



The role of binominals in the Pater Noster table of the Vernon MS, f. 231v

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Abstract: This paper examines the Middle English glosses contained in the Pater Noster table of the Vernon manuscript (Bodleian Library MS. Eng. poet. a. 1, f. 231v), written in the West Midlands in the last decades of the fourteenth century (Scase, ed. 2013). The table presents the Lord's Prayer in a diagrammatic way, linking its seven petitions to the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Seven Virtues, and the Seven Deadly Sins (Fig. 1). While recent scholarship has concentrated on the visual elements of the table (Henry 1990), its meditative and devotional purposes (Vulic 2004), and literacy modes available to its readers (Gottschall 2008), little attention has been given so far to the relation of the vernacular glosses in the roundels of the table (e.g. Drede of god in the middle of Fig. 1) to the contemporary Middle English lexical usage. The aim of the paper is twofold: to analyse how the visual aids of the table can help us interpret its lexical parts and, the other way, how the vocabulary of the vernacular roundels can enlighten us about the purpose, audience, and readings of the table. In particular, the author will concentrate on the binominals (here, coordinated noun phrases (Mollin 2014)) employed in the columns containing the Virtues and Vices (the two right-hand roundels in Fig. 1) in their relation to the lexicon of virtues and vices in the second half of the fourteenth century, using the Middle English Dictionary as a reference tool. This examination uncovers both neologisms (or possible copying mistakes) in the Vernon table, such as Pruide stow(t)nesse 'pride' (Fig. 1), and commonplace usage, such as loue charite. Previous research has seen these double glosses as interpretative tools, while this paper treats them as established binominal phrases undergoing freezing and idiomatisation. The author's conclusion is that the table served both a mnemonic and meditative function. Drawing directly and indirectly on the images and metaphors of mutability of life and fortune and of mutability of sin and virtue, the design of the table also invites us to consider variation in language: the lexical stability of Latin against the changeability of English, native English terms against loanwords from Anglo-Norman and Old Norse, dialectal West Midland terms against their more common counterparts, and recent phrasal innovations against established poetic clichés.

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This paper examines the Middle English glosses contained in the Pater Noster table of the Vernon manuscript (Bodleian Library MS. Eng. poet. a. 1, f. 231v), written in the West Midlands in the last decades of the fourteenth century (Scase, ed. 2013). The table presents the Lord's Prayer in a diagrammatic way, linking its seven petitions to the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Seven Virtues, and the Seven Deadly Sins (Fig. 1). While recent scholarship has concentrated on the visual elements of the table (Henry 1990), its meditative and devotional purposes (Vulic 2004), and literacy modes available to its readers (Gottschall 2008), little attention has been given so far to the relation of the vernacular glosses in the roundels of the table (e.g. *Drede of god* in the middle of Fig. 1) to the contemporary Middle English lexical usage. The aim of the paper is twofold: to analyse how the visual aids of the table can help us interpret its lexical parts and, the other way, how the vocabulary of the vernacular roundels can enlighten us about the purpose, audience, and readings of the table. In particular, the author will concentrate on the binominals (here, coordinated noun phrases (Mollin 2014)) employed in the columns containing the Virtues and Vices (the two right-hand roundels in Fig. 1) in their relation to the lexicon of virtues and vices in the second half of the fourteenth century, using the *Middle English Dictionary* as a reference tool. This examination uncovers both neologisms (or possible copying mistakes) in the Vernon table, such as *Pruide & stow(t)nesse* 'pride' (Fig. 1), and commonplace usage, such as *loue & charite*. Previous research has seen these double glosses as interpretative tools, while this paper treats them as established binominal phrases undergoing freezing and idiomatisation. The author's conclusion is that the table served both a mnemonic and meditative function. Drawing directly and indirectly on the images and metaphors of mutability of life and fortune and of mutability of sin and virtue, the design of the table also invites us to consider variation in language: the lexical stability of Latin against the changeability of English, native English terms against loanwords from Anglo-Norman and Old Norse, dialectal West Midland terms against their more common counterparts, and recent phrasal innovations against established poetic clichés.

Figure 1. The First Petition in the Pater Noster table of the Vernon MS, © Bodleian Library



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