The contents of the *Limburg sermons* textual collection is both broad in scope and diverse in nature. Despite all of the differences these disparate texts quite naturally exhibit, there exist as well all kinds of formal, stylistic and content-related idiosyncrasies that crop up on a regular basis. The compiler of *Limburg sermons* took the trouble to cast ‘his’ texts in the form of sermons, to a greater extent than the example suggested by the *St. Georgen sermons*. Apparently there were good reasons to respect as far as possible the laws of that genre in particular. The texts themselves reveal a remarkably high use of allegory, whereby botanical themes enjoyed particular preference. The violet of humility, the lily of chastity, and the rose of passion are staple images in the *Limburg sermons*. Moreover, in the sixteen interpolated Middle Dutch texts we detect a pronounced preference for imagery from the Song of Songs. Closely related to this is the undeniably strong interest in minne mysticism in these sermons. Other formal differences are more evenly spread throughout the collection, such as the systematic use of numerical series and the almost modular structure of the texts.

The *Limburg sermons* were not compiled in any more or less haphazard way, by someone with a particular literary interest, for example. For the inspiration behind this collection we must rather look to the compiler’s need to give expression, by means of careful selection and adaptation of texts, to the spiritual identity of a well-defined religious community. It can hardly be otherwise than that the shape these texts were given in this collection says something about the religious ambitions of this circle. This chapter attempts to delve more deeply into the manner in which the *Limburg sermons* were constructed. It deals not so much with the function of the *Limburg sermons* collection as a material object—it is my assumption that this prose corpus was intended primarily as a text to be read from aloud—as it does with the meaning of certain formal and stylistic idiosyncrasies it contains. The primary goal in this endeavor, as it is throughout this study as a whole, is to bring into focus as sharply as possible the compiler of the *Limburg sermons* and their first audience.
The first section provides a schematic overview of one complete Limburg sermon, in order to give an impression of the way in which the texts are structured (see also the two examples in Appendix V). Next follow five fairly comprehensive studies in which an attempt is made to place certain formal and stylistic idiosyncrasies in the Limburg sermons in a broader (literary) historical context, and situate them within that framework. The second section delves more deeply into the possible reasons behind the marked preference by the compiler of the Limburg sermons for the sermon form. The next section comprises a discussion of the most important stylistic feature in the collection, namely allegory, and its links with the medieval practice of Biblical exegesis. Section four deals with the pronounced influence of the Song of Songs on especially the interpolated Limburg sermons, and seeks to understand the significance that this book of the Bible had for its intended audience. In the section that follows next we consider the way in which readers and listeners, respectively, of the Limburg sermons were meant to use the texts in their own private meditations. We conclude with a consideration of the question of why the compiler of the Limburg sermons preferred prose, given the dominance enjoyed by rhymed verse in his day.

3.1 An Example: The Spiritual Wine Cellar

In order to avoid the danger of picking out haphazardly all manner of examples from the Limburg sermons, I have chosen one sermon that will run like a red thread though this chapter. Because this book’s primary concern is the Middle Dutch Limburg sermons tradition, it goes without saying that this example text should be chosen from one of the sixteen interpolated texts. Ls. 40 and Ls. 44 are disqualified in advance, as it has been established that these are translations from Latin and German, respectively. It is also the case that the Dutch origins of the seven sermons on the Passion are not entirely certain. In the end we have opted for Dets dbuec van den gesteleken winkelre [This is the book of the spiritual wine cellar] (Ls. 43), because this text exhibits the highest number of formal aspects we wish to discuss. To begin with, Ls. 43 is a sermon (which is not the case, for example, with Ls. 41 or Ls. 42) and moreover in the preface its author reflects on his own role as preacher. Dbuec van den gesteleken winkelre is furthermore unmistakably a sermon on the Song of Songs, although that is also the case for a number of the other interpolated Limburg sermons.