knowledge and tasks. The significance of Baxter and Mone’s individual religiosities is not just that they are physically located within and dependent upon their homes, but that their homes are integral to their spiritual understandings and theological arguments. The danger for the religious authorities was that this was a dialogue they could not control; first, because they did not operate in the spaces in which it was occurring; and second, because they were not privy to the activities that women undertook on a daily basis in the home. Women, however, understood these household chores and activities and could participate in a shared dialogue and understanding, independent of men. As a historian exploring the potential significance of medieval concepts of ‘space’ to the female Lollard’s experiences, it is important to reiterate that the significance of ‘space’ is not simply about where female Lollards physically locate and practise their religion; it is about how space and their use of spaces defines and gives meaning to their spiritual beliefs.

Throughout this thesis, certain key images or statements from Joan Clyfland’s deposition against her neighbour, Margery Baxter, have continually appeared. One of these statements is Baxter’s reported claim that, even if convicted of heresy, she should not be burned, for ‘she had a charter of salvation in her [womb]’.73 This image, discussed already in Chapters Five and Six, is of interest. Some historians, such as Tanner in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, give this statement little attention and attribute to it little significance or meaning. For Tanner, it is not much more than ‘an interesting remark, suggesting a belief that women were exempt

72 Tanner, Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, p. 45.
from being burnt if they were pregnant’. Although this is a fair and logical interpretation of the statement, there are other interpretations which also warrant consideration. This thesis has argued that this reported claim to hold a charter of salvation within the womb is highly significant and warrants much greater attention. This statement needs to be examined within the context of fifteenth-century attitudes towards the perceived nature of women, female physicality, female linguistic perversity and notions of certain spaces. It is important to examine how, and indeed why, Baxter uses the metaphorical and metaphysical space of her womb to locate her religious experiences.

The case of Margery Baxter, as presented to Bishop Alnwick’s court, exemplifies the importance of ‘feminine’ textual activities occurring in feminine, familial and household-bound spaces to the women of the Lollard community. Further, her case exemplifies the need for the Church authorities to regulate and control the spaces in which these activities occurred. From the deposition made to the courts, it is evident that an important aspect to Baxter’s individual textual activities and religious beliefs is the concealment of sacred texts. Just as she secretly heard the law of Christ read to her in her inner chamber at night, and just as she carried on her person books from Yarmouth, and then secretly hid William White’s books in her house for five days, so too did she carry the most sacred of texts: the charter of salvation, hidden in her womb. As the historian Rita Copeland wrote:

she carries the text of her own safekeeping in her womb, a place of utterly private sanctity beyond the powers of official examination or authentication. Like the private chamber in which her husband read her the ‘lex Christi’, and like the secret reading covens of the Lollards in general, the hiding of the text of salvation in her womb represents the exercise of private and this autonomous interpretative power. Within the secret confines of the womb Baxter exercises her interpretative prerogative of literalism by literalizing her doctrinal independence from orthodox supervision: like the Virgin, with whom she achieves a literal identification, she held within her the transformation of Spirit into letter, so salvation into her own personalized charter.

Although Copeland’s reliance on concepts of the ‘private’ is problematic, her observations convey that, for the Church authorities, the danger of Baxter’s claim

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74 Tanner, ‘Lollard Women’.
76 Ibid., p. 596; Tanner, ‘Lollard Women’.
77 Rita Copeland, ‘Why Women Can’t Read’, p 278.
was great. Baxter’s comment typifies the literalist hermeneutics the authorities feared. With her claim, the Scriptures were no longer safely enclosed in monasteries or universities, they moved around and were hidden in secret, concealed spaces, unable to be controlled or regulated. Moreover, the ideal of the sealed female body was violated and sacred texts became associated with the permeable, oozing female womb.78 Added to this, Baxter’s claim in effect aligned her with the sacred figure of the Virgin Mary.

In a medieval setting, there were important connections and conceptual similarities between ideas of the womb and certain enclosed spaces, including the inner chambers already discussed.79 This is something that has been noted by a number of historians.80 These spaces, however, should not simplistically be understood as ‘feminine’ spaces; rather, they were spaces that, like concepts and understandings of women of the period, were defined by notions of enclosure and integrity through impenetrability. In their 2005 work on the female anchorite phenomena and the intersection of concepts of gender and enclosure in the Middle Ages, Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards explore ‘the complex relationship between gender, power and enclosure’.81 They note that medical and gynaecological lore influenced how anchorite women viewed their enclosure, and that female anatomy provided a way of understanding and explaining the physical and metaphysical space of the anchorite’s cell and her role within it.82

Similar connections between the enclosed spaces of the womb and the inner chambers of the familial home are drawn in Gail McMurray Gibson’s 1999 paper on seeing and performing late medieval childbirth.83 McMurray Gibson examines the inner chambers when used as the birthing room, drawing conceptual connections between the conceptual and physical spaces of the womb and the chambers. She

78 For a discussion of the sealed female body, see Lochrie, Margery Kempe.
79 During the medieval period, the term ‘womb’ could refer to more than the uterus; it could also refer ambiguously to the belly, stomach or abdomen. The terms ‘maris’ and ‘matrice’ referred specifically to the uterus or womb. For some discussions of this see McAvoy and Hughes-Edwards, Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs, pp. 27–30.
80 Including Karma Lochrie, Gail McMurray Gibson and Georges Duby. This was also noted in Liz Herbert-McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards text, Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs.
82 Ibid., pp. 10–11.
83 Gibson, ‘Scene and Obscene’.
argues that ‘the power of the birthing room was as significant as it was anomalous; it was within the enclosed space of the childbearing body that medieval lay-women usually found the only room of their own’. When speaking of the inner chamber of the family home in the Middle Ages, the historian Georges Duby noted in 1994 that:

women usually found themselves forced to remain indoors in that room which, in the heart of the house, was like a womb. In this enclosed existence we can recognize what were the essential female functions—procreation and the control of the most mysterious secrets of life, those associated with birth and death (washing the bodies of the newborn and the dead). There was thus a natural metaphorical correspondence between the inside of the house and the female body.

The work of McAvoy, Hughes-Edwards, Gibson and Duby supports the idea that, conceptually, internal female spaces such as the womb were, in a medieval context, understood in the same terms as internal spaces within the familial home. Both were viewed in terms of physical integrity and enclosure. Where this research differs is that, firstly, it applies these same ideas to the female Lollards of fifteenth-century Norwich. Secondly, and more importantly, it explores the question of how women then made use of these connections between internal spaces of the home and the womb to negotiate for themselves places of religious authority. Lollard women are an interesting example, as they use the metaphysical and literal spaces that women were confined to as sites of religious expression and as powerful sources of religious authority. It was the locating of the charter of salvation in Margery Baxter’s womb that became her claim to authority and, potentially, her immunity from prosecution.

Interestingly, medieval ideas about the female body and female speech intersected, and were regulated through, concepts of space. According to Bynum, medieval science, together with Christian theology, constructed a physiological model in which woman were defined by ‘breaches in boundaries’. The medieval theory of humours, which identifies women as humid, fumy and excessively moist, also

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84 Ibid., p. 10.
rendered them more susceptible to external influences. According to this medieval science, women’s physiological breaches made them much more vulnerable to sickness. These same ideas are present in medieval theology:

This physiological susceptibility to external influences finds its theological equivalent in the moral breaches in boundaries associated with woman’s nature. It is no coincidence that chastity is defined for woman as a physical and spiritual *integritas*, or intactness. The religious life for women consists primarily in adopting boundaries and maintaining an unbroken body.

Further,

the sealed body, then, becomes the sign not only of virginity but of the *integritas* of all the senses, particularly speech and sight. When virgins are then instructed not to break that which seals them together with God and with themselves, they are being called to enclosure at many levels. The unbroken flesh ultimately means bodily closure and silence.

Karma Lochrie provides an interesting example of this medieval conflation of female bodily integrity and linguistic integrity, referring to *De Institutione Inclusarum* (1160–1162), written by the English Cistercian Aelred Rievaulx (1110–1167) and translated into English in the fifteenth century. This text, written as an instructional tool for anchoresses, speaks of chastity as being a state above ‘the conversacion of the worlde’. Aelred’s metaphor of a ‘conversation’ dissolves the distinction between sexuality and speech. Aelred warns the anchoress that thinks it is enough to ‘shutte her body between too walles’, that the ‘intercourse of her thoughts and speech with the world turns her cell into a brothel ... The cell windows reflect the perviousness of her flesh’ and her speech, the ‘promiscuity of body and soul’. As such, silence becomes as important as the renouncement of sexuality to the claim of chastity. Once again it is apparent how, in the medieval mind, linguistic perversity or integrity is associated with physicality and spatial conditions. The desire to maintain women’s moral and spiritual integrity demands physical, sexual and linguistic restriction. At this point, these discussions move to examine how the medieval ‘doctrine of female

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chastity and its law of the sealed body’ might have shaped or had consequences for Margery Baxter’s body and religious beliefs and practices.92

There is much reason to believe that Baxter’s reported claim to possess a ‘charter of salvation’ in her womb would have been regarded with suspicion by the authorities of the day. In *The Malleus Maleficarum*, the Dominican authors speak of women’s carnal lust as insatiable, but they do so using the phrase ‘the mouth of the womb’.93 This raises the question of whether there are links made by medieval thinkers, between the womb and the mouth; is there a perceived relationship or link between the womb and female physicality, and female speech and linguistic perversity? Would Baxter’s claim have summoned an already present medieval suspicion of women’s bodies, in particular, of their wombs? Some historians, including Dannielle Regnier-Bohler, have suggested that one of the reasons that forbidden words and utterances were so feared in this community was that, in the medieval mind, they were linked to the abandonment of all social restraint in the pursuit of fleshly desire. Woman’s perversity and deviancy was often simultaneously physical/sexual and linguistic. In one particular *fabliaux* quoted by Regnier-Bohler, the complex and feared relationship between woman, language and desire is played out for the audience. The audience hears of a man so convinced of the sexual harmony between himself and his wife that the young husband decides that the sexual act should be initiated by an agreed code:

> From now on, he tells his wife, she should ask for ‘oats for Morel’. This euphemism, requested by the husband, allows the wife to pursue her pleasure without restraint. Encouraged to ask for oats for Morel ‘unhesitatingly every week and every day and every hour that he might please her’, the woman turns perverse and overwhelms her husband with her insatiable desire.94

The wife’s ‘perversity’ is two-fold. Firstly, that she desires, and that those sexual desires are insatiable. Secondly, that she names and articulates those desires. In a similar anecdote, a husband is unable to satisfy a demanding wife:

> The victim groans: ‘Your Goliath opens its mouth too often. I can’t satisfy it, and your demands are killing me’. Later he says: ‘You’ve got a gluttonous mouth that wants too much suck’ … A woman’s vagina, in

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93 *Malleus Maleficarum*, p. 127.
other words, is a voracious mouth, a gullet of proportions as gigantic as Goliath.  

Here, a symbolic and intellectual link is made between wombs and mouths, suggesting a greater link was also being made between female flesh and female desire, and linguistic perversity and danger. Bearing this symbolic link in mind, the locating of a sacred text of salvation within Baxter’s womb seems even more deviant and dangerous.

By her reported claim, it is also possible that Margery Baxter was attempting to draw a parallel between herself and the image of the Virgin Mary to gain legitimacy and authority. In her collection of essays, Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion, Bynum notes the medieval fascination with the Virgin Mary’s role in the conception/creation of Christ. As Christ had no human father, theologians were left with the unsettling idea of his body having come entirely from his mother, Mary. Uncomfortable with a conceptual link between Christ and flesh; particularly earthly and carnal female flesh, medieval theologians in particular, emphasised the Doctrine of the Virgin Birth and the notion of Immaculate Conception. Increasingly, theologians emphasised the ‘sinlessness’ of Mary’s body. According to Church doctrine, the mother of Christ was born and lived without sin. In spite of this, some theologians were still ill at ease with the central role played by Mary; in particular, by her material body. Bynum suggests that this dis-ease partly accounts for the medieval tendency to discuss or visually denote Mary as a dematerialised, dehumanised and disembodied vessel or container for Christ. She notes the prayers of Francis of Assisi that ‘spoke of Mary as the tabernacle, the vessel, the container, the robe, the clothing of Christ’. Similarly, this:

\[ \text{notion is clearly depicted in those eucharistic tabernacles that Mary surmounts as if she were the container, and in the so-called Viertes} \]

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95 Ibid., p. 462.
Ouvrantes—late medieval devotional objects in which the statue of Mary nursing her baby opens to show God inside. ⁹⁸

This medieval interest in the womb of the Virgin Mother is further exemplified in Gertrude of Helfta’s vision of the Virgin. Gertrude claimed to have seen:

the immaculate womb of the glorious virgin, as transparent as the purest crystal, through which her internal organs, penetrated and filled with divinity, shone brightly … Indeed, one saw the little blossoming boy, the only Son of the highest Father, nurse avidly in delights as the heart of His virgin mother.⁹⁹

The historians Jeffrey Hamburger and Caroline Walker Bynum, both believe that Gertrude would have been familiar with statues such as the Visitation Group from the nun’s house of Kathariental; a thirteenth-century devotional object portraying the Virgin’s womb with a transparent crystal.¹⁰⁰

There is much evidence to suggest that, throughout the late medieval period, the Virgin Mary was regarded as a ‘container’ or ‘vessel’ for Christ. Eucharistic tabernacles and monstrances made in her image, as well as the so-called ‘opening virgins’, or small statues of *maria lactans* that opened to reveal the Trinity inside, clearly convey this notion of the Virgin’s womb as a sacred vessel.¹⁰¹ The interesting paradox, if not irony, of the concept of the Virgin Mary as sacred vessel or container for Christ is that, despite the denigration of female materiality typical of the medieval era, the Virgin Mother is ultimately elevated for her flesh; and in particular, for her womb. Perhaps Margery Baxter recognises this paradox and seeks to claim for herself this same special role and relationship with Christ when she asserts to hold the ‘charter of salvation’ in her womb. The problem for Baxter is that, whereas the Virgin’s womb is ‘open’ and clerics can see inside it, the contents of Baxter’s womb are hidden away, unverifiable and closed to clerical investigation. In reference to the special position of the Virgin Mother, the Italian Franciscan theologian and philosopher Saint Bonaventure (sometimes known by the Italian, San Bonaventura)(c. 1217–1274) wrote that:

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¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 168; Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 198. For an image of this object see figure 6.3, p. 201.
¹⁰¹ See Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, figure 6.10, p. 216 and figure 6.11, p. 217 for examples of these.
Indeed she [Mary] is raised above the hierarchy of the perfect [in heaven] ... And thus it can be said that she is there corporeally, for she has a special sort of perfection in the celestial city ... The soul of Christ is not from her soul—since soul does not come by transmission [from the parents]—but his body is from her body. Therefore she will not be there [in heaven] in the mode of perfection unless she is there corporeally.102

In light of this corporeal elevation, it can be hypothesised that Margery Baxter was asking her audience to recall the perfection of the Virgin who also held the Word of God, the charter of salvation, in her womb. She was using understandings and conceptualisations of her own corrupted flesh and femaleness to claim a special, intimate and personal relationship with Christ.

At the beginning of this chapter, I quoted the historian Robert David Sack when he wrote that to ‘explain why something occurs is to explain why it occurs where it does’ [emphasis mine].103 This statement conveys the idea that, as historians, if we want to know something of the beliefs and experiences of fifteenth-century Norwich Lollards, we need to examine what they said and did, and where they said and did it. Meanings can be taken from both because the religious beliefs and practices of certain Lollard women were shaped by, and in turn shaped, the spaces in which they operated; including the internal spaces within the female body. The arguments presented throughout this chapter developed from the fourth thematic cluster; images and language related to the violation of certain spaces, and the initial observation that the religious practices and textual activities of the female Lollards of Norwich were often confined to certain spaces; that is, the family home and their social roles within the home. Internal spaces both within the home and the female body also appear to have played an important part. However, rather than regarding their ‘confinement’ to the home and the continual presence of household roles and activities in their religious lives as an intrusion, or as something that distracted them from their religious practices, this research has tried to demonstrate that women’s connection to the home was an important feature of their religious identities. Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone used their homes (and sometimes their bodies) on a practical level for the concealment of known heretics and important Lollard books. They used the same

103 Sack, Conceptions of Space in Social Thought, p. 70.
non-sanctified spaces for the preaching and hearing of heretical Lollard ideas. Moreover, they used the family home, their roles within the home and their connections to internal spaces to bring personal, individual and experiential understandings to Church doctrine and their own theological beliefs.

In the context of these discussions of space in this chapter, this thesis also examined the significance of Baxter’s claim to holding a ‘charter of salvation’ in her womb. Although a more complicated argument, it was evident that not only was this an extremely dangerous and heretical claim to make, but that through it the historian can see that fifteenth-century ideas about space intersected with ideas about speech, gender, language, materiality and the nature of women. Throughout this chapter, the way Lollards used certain physical spaces is seen as reflecting a larger intellectual shift. In particular, by locating their religious and textual activities within the relative concealment and isolation of the inner chamber, they were articulating a larger rejection of community thinking and a desire for a more personal, individual and experiential interaction with Christ. For the authorities and sections of the community of Norwich, the danger of the Lollards and the Lollard hermeneutic was that it promoted and allowed for the rejection of ‘the community’. This desire for salvation found physical manifestation and articulation through the spatial structure of the home. In locating their religious practices within the relative enclosure and concealment of the inner chamber; the space most removed and distant from the community, a larger move away from collective/community thinking is made visible.
Chapter Eight: Lollard Women: A Question of Participation

the quest for global interpretations and grand narratives is always a mistaken one, assuming a shapeliness in human affairs and a simplicity of human motivation never encountered in muddy actuality. Nowadays no one much hankers for the panoramic view of where we all were and where we are all going once offered by Marxism or Whiggism, or the more obscure and even less testable stories and metaphors psychoanalysts offer to explain our darker private obsessions. Large theories may generate good questions, but they produce poor answers. The historian’s task is to discover what happened in some actual past situation – what conflicting or confused intentions produced what outcomes – not to produce large truths. The most enlightening historical generalisations tend to be those that hover sufficiently close to the ground to illuminate the contours and dynamics of intention and action in circumscribed circumstances.¹

This thesis has discussed women and heresy. While this topic is not new, this study has brought a greater focus on how to make sense of medieval documents and the words and actions they record to discussions about women’s participation within the fifteenth-century Lollard movement in Norwich, England. This has in turn produced new ways of reading and understanding the beliefs and activities of the women at the centre of this research. This study is not the first to focus on the experiences of fifteenth-century Lollard women in Norwich, nor is it the first to apply techniques of historical document analysis to the sources concerning them. However, it differs from other histories in that, while many have observed the role of books, families and homes in the activities of the Norwich women, few have considered this as evidence of anything beyond their secondary and subjugated place in that society. Conversely, this study has argued that books, families and homes were the sites in which some Lollard women located their religious activities for intellectual, theological and practical reasons. To do this it has, with a focus on method, returned to the central documents.

¹ Clendinnen, Reading the Holocaust , pp. 21–22.
By employing more historically useful and appropriate processes of interpretation by which medieval actions and words are examined in the context in which they first occurred, the particular religious beliefs and practices of Lollard women are revealed, firstly as existing, and secondly as having significance to our understandings of the period and the Lollard belief system. Further, it has been shown that the authorities’ perceptions of the dangers of the experientially based, feminised and familial book culture and religious practices of the Lollard movement, as observed through the actions and utterances of Hawisia Mone and Margery Baxter, caused them to want to ‘nip it in the bud’.

This thesis began with the problematic but invaluable record of the 1428–1431 Lollard Heresy Trials that took place in Norwich under the direction of Bishop William Alnwick. The record was a series of documents thought to have been produced by John of Exeter, the court scribe used in the trials, for a purpose that is unclear. In terms of accessing the views and words of ordinary women in the fifteenth century, official court records do not customarily provide the historian with rich information. Owing to the nature of the production of such documents and the legal processes they recorded, one would not expect to find much evidence of the actual views of ordinary fifteenth-century women. In this regard, John of Exeter’s documents are unusual and their idiosyncratic nature offers the historian great possibility. That the documents appear not to have been produced for any official purpose; that they record particular statements in the vernacular; that Exeter was perhaps bored by the processes he was involved in and at times seemed to engage with the wit, imagery and lyricism of the vernacular; and that the documents, despite their being unofficial, survived, leaves the historian with an evidence base for considering individuals to which we would otherwise not have access. Yet, despite having access to such important documents, the question of applying appropriate meanings to their contents remains.

As a starting point, this thesis reviewed the studies undertaken into the fifteenth-century English Lollard movement and the documents produced by John of Exeter. This was done with a view to identifying how best to interpret the accounts of two Lollard women recorded in Exeter’s documents: Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone. Using some of the techniques of ethnohistory and microhistory taken from other
scholars concerned with the area of historical document analysis, this thesis closely analysed the source documents relating to Mone and Baxter. Some of the beliefs, values and words of the two women were partially revealed by this. Of particular interest were the four reoccurring clusters of images and language evident in the core documents. These clusters provided the focus for much of the study. To understand the religiosities of the two women and the clusters, a context in which they could be resituated was reconstructed. This provided a framework in which to view the lives and belief systems exemplified by Baxter and Mone. Reconstruction of the contextual landscape of fifteenth-century Norwich took into account the fourteenth-century Black Death, the crises in the Orthodox Christian Church, the rise of literate mentalities and ways of thinking, and medieval attitudes towards words, books, the nature of women and certain internal physical and metaphysical spaces.

In fifteenth-century England, Orthodox Christian standards sought to preserve the intermediary role of clerics, priests and Church leaders and the intellectual, metaphysical and literal ‘distance’ between God and the ordinary laity. In this system, an authorised view of God and Christian doctrine was dispensed by the clerics and priests through sermons and preachings. God and his teachings were not directly revealed to the laity and personal engagement with either was forbidden and could result in an accusation of heresy. Within the framework of Orthodox Christianity, sanctioned textual activities took place in Latin and were understood in terms characteristically attributed to the ‘masculine’. They were also located in the confines of official consecrated spaces. In direct opposition to the masculine nature of Orthodox Christianity, Lollardy was understood (or imagined) in terms attributed to ‘the feminine’; it was carnal, literal, excessive, without boundary, permeable, material and associated with the vernacular and non-consecrated spaces such as the fields and the family home. The anxiety held by the fifteenth-century authorities towards the feminine nature of Lollardy was clearly revealed in the documents reviewed here.

Within the Norwich Lollard community, as in the wider movement, women’s participation was numerically less than that of men; a point sometimes emphasised by historians. However, they did participate and it is the nature of that participation that has been of interest to this study. Both Hawisia Mone and Margery Baxter
participated, sometimes from the margins, and sometimes very much from the centre, of their societies. The characteristics of their religious participation and their individual textual practices were intensely experientially based and derived meaning from the everyday, ordinary feminine and familial spaces and roles they occupied. The implication of both Mone’s and Baxter’s theologies is that they reveal women bypassing the Church and establishing a direct relationship with the Bible and Christ’s teachings.

For Baxter and Mone, Christ was not found in closeted universities, chained libraries or in the words and interpretations provided them by the Orthodox Church and its clerics. Rather, Christ was found in their homes and the daily household activities of talking to their neighbours or going to the markets. Thus, they did not need to rely on the preaching and interpretations of the Bible provided by priests; they could hear the Word of God for themselves and derive their own understandings from it. They did not find God in a wafer and wine, but rather residing in the most intimate recesses of their own bodies. They did not need pilgrimages or relics to get closer to God and, rather than relying on priests or clerics to act in an intermediary capacity and to play an interpretive role between them and God, they forged their own independent relationships with Christ and, interestingly, found an image of Christ not dissimilar to their own. Through their own lives and experiences, they found a ‘version’ or understanding of Jesus that made sense to them. Their Jesus was carnal, material, literal, feminine and experiential; with these articulations occurring at a time when the Orthodox Church spoke of Christ as a divine figure that could only ever be fully understood by a clerical caste. The danger for Orthodoxy was that if, through neglect or lack of vigilance, it allowed the uneducated, illiterate, lay-folk to independently form a vision of Christ, that vision would bear close resemblance to the laity; that is, God would take a material, visceral, literal form, bearing all the traits attributed to women at that time. Returning to those medieval images of the bleeding Jesus on the cross, just like the Lollard women who worshiped him, he was at that moment intensely carnal, mortal and bound to his weakened body.

In 1991, the historian Caroline Walker Bynum wrote not only of the importance of female embodiment to the practices of medieval religious women, but also of the centrality of Christ’s body intersecting with the female body when she wrote:
No religious woman failed to experience Christ as wounded, bleeding and dying. Women’s efforts to imitate this Christ involved becoming the crucified, not just patterning themselves after or expanding their compassion toward, but fusing with, the body on the cross.²

This relationship is seen most explicitly in Margery Baxter’s claims towards embodying a ‘charter of salvation’ in her womb, and intrinsically in the beliefs of both Baxter and Mone. Their practices exemplify relationships with Christ that did not conform to the Orthodox Christian standards of England in the fifteenth century; they are individual, intimate, personal and experiential.

The danger posed by Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone was largely that the practices they adopted and the principles they followed involved direct, immediate and personal engagement with Christ, relying heavily on their own experiences as women; that is, their direct experiences of female embodiment and female household-based and social roles. If, as at that time, the crucified Jesus is imagined as a book, this was a book that they knew and could read using their own stories. In the intensely personal, experientially based and direct relationship the Lollard’s established with Christ, the Orthodox Church and its leaders had no presence or authority. Orthodox Church leaders were seen as ‘false traitors’, ‘raising up heresies in the church’, ‘injuriously endowing’ them with possessions, false idols and riches, and as fleeing from their true responsibilities. Within this Lollard belief system, the mysteries of the Church and the powers of its clerics are exposed as unnecessary, corrupt and indeed, as moving the faithful further away from God’s salvation.

Lollard women of fifteenth-century England have been for the most part ignored or glossed over as insignificant by most historians interested in the topic. For those who have taken an interest in these women, few have taken their interpretations to a meaningful conclusion. Historians have made important observations about the part that books and the familial home played in women’s religious lives, but have not reflected upon the implications of this. As a consequence, ‘marginal’, ‘secondary’, ‘dependent’ and ‘subordinate’ are the predominant terms that have been comfortably applied to the religious experiences of the female Lollard in fifteenth-century England. The key indicators of this lesser status and peripheral role appear to come

² Bynum, Fragmentation and Redemption, p. 131.
from women’s physical and intellectual ties to the home and household and familial-based roles and to an apparent illiterate and uneducated state. Although there are points at which particular historians have taken up the issue of the importance of these women, many have been uncomfortable in shifting too far away from the dominant position and, as a consequence, have failed to fully consider the contributions of ordinary women. Some have granted that a few ‘out of the ordinary’ women negotiated spaces in which they could participate to some extent, but these historians go on to emphasise women’s dependence upon their male counterparts. For this reason, this thesis’ examination of the key documents relating to Hawisia Mone and Margery Baxter does not sit easily with the positions previously taken by scholars. These documents do not reveal women subordinate in their views, but nor do they depict ‘out of the ordinary women’. Rather they show ordinary women actively and willingly engaged in their own belief systems, choosing and creating individual religious experiences and versions of Christ and the Bible for themselves.

To see and take useful account of the experiences of ordinary women such as Mone and Baxter, this study has had to adopt particular processes of interpretation that allow medieval words and actions to be returned to the context in which they first occurred. To achieve this, this thesis has drawn on techniques from the microhistorical and ethnohistorical traditions, including those of close textual analysis; the identification and analysis of clusters of language, visions and imagery; and the use of historically appropriate sources to fill the ‘gaps’ in historical information. Where primary or supporting sources from the period are unavailable, this study has used secondary and present-day contemporary sources. Without the use of such techniques, the contributions of ordinary women such as Baxter and Mone cannot be easily seen by the historian. The more ‘orthodox’ historical techniques favoured by the traditional macrohistorical approaches necessarily give, as a result, orthodox historical views of the period. To see the contributions of ordinary women; contributions not usually recognised or immediately visible to the historian, more fine-grained, close textual analysis is needed.

This thesis has suggested that, by their very nature, the religious and textual practices of Lollards, particularly those adopted by women, were a challenge to the rule of the Orthodox Church; in particular, to its linguistic and hermeneutic hegemony. This
level of discussion, while important, does not adequately capture what was happening and what was being felt at the community level during the fifteenth century. These were very ordinary women; mothers, neighbours and wives, whose prosecution by the authorities indicates the level of anxiety generated within the community by the Lollard movement, and women’s participation in it. Hawisia Mone and Margery Baxter’s contributions should not be characterised by historians as insignificant or somehow less worthy of consideration than those of their male peers. To the Norwich community and the Orthodox Church at that time, the activities of these two women were a threat. To a community that viewed words, language and books as dangerous and a potential pathway to God’s wrath, the actions of these women seemingly paid no heed to these dangers. Indicators of the threat they posed are found in the court-related documents of the time. In these documents, there is talk of bees that ‘sting the tongue and venom the soul’, ‘sticks and stones and dead men’s bones’ and the slaying of priests as they flee their churches; community leaders are characterised as corrupt and weak Caiaphas-like figures; and churches are associated with images of death and decay. By these women’s actions and words, the very legitimacy and right of the Church to rule and to operate on God’s behalf was being questioned. Certainly, this was not the first or last time the Church’s rule was to be questioned. However, significantly, and dangerously, here that rule was being questioned by two uneducated lay-women, one of whom had the ultimate claim to an unfettered relationship with Christ; the ‘charter of salvation’ in her womb.

The women at the centre of this thesis occupied positions of relative restriction and limitation and yet their belief systems and activities were such that they generated great unease in their communities and with the authorities. While there is a temptation to see them as extraordinary historical figures, their ‘value’ to the historian is in their ordinariness. The brief glimpses we catch of Margery Baxter and Hawisia Mone should force us to rethink what it means to be ‘illiterate’, ‘uneducated’ and ‘marginal’. We need to consider whether the historical techniques and methods for understanding that we adopt as historians shape and influence what we ‘see’ when we investigate communities other than our own. We need to explore other ways of reading historical material and avoid the assumption that in book-based religious cultures, such as that of the Norwich Lollard community, illiterate
lay-women could not and/or did not participate. Further, as historians and scholars, we need to reconsider what it means for individuals and groups to be identified as marginalised and relegated to the edges of a dominant society. Can one operate and participate from such a space, and if so, how?

The answer for Lollard women of fifteenth-century England is “yes”, and in powerful ways, unexpected by many historians. They drew on lived experiences and made their belief systems meaningful to their own lives by refiguring concepts of Jesus and the Bible that made sense of and drew parallels with their own world. They returned to their bodies, families and homes for explanations of God and in so doing, circumvented and denied the intermediary role of priest and clerics. Their danger to the community leaders and authorities of the day was that they went to ‘the source’ themselves by establishing a direct, feminine, bodily and experientially based connection with Jesus. They sought an intensely personal relationship with Christ in which the Orthodox Church and its leaders did not feature and which the Church could not easily control.

One of the most interesting findings of this thesis relates to the ability of these two ordinary women to derive religious understanding and shape spiritual meaning based on their own lived experiences. These were experiences that were tied to the everyday activities associated with the family home and these women’s places in the community as women, mothers and wives. Women drawing on and deriving intellectual or spiritual meaning from their own lives is not a topic confined to the Lollard experience in fifteenth-century Norwich; for feminist historians, it is a common historical theme. As a group historically denied access to universities or often a formal education, often without an active presence or influence in official legal, religious or political forums, it makes sense that women throughout history would draw on the world in which they did operate; their homes, neighbourhoods and communities, and those physical and personal elements over which they did have some degree of control and influence; their bodies, families and household operations. A significant impediment to medieval historians recognising this situation is the paucity of sources available for the medieval period and particularly in relation to women’s experiences during that period. This scarcity of sources upon which the historian can draw is further exacerbated by the dominance of less
appropriate methodologies and techniques in the field. What this research shows is that using different, more appropriate and well-considered ways of reading historical sources opens up possibilities and reveals meanings that might not otherwise have been seen in the documents. Should such techniques not have been applied in this study, these women’s stories might have been missed. Moreover, as this thesis demonstrates, when we go to the effort of seeing these stories, it becomes clear that they are valid and worthy of attention.
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