

Essays in Medieval Studies 15

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Herbs, Birds, and Cryptic Words for English Devotional Readers**Susanna Fein**

"Meditation," according to Hugh of Saint Victor, "is the concentrated and judicious reconsideration of thought, that tries to unravel something complicated or scrutinizes something obscure to get at the truth of it."¹ In recent work I have identified several Middle English longer lyrics that possess what appear to be meditational forms, that is, they are poems designed to be read in the concentrated manner suggested by Hugh, so that someone well attuned to their enigmatic patterns would be spiritually nourished by reading them.² In the sensibility of devout medieval English people, Christian doctrine was connected vitally to emotional receptivity. One could be taught the theology of redemption, but only through heart-felt response to God's love offering--in the Incarnation and Passion--would one be granted grace.

Learned and popular devotion to a theology of divine incarnation opened the way for an aesthetics of incarnation to develop. Poets who understood that Christ, the Word, took flesh to save mankind, felt themselves empowered to create from the Word the means to flesh out verbally the signs and patterns of redemption for readers for whom literacy was a way to reach God. Such poetry, because it is participatory, stresses that the human soul has an "active potential" for seeking God, to which God will "reciprocate" because He has already shown love by sending his embodied Son.³ A poetic creation designed to mediate this process can therefore potentially summon the holy presence and make it be felt in the soul of the reader.

Other medieval customs attest to a practice of locating divine emanations in well-crafted words. Just as relics and icons of saints were presumed to be supernaturally imbued with the sacred essence of their origins, so too were prayers (such as the Pater Noster), charms invoking the Trinity, Christ, or the Cross, and even saints' legends believed to be possessed of spiritual powers. To give a simple example, a fifteenth-century verse prayer that invokes Christ's name and passion is composed in precisely thirty-three words, "mystecally representyng xxxiiij yerys

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of the age of ovr lord Jesu Cryst"; it is to be recited in a given pattern upon five colored beads of the rosary; and doing so will gain the speaker (according to a scribal note) an indulgence of 5,425 years, this number equivalent to the total number of wounds Christ received.⁴ The form of the prayer, in 33 words, is as important as the words' content, for it makes "mystecally" present Christ's wounded, 33-year-old body, and through sacrifice of this body (physically commemorated through handled beads and voiced prayer) the petitioner's body and soul will be saved.

Medieval medical practitioners also routinely relied on the healing efficacy of prescribed charms and prayers. In a practice designed to protect the unborn and their expectant mothers, "holy names [were] invoked via inscription on scraps of parchment tied to the bodies of pregnant women, or [were] carved on apples for their ingestion."⁵ For the needy patient the power of the names was harnessed not by reading them, but rather by wearing or even eating them. Here words as things in themselves become "a species of contact relic."⁶

While a piece of lyric poetry is not the same as a charm or a prayer, it too could be the means to invoke the names and signs sacred to Christianity. That poets structured their poems on the shape of the Cross or enigmatically enclosed in them several namings of God suggests the very serious spiritual mission that they expected such verse to fulfill in the life of a reader. This poetry was not merely to be read (as we might be prone to think of reading as a simple straight-once-through process), but rather *consumed* in a metaphysical sense, so that it might bring "sowlehele" to the devout, penitent user. One needs to picture the meditant man or woman retreating regularly to a private spot, reading a text through many times over an extended period, quite likely committing it to memory, and pausing over its words and verbalized images to make connections, find patterns, discover signs and meanings, participate with compassion in its depiction of holy suffering, and absorb its objectified shape, that is, what it becomes when perceived whole rather than as a series of discrete signifiers.

Here I will present the incarnational aesthetic as it occurs in two lyrics that date from about 1390, a time contemporary with Geoffrey Chaucer and the anonymous author of *Pearl* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The first one, *The Four Leaves of the Truelove*, draws on the herblore alluded to in my title.⁷ The poet both borrows from the tradition and transforms it. This lyric in forty stanzas survives in two fifteenth-century manuscripts, one now in London, the other in Oxford, where it is copied very close to an herbal called *The Vertues of Herbs*. "Virtue" refers to a substance's medicinal or otherwise potent effect; every created thing - mineral, plant, animal - was thought to possess an innate essence or power. But the herb that is featured in the lyric, truelove (*Paris quadrifolia*), does not appear in this herbal, nor, to my knowledge, does it appear in any English herbal before the Renaissance. The first known instance is in the 1597 herbal of John Gerard.⁸ The "virtue" of truelove is revealed not by the herbalist but by the lyricist. The power immanent in the herb is, ultimately, *God's grace*, and it becomes an emblem for how people should love God who loves them. This gracious *grasse* (there is wordplay here; "grass" and "grace" sound almost

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alike in Middle English) offers the spiritual cure for a person who is lovelorn.

Opening the poem in a blooming Maytime meadow, the poet draws on a popular belief that the truelove flower could bring luck in love. Hopeful lovers liked to adorn their hats and clothes with flowering trueloves, in what was a romantic token. This practice is illustrated in a fourteenth-century verse that survives in a handbook for Franciscan preachers: "Trewelove among men that most is of lette, / In hattes, in hodes, in porses is sette. / Trewelove in herbers spryngeth in May, / Bote trew love of herte went is away."⁹ Finding an apt pun, preachers used the plant to teach Christian doctrine: human love is, like the plant, frail and fallible; one ought to seek the Supreme Truelove, God.

Beyond its romantic connotation, the truelove bore a host of associations that allowed it to become for the poet an emblem of multiple religious valence: first, there is the felicitous pun on "grace"; second, as an organic herb the truelove may be thought to have medicinal properties; third, its cruciform shape is an emblem of the Cross, or God's love revealed (a common association mentioned by Gerard); and, fourth, its four leaves joined at the center create a looped love-knot, a familiar symbol of union or marriage. To allow these meanings to converge, the poet embeds them in an elegant narrative bracketed by two figures, a man and a woman. The thread starts as the adventure of a man devoutly absorbed in his orisons, but his attention is soon diverted by the mournful strains of a young woman desperate in love. The girl's lament is, in turn, interrupted by a speaking bird, whose words are delivered to console her. The maiden becomes the bird's patient auditor, and both she and the eavesdropping man seem to disappear while the bird sermonizes at length. In the final stanza they rematerialize, the maiden now comforted, and the man concluding his adventure. The poet thus encloses the bird's sermon within two frames, a woman listening to a bird, overheard by a man.

This structure leads the meditant reader to verbal arrangements of increasing sophistication. The poet ultimately depicts the Passion and Resurrection right at the lyric's center. The pious turtledove tells the history of God and man as though it were a vast love-knot with alternate tyings, loopings, and retyings. Contrastive ideas--truth/falsehood, love/betrayal--are alternated in a structure of symmetrical oppositions. The truelove signifies the mystic *nodus amicitiae*, the "knot of friendship" that binds humanity in kinship to God. Narrative joinings and disjoinings create a metaphorical knot being tied and broken, and, finally, made endlessly circular without break, as the poem begins and ends on the same line.

The vocal dove makes the herb his ruling conceit, comparing its leaves to the Trinity, with the fourth leaf made Mary (by extension, all humanity). A significant degree of mirror imaging occurs between the two halves of the poem. A rough outline reveals some fascinating parallels, especially in the rounding out of man's fall away from God with his involuntary return on Doomsday, and between Christ's birth into the world and each soul's death (that is, rebirth) out of it. In the précis offered by the poet, all of history becomes a vast pattern of unions, separations, and reunions.¹⁰

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The bird's 455-line sermon occupies thirty-five stanzas, or seven-eighths of the poem. Modern readers tend to find the maiden's patience extraordinary. Nonetheless, the sermon is shown to have a wondrous curative capacity, which is supposed to take place--for both maiden and meditant reader--through a process of absorbing words and designs

crafted in poetic sequence. *Truelove* works as a medicine delivered by verbal means, bringing potential health to each fragile, blossom-like soul. The maiden, sighing among the flowers at the opening (line 8), was doomed to wither without a medicinal treatment. The solace she seeks in her secular way is the curative herb truelove, or a faithful lover. The bird redirects her to the divine Truelove by means of a sermon-poem shaped cruciate like the plant. The sermon thus delivers from Christ as Physician the medicine she seeks: an "herbal" cure imbibed as a verbal pill that makes her whole again.

The hope expressed at the end of the exposition is that "we" may win the love of the Truelove (the Trinity and Mary) because, like the maiden, we are edified as to where and how to seek it. The narrator prays God to grant everyone this particular grace, a revelatory pun that conflates God's *grace* with the herbal *grass* (line 515). So in reading this poem of "sowlehele," we swallow the medicine, and each time we reread the poem meditatively, discovering more of its embedded meaning, we increase the dosage and improve its effect.

The notion of health is also present in the experience of the strolling narrator, which forms the outermost frame. He too is absorbed in an efficacious, health-seeking practice: he is "byddyng" his "owres" (line 4), that is, devoutly saying prayers as they were prescribed in a Book of Hours. The events usually sequenced in a book of hours closely reflect the biblical events appearing in *Truelove*: Creation and Fall of Mankind, Annunciation, Nativity, Adoration of Magi, and so on. Thus the narrator is not simply witnessing a remarkable maiden/bird dialogue; he is rapt in a state of meditative prayer, and many images illuminated in books of hours unfold before him--and the reader--in the bird's sermon.

The second frame-setting of *Truelove* belongs to the maiden who stands beside a tree upon which is perched a turtledove. In what is another crucial wordplay, the meditant seems led to the sight of a "mourning may" during his "May morning" stroll (lines 1, 7). The grouping of maiden, tree, and bird offers the meditant a detailed shadow-likeness to a very familiar sacred image: Mary at the foot of the Cross, the cross being the tree, Christ's body the bird. Mary's deep maternal mourning is the anchoring image for numerous English meditative works in verse and prose. The figuration of this familiar image here, at the opening of the poem, dignifies the opening strains of lament from a lovesick maiden. Mary's devout mourning is made to seem the antidotal model for the "mourning may."

Given the *Truelove* poet's propensity for wordplay and concrete metaphor, it is not surprising to discover that his care extends even to physical layout. The title *The Four Leaves of the Truelove* probably references an original poem inscribed upon four leaves of parchment, a quarto with eight sides, five stanzas on each half-leaf. Such a format would have highlighted the symmetries of the poem, and the midpoint Harrowing would have appeared at the exact middle of four leaves. While neither of the two surviving manuscripts of *Truelove* (London,

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British Library Additional MS 31042 and Oxford, Bodleian Library Additional MS A 106) preserves it in quite this manner, the London copy follows it for two pages and appears to be based on an exemplar copied just as described. [11](#)

Both manuscripts are from Yorkshire, and they preserve *Truelove* in what is likely its original northern dialect. When Wynkyn de Worde printed *Truelove* in sixteenth-century London (c. 1510), he gave it a woodcut depicting a man and woman in a garden, a tree between them in the background. [12](#) The woman is offering a ring to the man, and a scroll over her head records her words: "Holde this a token yvvys [ywys]." The man responds: "For your sake I shall it take." This woodcut, which is borrowed from a series designed earlier for a different work (Stephen Hawes's *The Pastime of Pleasure* [1509]), represents the poem's subject in a most superficial way. One wonders whether de Worde's customers would have bought the slim Volume as a devotional text or as something by which to celebrate a wedding.

But as a poem from its own time, that is, as a fourteenth-century meditation of intricate refinement and serious purpose, *The Four Leaves of the Truelove* has much to tell us about the devotional tastes and reading habits of people for whom literacy was a skill self-consciously cultivated to order to gain personal knowledge of God. Asking that the work be more than merely read, the poet expected his verbal artifact to be mentally embraced and spiritually imbibed as an efficacious "pill" for personal salvation. The user's engagement was to be both contemplative and interactive, mastering the text not just for its content but also for its forms. He or she was to use it to meditate in visualized concepts, from remembered images in books of hours, from patterns and interweavings suggested by sacred emblems,

and from the four leaves of the poem in his or her hands.

The poem I will discuss next, *The Bird with Four Feathers*, is an anonymous lyric that demonstrates in another way the incarnational aesthetic.¹³ *Bird* belongs to a widespread group of Middle English lyrics that begin, like *Truelove*, with a narrator ambling out of doors, and, also like *Truelove*, it has a talking bird and a sermonic, four-part disquisition. Unconfined by the walls of constructed dwellings, a man sets aside his daily affairs and momentarily locates the sacramental in the midst of a leafy "church," with an architrave of tree branches and a choir of birdsong. The responsive person may learn something here that the hubbub of human commerce normally obscures from understanding. He listens to the language of birds, and, attuned to its cryptic repetitions, his heart may absorb and retain sacred truths. Such a premise underlies *The Bird with Four Feathers*. The sound pattern of the refrain "*Parce mihi, Domine!*" mimics a birdsong tweeted to the auditor at regular intervals. As a sound different from English, the Latin words of penance can masquerade as chirps from an avian plaintiff. Hearing this mournful utterance, the auditor is curious: who has harmed the bird by plucking her four feathers, and why does she sing this song? The bird's response insists that the answer cannot be a simple verbal translation of the song; the auditor must feel the bird's pain in order to comprehend the meaning. The words represent a deeply experienced condition.

An understanding of pathos that is both aesthetic and psychological is in

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evidence here. The *Bird* author assumes that emotions have the power to effect spiritual change. Reluctant to recount her suffering because verbal expression will renew it, the bird agrees to speak if the listener promises to absorb the message. As transports of emotion, words are therapy *not* for the speaker but for the hearer. It is quite clear, moreover, that the human capacity to respond emotionally--which is central to the redemptive process--derives ultimately from God. The first epithet for the Deity is, significantly, "Kyng of Pytee" (line 13), and the poet's penultimate line (239) expresses the point of "*parce*"--to win divine pity. The speaker's sincerity is designed to move not just human listeners, but also God, the source of all compassion.

Outdoors, away from human society, the narrator learns about his true inner nature. His forested surroundings suggest the primal quality of his experience, and his pose foreshadows the message he will hear. Lying amidst flowers (lines 4-5), he hears the cry of the featherless bird, and the lesson turns out to be about man's likeness to the ephemeral spring blossom (line 230). The poem circles from the physical floral landscape engulfing the narrator to a moral symbolism of earthly decay. The associations must have been commonplace to an audience closely familiar with the Office of the Dead taken from the book of Job (the source for the refrain). Walter Skirlaw, a bishop of Durham (d. 1410), prefixed to his will a typical lamentation that "all knowledge and glory, like flowers in the field, was destined to die and ... all rational creatures, after the flowing of the course of their lives, come back to the sad thought of fearful death."¹⁴ The supine narrator signifies two things at once: man refreshed by life and man doomed to die and return to the earth. In the two illustrations of the poem found in manuscripts, the narrator's reclining pose is prominent.¹⁵

The mournful bird dwelling in this landscape is female in the fictional prologue, but she becomes an entirely human male in her sad, moralized account of four lost feathers. As for the narrator who listens to the bird, he projects a consciousness barren of experience, a naïveté in the natural world that must be informed. He too will lose his four worldly attributes--youth, beauty, strength, and riches. Possessing them, he is distracted from true self-knowledge. Only in losing them will he finally understand that they kept him from God. The poet asks that the reader consider this fact in advance, lest it take him unawares. The poet assumes, too, that each bearer of this wisdom will inwardly sing the charm-like incantation "*Parce mihi, Domine!*"--"Spare me, Lord!" The song verbalizes the spontaneous reflex of a Christian awareness of one's personal and primal condition.

The technical aspects of the poem reveal artistic precision. As a refrain poem its stanzas are unusual for their varying length (eight, twelve, sixteen, and twenty lines). There are twenty stanzas overall, an interesting round number; the bird's disquisition centers upon the number four; and the poem totals 240 lines. One might well suspect numerological ordering within the poem, or, at the least, some degree of symmetrical construction. The end of stanza 10 clearly marks a midpoint that is both numerical and rhetorical: at 120 lines the bird has described two feathers and begins an account of the third one. Scholars have sug-

gested that the poem is organized into two "wings" with symmetrical bipartite structures. The structure of the "two-feathered" wings, in terms of stanzaic line lengths, is: 12,8,8 / 12,12,12,12 and 12,12,12,12 / 12,8,8.¹⁶ To extend this analysis, the remaining central section consists of 88 lines. The numerical arrangement of lines is, then, 28:48:88:48:28, four feathers on two wings, one on either side of a central "body" of text.

What meaning the poet may have intended by these symmetries remains an open question. He perhaps expected the poetry to "embody" the woeful bird and her lost feathers. Symmetrical structures are not uncommon in medieval verse. In lyrics such as *Truelove* the strophic arrangement of ideas seems designed to recreate the shape of a love-knot, or Cross, with Christ's redemptive powers made manifest at the central point. Normally, such poems are explicitly about the Crucifixion, which *Bird* is not. It may be that the general set-up of a bird in a tree prepared a devout medieval reader for a christological meaning and pattern. Even though the bird here is primarily a figure for mankind struck down by age, her suffering in four extremities and her added heartache might recall the wounds of Christ.

This meaning, however, exists as a shadow behind the bird's lament over her loss, which itself maintains a human perspective. There is, nonetheless, buried in the bird's words of devotion to God a deeper pattern that seems to complement the structural symmetries. Just as the first reference to God, "Kyng of Pytee" (line 13), is especially meaningful, subsequent calls to God allude to the four mourned attributes as understood in divine terms, and together they sequentially construct Christ's life as a man and role as Savior. Lamenting her lost Youth, the bird appeals to Christ incarnate as human infant, "Hym ... that Marie bare" (line 63). Bracketing this appeal at the other end of the complaint, when the bird mourns lost Riches, she appeals to Christ's rich gift to mankind: "Jhesus for Thi precious blood" (line 187). The theme is Christ's Incarnation, the demonstration of God's love that forms the basis of the penitent's hopeful petition, "*Parce michi, Domine!*"

These calls to God occur at symmetrical points, the one to Jesus as Infant in stanza 6, the other to Jesus as Crucified in stanza 15--stanzas that each occur six in from the endpoints. Counting in two more stanzas in each direction (stanzas 8 and 13), one finds God initially called upon in his might, an attribute that is softened in the second reference to include God's mercy. The first one accompanies the bird's description of Beauty (line 91). The second reference comes, appropriately, in the discussion on Strength (line 153); the additional mention of mercy (line 159) implies a strength greater than brute power. Again there is a sequence, from Might, to Might and Mercy, the change wrought by Christ living as a man.

Moving inward again, to the two central stanzas, one discovers a midpoint exemplum on sovereignty: Solomon was a fair and worthy king (lines 105-08), but as any mortal will, he eventually fell (in his case, to concupiscence); the narrating everyman bird was also at one time "a man of mochel myght" (line 123), but he too fell away from God; God alone is the ultimate "Kyng, coroune in

hevenne blys" (line 131).

The various terms for God, always strategically placed in an appropriate context, create a composite *portrait* of God in the sequential roles adopted by Christ: Son of Mary, God of Might, King of Heaven, God of Mercy, Crucified Man. These hidden signs complement the "winged" shape of the poem: Divine Kingship in the middle, flanked by Incarnation and Divine Power on the left side, Divine Mercy and Crucifixion on the right. Framing the whole (lines 13, 239) is a conception of God as font of "pytee," ever responsive to a heartfelt cry of "*parce*." Ultimately, the poem--if read repeatedly, learned by heart, or meditated upon devoutly--would come to reveal an emanation of the divine within its lines. The well-attuned meditant would experience something approaching fulfillment of the pious petition in the last lines:

And *parce* geteth Godis pyte,

And scheweth us His blessed face.

A portrait of God's "face," traced in the lineaments of His successive attributes, is enigmatically present to be discovered by the literate meditant whose search for God's "pytee" is earnestly pursued.

Survivals of the poem in various manuscripts give evidence of how the cryptic Holy Face emanating from the poem was perceived--or not--by contemporary readers. In three manuscripts *Bird* was paired with another poem having the same refrain (MS Douce 322, TCC R.3.21, and London, British Library MS Harley 1706). This poem, *Pety Job*, is a lyrical translation of the Latin Office of the Dead.¹⁷ The books containing both poems are all from the London area, as is another *Bird* manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 596). *Pety Job* is a product of the French literary fashions current in the capital in the mid-fifteenth century.¹⁸ While *Bird* would have similarly appealed to cosmopolitan readers with cultivated, devotional tastes, its composition preceded *Pety Job* by many years, that is, around 1390, a date that allows sufficient time for several variant texts--altered or abridged--to crop up in manuscripts of the mid-fifteenth century and later.

These revisions reveal that not every contemporary reader was alert to the niceties of form matched to meaning, since several redactors felt free to erase the poem's devotional structure in preference for a tighter narrative or for stanzas of uniform length. One compiler, a Glastonbury monk of about 1450, shows a collector's taste for proverbs. To judge from his garbled redaction of *Bird* (in Trinity College, Cambridge MS O.9.38), he was attracted to the poem for its sententious wisdom--expounded in its refrain and moral exemplums--without much attention paid to the narrative logic of the bird's lament. His careless transcription entirely omits the third feather.

The editor of the eight-line stanzaic version (found in London, British Library MS Harley 2380) has substituted a rather pedestrian structure; after a five-stanza prologue, the laments for individual feathers fall in place methodically: Feather One in stanza 6, Feather Two in stanza 8, Feather Three in stanza 10, and Feather Four in stanza 12. By the conclusion in stanza 13 the narrator has

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been forgotten, but nonetheless the penultimate line seems a gloss designed to provide the hidden name of God, who "ys Fader and Sun and the Holy Gast." The text of a late sixteen-line lyric ("Parce mihi O Lord Moste Excellent") suggests that one's hope in repeating the Latin penitential phrase *is* to see God's hidden face.¹⁹ Job does in fact see it in the illustrations to *Pety Job*.²⁰

There remained, however, an audience for the poem in its original form, readers who were undeterred, apparently, by the stanzas of irregular length and who would have wanted to grasp the appeal from bird to "Man!" as a serious poeticized message in touch with the sacred realm. The continued copying of the twenty-stanza poem in London through the later fifteenth century, next to other serious devotional texts, indicates a respect for the poet's effort to supply an innovative aid for readers in their private meditations. In particular, one may note the neat layout of the piece in Harley 1706, which helps to showcase the poem's symmetry. Copied in six even columns of forty lines, the midpoint occurs, appropriately, at the top of the fourth column.

If there had not been readers who understood the method of the verse, its survival fully intact in several copies of a generation or two later would be remarkable. A well-educated, very pious, aristocratic society, customers of the booktrade in London with close ties through family and patronage to several religious houses, appears to have promoted a demand for texts that promised both moral edification and mental challenge. *The Bird with Four Feathers* is the kind of text that asks one to meditate upon it, offering the reward of hidden truths. Since the densely structured poem appealed to the tastes of this audience, it seems very likely that at least some readers knew the work to contain secret patterns, and that a pleasure in working out the hidden mystery in this and similar works fostered an art of meditational reading in a self-consciously literate culture.

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Notes

1. Hugh of Saint Victor, *Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. a religious of the Community of St. Mary the Virgin (London, 1962), p. 183.
2. This verse appears in my edition: Susanna Greer Fein, ed., *Moral Love Songs and Laments*, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1998); hereafter cited as *MLSL*. For a fuller discussion of such verse, see "Introduction," pp. 1-9.
3. Eugene Vance, "Pearl: Love and the Poetics of Participation," in *Poetics: Theory and Practice in Medieval English Literature*, ed. Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Cambridge, 1991), p. 141.
4. John C. Hirsh, "A Fifteenth-Century Commentary on 'Ihesu for Thy Holy Name,'" *Notes and Queries* 17 (1970), 44-45.

5. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, "The Apple's Message: Some Post-Conquest Hagiographic Accounts of Textual Transmission," in *Late Medieval Religious Texts and Their Transmission: Essays in Honour of A. I. Doyle*, ed. A. J. Minnis (Cambridge, 1994), p. 49.
6. Wogan-Browne, p. 43.
7. *The Truelove* is critically edited in *MLSL*, pp. 161-254. Previous editions are Israel Gollancz, ed. "The Quatrefoil of Love: An Alliterative Religious Lyric," in *An English Miscellany, Presented to Dr. Furnivall*, ed. N. R. Ker, A. S. Napier, and W. W. Skeat (1901; repr. New York, 1969), pp. 112-32; and Israel Gollancz and Magdalene M. Weale, eds., *The Quatrefoil of Love*, EETS OS 195 (1935; repr. Millwood, N. Y., 1971).
8. The illustration of "Herba Paris" (truelove) appearing in Gerard is reproduced in *MLSL*, p. 163. For the text, see John Gerard, *Gerard's Herbal: The History of Plants*, ed. Marcus Woodward (1927; repr. London, 1994), pp. 101-03.
9. Siegfried Wenzel, *Verses in Sermons: "Fasciculus Morum" and Its Middle English Poems* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), pp. 159-60.
10. Susanna Greer Fein, "Form and Continuity in the Alliterative Tradition: Cruciform Design and Double Birth in Two Stanzaic Poems," *Modern Language Quarterly* 53 (1992), 121.
11. A fuller discussion of the evidence appears in a forthcoming article, Susanna Greer Fein, "Quatrefoil and Quatrefovia: The Devotional Layout of an Alliterative Poem," *Journal of the Early Book Society* 2 (1998).
12. The woodcut is reproduced in *MLSL*, p. 169.
13. *Bird* is critically edited in *MLSL*, pp. 255-88. Earlier printings of the poem (transcribed from single manuscripts) appear in Carleton Brown, ed., *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century*, 2nd ed., rev. G. V. Smithers (Oxford, 1957), pp. xxi, 208-15, 283, and in J. Kail, ed., *Twenty-Six Political and Other Poems*, EETS OS 124 (London, 1904), pp. 143-49.
14. Paraphrased by Jonathan Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries: Religion and Secular Life in Late Medieval Yorkshire* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1988), p. 268.
15. These illustrations--from Oxford, MS Douce 322 (fol. 15a) and Trinity College, Cambridge [TCC] MS R.3.21 (fol. 34a)--are reproduced in *MLSL*, pp. 257, 262.
16. A. Kent Hieatt and Constance Hieatt, "'The Bird with Four Feathers': Numerical Analysis of a Fourteenth-Century Poem," *Papers on Language and Literature* 6 (1970), 24-25.
17. *Pety Job* is critically edited in *MLSL*, pp. 289-59. For other editions, see Carl Horstmann, ed., *Yorkshire Writers* (London, 1886), 2.381-89, and Kail, *Twenty-Six Political and Other Poems*, pp. xxiii, 120-43.
18. Hope Emily Allen, *Writings Ascribed to Richard Rolle, Hermit of Hampole* (New York, 1927), p. 370.
19. Edward Bliss Reed, ed., "Parce mihi O Lord Moste Excellent," in "The Sixteenth-Century Lyrics in Add. MS. 18,752," *Anglia* 33 (1910), 353.
20. These illustrations--from Douce 322 (fol. 10a) and TCC MS R.3.21 (fol. 38a)--are reproduced in *MLSL*, pp. 293, 294.