WHAT THE NUNS READ: LITERARY EVIDENCE FROM THE ENGLISH BRIDGETTINE HOUSE, SYON ABBEY*

Ann M. Hutchison

During its pre-Reformation life, Syon Abbey, though a late foundation, was held in high esteem both on account of the rigour of its religious observance and on account of the learning of its members. Evidence of the latter, however, is chiefly traced to the brothers of this remarkable double monastery. Although there are references to a library and librarian for the sisters, no inventory of its contents survives. There are, however, other sources, and this study represents an attempt to draw upon these in order to form some idea of the kinds of books the nuns would have read. Evidence has been sought from the Rule, from The Myroure of oure Ladye, and from wills and other documents, as well as from existing books known to have belonged to the nuns.¹

When Henry V laid the foundation-stone of the Bridgettine house, Syon Abbey, at Twickenham, in Middlesex, on 22 February 1415, he was said to have been fulfilling an obligation on behalf of his father, Henry IV.² In

* While checking the proofs of this article, I was deeply saddened to hear of the death of Sister Frances Nims, L.B.V.M. An inspiring teacher whose natural modesty never quite managed to conceal the vast scope of her learning, a deft but constructive critic, an encouraging mentor and a generous friend, Sister Frances has been for me an important and pervasive influence. I would like to dedicate this article to her memory.

¹ Since I began this project, which was originally given as a conference paper, two scholars have approached this topic from other angles; their work complements, and indeed has enriched, my own. Christopher de Hamel's survey of surviving manuscripts from both the men's and women's libraries at Syon and his discussion of how they were used brings the pre-dissolution community very much to life; see “The Library: The Medieval Manuscripts of Syon Abbey, and Their Dispersal,” in Syon Abbey: The Library of the Bridgettine Nuns and Their Peregrinations after the Reformation. The Roxburghe Club 1991 (Otley, 1993), 48–158. David N. Bell has prepared a list of all surviving books (manuscripts and printed books) from women’s monastic houses in England; see What Nuns Read. Books and Libraries in Medieval English Nunneries, Cistercian Studies Series 158 (Kalamazoo, 1995). I would like to thank both Dr. de Hamel and Dr. Bell for reading an earlier version of this paper and for their numerous helpful comments. In addition, I would like to acknowledge their generosity in sending me drafts of their work prior to publication.

² Although the latter had been exonerated by Pope Gregory XII in 1408 from responsibility for the deaths of Richard II and Archbishop Scrope of York, he had undertaken to found three strict monastic houses as an act of expiation. The Carthusian house of Jesus of Bethlehem of Sheen was also founded in 1415, but the projected third house, for the Celestines (to be named

addition, Henry V was, no doubt, concerned to have completed this deed when he set out for France and what was to become the celebrated battle at Agincourt in the autumn of that year. In this respect, the choice of a house of the Bridgettine order was particularly suitable, since it was believed that the prayers of its members were especially efficacious in bringing peace and well-being. Royal interest did not, however, stop with the foundation of Syon Abbey. In his will of 10 June 1421 (a copy of which was only recently discovered at Eton College), Henry stated, "volumus quod abbatissa de Syon habeat et gaudeat ad usum illius monasterii libros nostros sibi accom[modatos]," although, apart from specifying that they were "suitable," he did not indicate the exact nature of these books. A notable exception is the "magna biblia" which had belonged to his father, Henry IV. Henry V had given this to the abbess, but wished to have it returned for his successor. A specific gift was made to the monastery, however, in 1426, four years after Henry's death, when his brother, John, duke of Bedford, laid the foundation-stone of the new church at Isleworth (the more spacious and less marshy site to which Syon Abbey moved in 1431): "Dedit...duos pulceros libros officii sororum et vnum legendam."

Recently, Christopher de Hamel has identified the hand of the scribe of the Bedford Hours on eight leaves of a Breviary that he suggests are part of one of these pulchri libri. Seven of the leaves now make up Cambridge, University Library Add. 7634; the eighth, which only came to light in 1988, is in private hands. If de Hamel's identification is correct, the eight leaves belong to the earliest recorded book that can be traced specifically to the

4 The foundation charter of 3 March 1415 (Charter Roll, 2 Hen. v, pt. 2, m. 28) clearly indicates that the community would have the special task of praying for the king and his family.
5 Patrick and Felicity Strong, "The Last Will and Codicils of Henry V," English Historical Review 96 (1981): 94. In a codicil made on 26 August 1422, just five days before he died, Henry added that he did not wish either the abbesse or confessor-general of Syon (or the prior or community of Sheen) to keep any duplicate copies of his books (Ibid., 100).
6 Ibid., 93. I would like to thank Jenny Stratford for drawing this reference to my attention.
8 Syon Abbey, 62–64. The Breviary is No. 71 in de Hamel's list (Syon Abbey, 114–24); in Bell's it is A.5. Hereafter, surviving books from Syon will be referred to by their numbers in de Hamel's and Bell's lists.
9 Formerly Maggs, Bulletin 14, 1988, no. 56.
Syon nuns. The Breviary, however, is a service book, and the interest of this paper lies mainly in the books the nuns read in connection with their meditations.

Syon Abbey is the only house of the Bridgettine order to have been established in England—and, I might add, the only house not to have been dissolved at the time of the dissolution. (When Syon shut its doors on 25 November 1539, the community went underground and abroad.) The order's founder, the fourteenth-century Swedish mystic, St. Bridget, received its rule by divine revelation and then went to Rome to seek papal approval. According to the divine specifications, this was to be an enclosed double order, intended primarily for contemplative nuns. Its full complement was to have been sixty nuns, thirteen priests, four deacons, and eight lay brothers, making a total of eighty-five, symbolic of the post-Ascension community. The role of the priests (who symbolized the twelve apostles plus St. Paul) was to take the services, preach sermons (on Sundays they were to preach to the public in the vernacular), and assist the nuns with their devotions. The deacons, who could also be priests, represented the four principal doctors of the Church—Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory, and Jerome—and their role too was to assist the nuns in their learning and devotional life. Thus it is interesting to see an emphasis on learning in the very structure of the order.

Though part of the same house, the women and men were strictly segregated; communication took place through a grill. The chapel was divided into upper and lower levels and arranged so that the nuns and brothers could hear, but not see, each other. Otherwise there were to be separate facilities; included among these were the libraries, each to be presided over by its own librarian. An important catalogue of books from the brothers' library survives, but so far no list of the contents of the pre-dissolution nuns' library has been discovered. Nevertheless, as I shall

---

10 A good account is given by John Rory Fletcher, who, having thoroughly culled the Syon Abbey papers and other relevant documents, published a summary of his findings in The Story of the English Bridgettines of Syon Abbey (South Brent, 1933). A fuller, but earlier, account is given in George James Aungier's The History and Antiquities of Syon Monastery, the Parish of Isleworth, and the Chapelry of Hounslow (London, 1840).

11 See Regula Salvatoris (ed. Eklund, passim).

12 For a fuller discussion of the significance of the order's composition, see Roger Ellis, 'Viderunt Eam Filie Syon': The Spirituality of the English House of a Medieval Contemplative Order from its Beginning to the Present Day (vol. 2 of The Contemplative Life in Great Britain: Carthusians, Benedictines, Bridgettines), Analecta Cartusiana 68 (Salzburg, 1984).

demonstrate, from other sources we have evidence of the importance attached to reading in the daily devotional life of this contemplative order, and indeed some of the books they read still survive.

A remarkable feature of the Bridgettine Rule, a rule in which poverty is stressed, is the provision made for an unlimited supply of books for study. This liberality is all the more striking when one realizes that even the number of service books is stringently restricted to "as many as be necessary to doo dyvyne office and moo in no wyse," as the Middle English version of the Rule puts it.\textsuperscript{14} A text which gives some hint of the reading habits of the nuns is \textit{The Myroure of oure Ladye}, a treatise on the nuns' devotional practices, along with a translation of the Bridgettine Breviary and an explanation of its significance. As well as being a primary source of evidence, \textit{The Myroure} is itself one of the books belonging to the nuns' library. Today only one manuscript copy is known to have survived (and a fairly late one),\textsuperscript{15} but in 1530 the abbess and confessor-general of the time considered it necessary to commission a printed edition.\textsuperscript{16} At least thirteen copies of this version of \textit{The Myroure} published by Richard Fawkes are known to survive.\textsuperscript{17}

The date and authorship of \textit{The Myroure} have not been precisely established, but the author was certainly a member of the order, as can be determined from his direct and intimate knowledge of the house, from his clear understanding of the Bridgettine liturgy, and especially from inclusive statements he makes from time to time (e.g., "we that are professed in her relygyon," with reference to St. Bridget [164])\textsuperscript{18} and the deeply caring way in which he addresses the nuns (e.g., "moste dere and deuoute sys-


\textsuperscript{15} This copy, made sometime in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century by Robert Tailor for sister Elyzabeth Montoun (or Moutoun), survives in two manuscripts: Aberdeen, University Library 134 contains the first part of the text (ending on p. 174 of Blunt's edition [see n. 3 above]), and Oxford, Bodleian Library Rawl. C. 941, the second (pp. 175–332 of Blunt's edition). See de Hamel, Nos. 65, 14; Bell, A.1. Citations from \textit{The Myroure} are from Blunt's edition. I am currently preparing a new edition of this text.

\textsuperscript{16} Agnes Jordan was the Lady Abbess (1520–46) and John Fewterer, the confessor-general (1523–36).

\textsuperscript{17} A \textit{Short-title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, and Ireland... 1475–1640}, ed. A. W. Pollard, G. R. Redgrave, et al., 2d ed., 3 vols. (London, 1976, 1986, 1991) [hereafter cited as \textit{STC}], no. 17542. These may be found in the Cambridge University Library; the Bodleian; the British Library; Lambeth Palace; Bishop Cosin's Library, Durham; Peterborough Cathedral (now in the Cambridge U.L.); Warwick; Manchester; and in the Folger (2); the Huntington Library, San Marino, California; the University of Illinois, Urbana; the Pierpont Morgan Library.

\textsuperscript{18} Cf. \textit{The Myroure}, 12, 62, 72.
tress" [4]). Moreover, he tells his readers that he has been to the house in which St. Bridget lived in Rome. These hints have led A. J. Collins, the editor of the Latin Bridgettine Breviary, to propose two candidates: Thomas Fishbourne, the order's first confessor-general, elected when the house was enclosed in 1420, or his contemporary, priest-brother Simon Wynter. Fishbourne died in 1428 and Wynter in 1448, and if Collins's hypothesis is correct, then The Myroure was composed either late in the first quarter, or before the end of the second quarter, of the fifteenth century. A piece of internal evidence suggests the work was composed when both the order and its English house were still fairly "young." The author refers to the Bridgettine hymns, anthems, responses, and so on, which were, like the service itself, received through divine inspiration; concerning this part of the service he says, "For ye haue nye all suche thynges made and set to you of new in your servuce in suche a meruelous and gra- cyous wyse. . . ."

The Myroure is divided into three parts: Part I describes the divine origin of the Bridgettine service and provides a rationale of divine service generally; Part II, the major section, translates and explains the "Hours" as they are said, or sung, on each day of the week and is preceded by a short treatise on "how ye shall be gourned in redyng of this Boke and of all other bokes" (65); and Part III translates special masses and offices observed at Syon Abbey. Of particular interest here is the short treatise on reading, which begins "Deuoute redyng of holy Bokes. ys called one of the partes of contemplacyon" (65). The author establishes the importance of reading, discusses the best methods, suggests times, and offers guidance on the choice of reading material. In other words, he takes for granted that a large part of the nuns' day is devoted to reading, not only this book but other edifying books as well.

Some of these books are, in fact, referred to in The Myroure. Richard Rolle's translation of the Psalter, for example, is mentioned in the first prologue, where the author states that he has not considered it necessary to translate many of the psalms "for ye may haue them of Rycharde ham-

19 Cf. ibid., 52.
20 Collins, Bridgettine Breviary, xxxix.
21 In a forthcoming article, "Further Thoughts on the Spirituality of Syon Abbey," Roger Ellis has pointed out (n. 65) that if The Myroure is dependent on British Library Harley 612 (dated 1435–57), a possibility suggested by Collins (Bridgettine Breviary, xx n. 3), Thomas Fishbourne (d. 1428) cannot have been the author. I would like to thank Dr. Ellis for drawing this note to my attention.
22 The Myroure, 37. Italics are mine.
poules drawynge” (3). In addition, he implies that the nuns have English bibles, which would also make translation unnecessary, for in the same place he adds “if ye haue lysence thereto,” referring to Archbishop Arundel’s constitutions of 1407–9 concerning the necessity of obtaining permission to possess translations of the Scriptures. (We know, in fact, that the men’s library possessed a Wycliffite bible.)

In discussing the value of singing—as opposed to reciting—divine service, our author notes that it sometimes causes “deouute soules to be rauyshed and to recyeue spyrituall gyftes of god as ye rede in saynt Mawdes boke” (33, italics mine). This is the first of several references (see 38–39, 276–77) to “Mawdes boke,” or The Booke of Gostlye Grace, a Middle English translation of the Liber specialis gratiae by the thirteenth-century mystic from the Benedictine convent in Helfta, Mechtild of Hackeborn. Interestingly, selections from Mechtild are often found in devotional compilations which also contain excerpts of the Revelations of St. Bridget. Not unexpectedly, the author of The Myroure frequently quotes and alludes to St. Bridget’s Revelations, both those contained in the version presented for the canonization proceedings, or the Liber celestis (e.g., 35), and the extra revelations, or Extravagantes (e.g., 16, 59). Although he does not provide absolute proof of their ownership of these works, as he does in the case of “Mawdes boke,” it would, I think, be extraordinary for nuns of St. Bridget’s order to possess the one and not the other. Certainly by 1495 they had a copy, for the seventh prioress, Anne de la Pole (d. 1501), re-

23 Item F48 in the men’s library is an English Psalter which Bateson speculates may be Rolle’s version (Catalogue, 58 n. 4). It is important to note, however, that the nuns also read the Psalter in Latin—this is always the case in choir. De Hamel lists eleven surviving manuscript copies of Latin Psalters (Syon Abbey, 74–75; also Nos. 1, 4, 12, 35, 43, 45, 56, 67, 73, 74, 80), eight of which belonged to the nuns (12, 35, 45, 56, 67, 73, 74, 80; these correspond to Bell, A.24, A.28, A.15, A.44, D.1, A.18, A.33, A.4).

24 Manchester, John Rylands Library Eng. 81 (R.4995), as de Hamel (following notes of N. R. Ker) points out, is a Wycliffite New Testament which can be traced to the brothers’ library at Syon (Syon Abbey, 82 and No. 40).

25 The Middle English translation has been edited by Theresa A. Halligan, The Booke of Gostlye Grace of Mechtilde of Hackeborn, Studies and Texts 46 (Toronto, 1979); see esp. 1, 50, 51. Halligan (51) points out that the inventory of the men’s library includes three early sixteenth-century printed copies in Latin (M47, M107, M121), three manuscripts of the Latin (one complete—M59—and two in part—M22, M94), as well as a manuscript “in anglico” (M98); see also Bateson, Catalogue, 105, 114, 115, 107, 102, 112, 113.

26 Cicely, duchess of York, read—or, at least, heard—and owned both; see “Orders and Rules of the House of the Princess Cecill, Mother of King Edward IV,” A Collection of Ordinances and Regulations for the Government of the Royal Household, The Society of Antiquaries (London, 1790), 37–39, esp. 37. Durham, University Library Cosin V.iii.16, which will be discussed later (see pp. 221–22 below), contains excerpts from both Bridget and Mechtild.
ceived such a bequest from her grandmother, Cicely, duchess of York.27 (Again we know that the brothers' library had several copies.28)

Similarly, one would expect that the nuns had copies of St. Bridget's Vita, another work referred to by The Myrour's author. Versions of the Vita are often found together with the Revelations, both in Latin and in Middle English manuscripts. In contrast to the dearth of information concerning the Revelations and the Vita, there is evidence concerning the Rule. Once a week, according to the Additions to the Rule for the nuns, the "legister" was to read in the refectory "the rewles of seynt sauyour, and of seynt austyn, hoole, and also a parte of thes addicions."29 Although no complete copies are known to survive, medieval fragments of both the Rule (in English) and the Additions for the sisters can still be found at Syon Abbey today (de Hamel, Nos. 81, 82; Bell, A.48).30 In addition, a copy of the Rule translated into Middle English survives in Cambridge, University Library Fl.6.33 (de Hamel, No. 57; Bell, B.3). Dr. A. I. Doyle has identified the copyist as William Darker, monk of the Carthusian house of Sheen, just across the Thames from Syon. Although there are no marks of possession on the manuscript itself, Dom Darker, as we shall see, executed several manuscripts for the nuns.31 A Middle English manuscript of the "Additions" to the Rule for the sisters also survives as London, British Library Arundel 146 (de Hamel, No. 48; Bell, A.22). Erasure and later reinstatement of references to the pope suggest that the manuscript may have remained with the Bridgettines after the suppression.32 The surviving copy of the Martyrology, London, British Library Add. 22285, which seems to have originally belonged to the brothers,33 but which was taken into exile and brought back to England by the nuns in 1809, bears similar indications of the deletion and later reinstatement of references to the pope, Cardinal Pole, and others.34

28 M64–69 (Bateson, Catalogue, 107–8); M115 (ibid., 115).
30 Although not all the manuscripts found at Syon Abbey today can be assigned to the pre-dissolution library, it is generally agreed that these particular fragments originated in the nuns' library. James Hogg has also described these fragments in "Brigittine Manuscripts Preserved at Syon Abbey," in Studies in St. Birgitta and the Brigittine Order, vol. 2, Spiritualitat Heute und Gestern 19 (Salzburg, 1993), 228–42, esp. 232.
31 See Hogg, The Rewyll of Seynt Sauiore 2:iii.
32 See ibid. 4:vi. In 1667 the manuscript was given to the Royal Society by Henry Howard, sixth duke of Norfolk (1628–84).
33 See Collins, Bridgettine Breviary, iv n. 1.
34 The Martyrology was brought back to England in 1809 by a splinter group of nuns wishing to leave Lisbon and reestablish Syon Abbey in England. Unfortunately, the attempt was unsuccessful, and the treasures they brought with them, which included the Martyrology, were
In the course of his treatise on divine service and of his explanation of the parts of their own service, the author also refers to works by Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, Gregory, Isidore, Bede, Chrysostom, Innocent III, Hugh of St. Victor, Caesarius of Heisterbach, and others, in particular, St. Bernard. Clearly this does not indicate that he expects the nuns to have read their complete works, but he certainly assumes a knowledge of their thought. When one remembers that the four deacons of the order represent the four “principal” fathers of the western Church, a first-hand knowledge of some of the works of Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, and Gregory would not necessarily be out of the question.

Though we have no certain evidence from the pre-dissolution period, we do know that in the period of their wanderings abroad the nuns took very good care of their books. Prominent among those they still possess today are works by Augustine, Jerome, and Bernard, though, of course, we have no means of establishing when such books were acquired. One book about which we do have information survives from the time of their first exile (the order returned to its house in the time of Mary and was re-enclosed in 1557). This is a Latin edition of the works of the German mystic and popular preacher, John Tauler (1290–1361), printed in Cologne in 1548, and it bears the name of Catherine Palmer. A comparatively junior

bought by the sixteenth earl of Shrewsbury to assist the nuns financially. The British Museum subsequently acquired the manuscript from his estate in 1858. See de Hamel, No.66; Bell, C §4 (p. 207).

35 Although the men’s and women’s libraries were completely separate, the catalogue of the men’s library may, if used with caution, be helpful in suggesting what might have been available to the community as a whole, since we also know that the priests assisted the nuns in their devotions. The brother’s library possessed, for example, at least one copy of Caesarius’s Dialogus miraculorum, K62 (Bateson, Catalogue, 88). Also, one copy of Hugh of St. Victor’s commentary of the Rule of St. Augustine, M17 (ibid., 101), contained an English life of St. Jerome—probably the Life written by Simon Wynter for Margaret, duchess of Clarence, a sister-in-law of Henry VI, who, as a widow, came to Syon for spiritual direction; the presentation copy of the Life is now in New Haven, Yale University, Beinecke Library 317.

36 From the time of the move to Rouen from the Spanish Netherlands in 1580 there is a record of the shipment of, among other effects, “a cask of books” and “5 crates of unbound books” (Certificate Book, vol. 425, Archives Communales d’Auvers; see Poor Souls’ Friend, July–August 1966, p. 107). Subsequently, however, books were lost as a result of fire and other vicissitudes (see Bateson, Catalogue, xvii).

37 The books have recently been placed on permanent loan at the University of Exeter, where a list has been compiled.

38 D. Joannis Thavleri Praeclarissimi viri, sublimisque Theologi . . . (Cologne: Joannis Quentel, 1548. Quarto). I am grateful to the Lady Abbess and Sister Mary Bridget who showed me this book when I first began my research on the reading habits of the nuns of Syon Abbey. The book is now with the other Syon books at the University of Exeter, and has recently been unpacked. It bears two inscriptions in the same hand: the first, originally the label but now pasted on the first flyleaf, reads “vsui sororis Katherine Palmer”; the second, at the top of the title page, reads “Advsum sororis Katherine palmere.” See also Bell, under A.13.
sister at the suppression, Palmer led a group of the nuns abroad and, on
the death of Agnes Jordan in 1546, became the eighth abbess, a position
she occupied with courage and distinction for the next thirty years.39 The
existence of this book among the possessions of the nuns indicates some-
thing of both the nature of their interests and the seriousness of their
dedication to study, even during periods of uncertainty in their day to day
life.

From this and other evidence, we can with some confidence interpret
literally the recurring statement of the author of The Myroure, "As ye rede
..." (e.g., 33).40 This phrase is often repeated in connection with exempla
or "sentences," undoubtedly taken from a devotional compilation that the
nuns possessed. Remarks concerning the Paternoster at the beginning of
his translation of the Sunday service provide further indication of the exist-
ence of such compilations.41 The author acknowledges, "The exposcycon
of thys holy prayer ye haue in dyuerse bokes. whiche ye study byselly to
vnderstonde wyll gyue you cause to fynde grete conforte & deuocyon in
the sayng therof" (73).42

We know of other books associated with the nuns of Syon through wills
and from the names inscribed on them, though this latter practice seems to
be more frequent after 1500. A work that the Syon nuns had in the early
fifteenth century in manuscript, and then after 1494 in printed form, is
Walter Hilton's Scale of Perfection, one of the most widely circulated devo-
tional texts. Sometime not long after Syon was founded, Margery Pensax,
an anchoress near Bishopsgate, bequeathed ("legavit") a copy of the Scale;
it survives as London, British Library Harley 2387.43 Another manu-
script of the same work (now Oxford, All Souls College 25; de Hamel, No.

39 Although she headed the community after the death of Abbess Jordan, Catherine Palmer
was only "officially" elected abbess at the time of the reenclosure under Queen Mary on 1
August 1557. An inscription of 1546 does, however, refer to her as "pia mater" (see n. 46
below).

40 The Myroure itself, of course, was written specifically for the nuns to read and reread (e.g.,
4), and, as noted above, the author includes a short treatise to instruct the nuns on reading (The
Myroure, 65-71; see p. 209 above).

41 A late example is Cambridge, Magdalene College 13 (de Hamel, No. 39; Bell, A.10), origi-
nally owned by a Dominican friar, but by 1521 in the possession of Elizabeth Crutchley, one of
four lay sisters at the time of the suppression; this manuscript contains, among other devotional
material, a commentary on the Lord's Prayer.

42 On this occasion, however, he will offer his own explanation for the nuns to "laboure
theraboute" when saying "thys holy prayer," but, he concludes, he does not intend them to
"haue mynde on all the wordes that I haue wryten. but on the sentence" (The Myroure, 77).

43 Noted in Medieval Libraries of Great Britain: A List of Surviving Books, ed. N. R. Ker, 2d
ed. (London, 1964), 309; de Hamel, No. 52; Bell, A.26.
(The Pierpont Morgan Library 600).\textsuperscript{53} Her name also appears in \textit{A Deuout Treatys Called the Tree & XII Fruites of the Holy Goost}, another printed book (STC 13608) now in Cambridge (Trinity College C.7.12).\textsuperscript{54} Somewhat later, on 1 July 1534, Susan Kingstone, a vowess of Syon, became the dedicatee of two works translated by her stepbrother, the humanist Sir Thomas Elyot: \textit{De mortalitate}, a sermon by St. Cyprian, and \textit{Regulae XII}, the “rules of a Christian lyfe” by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (London, 1534; STC 6157).\textsuperscript{55} In the course of his dedication, Elyot entreats Susan to “communicate” the translations with two other sisters, Dorothy and Eleanor, both nuns at Syon.\textsuperscript{56} He urges this “as welle for theyr instructyon as myne,” for during troubled times it is especially important to be prepared “agaynst naturall and worldly afflicctions.” Elyot’s desire to pass on to his stepsisters a work which he himself “liked so well” is interesting, for it suggests an atmosphere of shared intellectual interests and mutual respect among men and women in educated circles in this period.

\textsuperscript{53} This book was given to Margaret by Henry Parker (one of the priest brothers, according to de Hamel, \textit{Syon Abbey}, 97; his first name, however, appears as Richard in J. R. Fletcher’s “Who’s Who,” notes on the members of the Syon community to be found with his collected papers at the University of Exeter Library). The book is mentioned by N. R. Ker in his notes on Syon’s books (No. 43), a copy of which is now with the Fletcher papers in the University of Exeter Library. See also de Hamel, \textit{Syon Abbey}, 97 and n. 102; Bell, A.31.

\textsuperscript{54} See Bell, A.14. Her name is also found in a Psalter made especially for her, a gift from her brother, Lord Andrew Windsor (see de Hamel, No. 74; Bell, A.33).

\textsuperscript{55} The dedication, addressed to “my ryghte worshipfull suste dame Suzan Kyngestone,” speaks of the merits of the work, “whiche I have dedycate and sente unto you for a token: that ye shall perceyyue, that I doo not forgete you: and that I doo unfaynedly loue you, not onelye for our allyaunce, but also moche more for your perseveraunce in vertu & warkes of true faith, praieing you to communcate it with our two susters religiouse Dorothe & Alienour. . . .” I am grateful to James P. Carley for drawing this book to my attention.

\textsuperscript{56} Susan, the eldest daughter of Richard Fetiaplace and Elizabeth (née Bessells), became a vowess after the death of her husband, John, in 1514. She was the stepsister of Sir Thomas Elyot through her mother’s second marriage to Sir Richard Elyot sometime after her father’s death in 1511. Dorothy, the fourth Fetiaplace daughter, became a nun after the death of her husband, John Godrinton (sometimes written Codrynton), in 1518. The name “Dorothe Coderynton” is found in a copy of \textit{A Deuout Treatys Called the Tree & XII Fruites of the Holy Goost} printed in 1534–35 (STC 13608), now Ampleforth Abbey C.V.130 (Bell, A.3), this latter must be the Dorothy of Elyot’s dedication, who may have been a stepniece, or sister-in-law, to Elyot, since there seem to have been two nuns named Dorothy Godrinton at Syon, one Dorothy Fetiaplace Godrinton, who died in 1531, and the other, who remained with the community after the suppression and died in Rouen in 1586. Eleanor Fetiaplace, the next daughter after Dorothy, never married and must have been professed sometime after 1518, since her name is not on that election list. For further reference to books associated with Eleanor, see pp. 220–21 below. For the Fetiaplace family, see Fletcher’s “Who’s Who” and, more recently, Mary Erler, “The Books and Lives of Three Tudor Women,” in \textit{Privileging Gender in Early Modern England}, ed. Jean R. Brink, Sixteenth-Century Essays and Studies 23 (Kirkville, Mo., 1993), 5–17.
There is speculation that more crude renderings of the "I S" monogram and notes which appear in British Library Add. 37790, another manuscript annotated by Grenehalg, might possibly relate to Joanna Sewell (though customarily Grenehalg's hand is elegant, often alternating the "humanist" with a cursive style).49 Such notations appear against "The Golden Epistle of Saint Bernard," a Middle English translation of Notabile documentum, spuriously attributed to St. Bernard, and in the verses which conclude The Mirror of Simple Souls, the Middle English translation of Marguerite Porete's Miroir des simples ames.50

Apart from the Revelations of St. Bridget, Cicely, duchess of York, bequeathed to her granddaughter, the prioress of Syon, two treatises bound together in a single volume: "a book of Bonaventure and Hilton in the same in English."51 The former is probably The Mirour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ, a translation of the Latin of Pseudo-Bonaventure, by Nicholas Love, prior of the Carthusian house, Mount Grace, while the latter is Hilton's Epistle on the Mixed Life, a treatise actually recommended within Love's work. A copy of Love's translation printed by Caxton in 1490 (STC 3260), now British Library IB 55119, bears the inscription "Susan purefeye owethe thys booke." Susan Purefoy was professed after 1518 and remained with the community until her death in exile in 1570. This edition also contains a short treatise and a prayer (in English) on the sacrament.52

By the early sixteenth century, there is evidence of individual nuns receiving books as gifts. Margaret Windsor, the ninth prioress (1513–39), was given a printed French translation of Boccaccio's De casibus virorum illustrium (Lyons, 1483), in which she has twice—once in English and once in French—claimed her ownership. This volume is now in New York

No. 49; Bell, A.16) contains The Sawyer of Mercy in Latin with English rubrics. Dr. Bell notes that the work was written in 1495 by John Cresseuer and that this "appears to be the unique copy." Latin prayers with English rubrics follow the Sawyer, and the final work is the Meditations on the Life and Passion of Jesus Christ, an English translation of Meditaciones de passione Christi Articuli by de passione Domini cum theorematibus et documentis by Jordan of Ondeliruburg (or Jordan of Saxony, O.S.A.). The second book, printed in Paris, 1523 (Durham, Dr. A. I. Doyle; Bell, A.17), entirely in Latin, contains twenty-six of the shorter works of Thomas à Kempis and five of Jean Gerson (see Imprimeurs & libraires Parisiens du XVIe siecle, vol. 2, ed. Philippe Renouard [Paris, 1969], 217, no. 524). I am grateful to Dr. Bell for pointing out the importance of these books to me.

49 See Sargent, James Grenehalg 1:87.
50 Ibid. 2:503–7. Sargent (1:69) notes that E. Colledge seems to have been in two minds about the attribution to Grenehalg; his final word, however, is that the monogram is not written by Grenehalg (Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich, 2 vols., Studies and Texts 35 [Toronto, 1978], 1:4 and n. 14).
51 Wills from Doctors' Commons, 3.
52 I am grateful to Dr. Bell for drawing this book to my attention; this is his A.27.
Ff.6.33, was copied by William Darker of Sheen for Syon (see p. 211 above). Excerpts from the former appear in British Library Add. 37790, a manuscript which, as we have seen, is associated with James Grenehagh, but so far no direct connection can be made with the nuns at Syon Abbey. On the other hand, *The Orchard of Syon*, a fifteenth-century translation of *The Dialogue* of St. Catherine of Siena, can with certainty be linked with the nuns of Syon. In this case the prologue is explicitly addressed to the “Religious modir & deouete sustren . . . at the hous of Syon.”

In 1519 Wynkyn de Worde printed an edition of *The Orchard (STC 4815)* at the request of Richard Sutton, steward of Syon.

One of the works of the Dutch Augustinian, Jan van Ruysbroek, translated from the vernacular into Latin by Wilhelm Jordans and later into Middle English, also has definite Syon connections. A copy of a late fifteenth-century printed edition (Wynken de Worde, Westminster, 1493 [*STC 5065*]—perhaps commissioned by Syon) of *The Chastising of God’s Children*, written as a series of conferences between a nun and her spiritual advisor, was owned by Edyth Morepath, a nun of Syon who died in 1536, and subsequently by Catherine Palmer. Another copy, now in the Göttingen University Library, is inscribed with the names of two other Syon nuns. This is also one of the texts which James Grenehagh annotated, and thus may have been known by Joanna Sewell as well.

The Göttingen volume also contains *The Tretyse of Love (STC 24234)*, printed by de Worde at about the same time; it is an English translation of a French adaptation of the *Ancrene Riwle*.

---


60. A copy now in the New York Public Library (Spencer Collection, Eng. 1519) bears the inscription of Sister Elizabeth Strickland, a nun by 1518 whose name also appears on the pension list. (See No. 41 in the copy of Ker’s list; also mentioned in de Hamel, *Syon Abbey*, 101, 112; Bell, A.32.)

61. Now Cambridge, Sidney Sussex College Bb.2.14 (Bell, A.13).

62. Göttingen, U.L., 4° Theol. Mor. 138/53 Inc.; see *The Chastising of God’s Children*, ed. Joyce Bazire and Eric Colledge (Oxford, 1957), 38. The nuns named are Audrey (or Etheldreda) Dely, a sister at the time of the suppression who remained with the community until her death in 1579, and Mary Nevill, also a sister at the time of the suppression who died during the time the community was back at Syon Abbey in 1558 and was the last nun to be buried in the old Abbey (Fletcher’s “Who’s Who”). As the inscription indicates, the book was a gift from Sister Mary to Sister Audrey: “Thys boke ys myne, S<ysters> Awdry Dely, of the gyfte of Syster Mary Nevill. God reward her in heven for yt.” I would like to thank Dr. Bell for the reference to the catalogue number and the details of the inscription; this is his A.20.

63. The same author’s *Tretise of Perfection of the Sons of God* might possibly have Syon connections; it survives in one manuscript, British Library Add. 37790 (Amherst), which, as noted above, belonged to Grenehagh.

64. I am grateful to Dr. Bell for this information.