ABSTRACT

"Sed Rudibus et Indoctis": Women, Orthodoxy, and the Rosebery Rolle Manuscript

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This thesis discusses one manuscript of Richard Rolle, the Hermit of Hampole. It asserts that Rolle's *Prose Psalter* was compiled specifically for a woman's private devotion and thus sheds light on both the authors and the readers of the growing devotional movement in late medieval England. Furthermore, by contextualizing Rolle's work within this devotional movement, as well as by examining the themes and reception history of his texts, this study argues that Rolle was not a precursor to the Lollard movement. He was, instead, an orthodox[1] product of the political and theological situation of the period. Finally, because the passage of verse at the end of the Roseberry Rolle Manuscript *Psalter* has never been seen before, this thesis provides a translation of the text, an analysis of the text, and ends by raising several questions that deserve further study.

[1] Orthodox is used throughout this document in a wide sense; it includes all those things that fell within the sanctioned purview of the Roman Catholic Church.

"Sed Rudibus et Indoctis": Women, Orthodoxy, and the Rosebery Rolle Manuscript

by

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A Thesis

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To my Mormor, Pauline Ruth Jensen
April 27, 1930 – September 15, 2011

Monkes & als all leryd men
In latyn may it lightly ken,
And wytt Þarby how Þay sall wyrk
To sarue god and haly kyrk.
Bott tyll women to mak it couth,
Þat leris no latyn in Þar oouth,
In ingles is it ordand here,
So Þat Þay may it lyghtly lere.

—Northern Metrical Version
*Rule of St. Benedict*

# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

In the prologue to *Incendium Amoris*, the author writes: "sed rudibus et indoctis, magis deum diligere quam multum scire."[2] *Incendium Amoris* is an exultation, written by a fourteenth century mystic who sought to express the intense joy he experienced during his personal union with God. He wrote *Incendium Amoris* in Latin, yet he made clear in his prologue that he wrote not for the theologically learned nor the ecclesiastical hierarchy, but instead for the uncultivated or unrefined and unlearned. Expressing the extreme ecstasy he experienced during his times of prayer and contemplation, he sought to lead others to similar periods of joy and unity through both recording his mystical unions and compiling devotional tools for greater piety. Many of these texts were in English, a number of those for women, who were unlearned in Latin but who could still read in their vernacular.

This author was Richard Rolle, Hermit of Hampole, who stands irremovably in the pantheon of fourteenth century English mystics. Written in both Middle-English and Latin, his works represent a life of contemplation and devotion to the Christian God. This study examines one of Rolle's manuscripts, the Rosebery Rolle manuscript, specifically the passage of verse found at the end. This work argues that this fragment is the only known copy of Rolle's verse representation of the Twelve Degrees of Meekness, as found in Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*. It also argues that Rolle, in writing in

[2] Margaret Deanesly, "The 'Incendium Amoris' of Richard Rolle and St. Bonaventura" in *English Historical Review* (1914) XXIX(CXIII): 98. Author's translation: "but for the unrefined and unlearned, to know much more of the love of God."

English, was not writing as an early forerunner to the Lollard movement but was, instead, fulfilling the call laid out in Pecham's Syllabus for greater lay learning in response to a natural rise in literacy during the early fourteenth century.

This thesis, therefore, seeks to argue two strains of thought. By looking at the corpus of secondary literature on the topic, as well as examining Rolle's life and actions, this paper will argue that Rolle does not fall into line with the Lollards that came at the end of the fourteenth and start of the fifteenth century. A small body of historians groups Rolle and his work, especially his translation of the Psalter into English, as being a precursor to the Lollard movement. These scholars argue that Rolle was part of a rising trend of increasingly hostile thought that sought to move outside the church's guidance and authority by providing greater personal access to religious texts, usually by translating them into the vernacular. This paper argues that Rolle's intentions were not outside orthodoxy, but instead lay well within the confines of the church's approval. Because of his Oxford education, Rolle was well versed in religious texts and thus was able to compile devotional tools that fell well within the orthodox approval of the church.[3] Additionally, Rolle's work was used to increase personal piety, a goal very much in line with the church's goals. Finally, the verse passage at the end of the Rosebery Rolle manuscript is a representation of the Twelve Degrees of Meekness, steps to a holy life witnessed numerous times throughout historical texts, in such orthodox places as the Benedictine *Rule*.

The second argument this paper makes, though by no means a thesis of secondary importance, is that Rolle's works revolved unusually around women and was particularly

[3] Orthodox is used throughout this text as being those things which fall into the approved purview of the Roman Catholic Church and were not, at the time, ruled heretical.

attentive to their needs. This is flushed out by an examination of the position women held in Rolle's life. Furthermore, Rolle's relationship with Margaret Kirkeby is examined in great detail, for it was this relationship that instigated many of the devotional tools Rolle produced. Additionally, this paper explains that this relationship was not necessarily unorthodox, as there are examples of other orthodox situations of similar nature, and that it was a deciding factor in Rolle crafting devotional tools in the vernacular.

Indeed, one aspect that bears minor comment is the seemingly pleasant nature of this relationship with Kirkeby. In Rolle's *Form of Living*, which he wrote as a guide for the anchoress to lead a pure eremitic life, he encourages and cautions her in her chosen role, yet does so in a kindly manner and it is the *Prose Psalter* with its additional devotional tracts that he provides for Kirkeby's use in living that life. Not all devotional tools were provided for religious women in such a charitable manner. Often nuns were seen as being mischievous and wayward, and Eileen Powers, in *Medieval English Nunneries*, states that "the Yorkshire nuns [in particular] were quarrelsome ladies."[4] An article by English professor Antha Spreckelmeyer addresses this precise issue, examining how devotional tools often became an attempt to "reclaim the image of the wayward nun by recording, reproving and, in some instances, mocking."[5] Rolle's manuscript lacks many of these qualities and instead Rolle treats his reader with a semblance of equality, and approaches her walk in the eremitic life as being akin to his own.

[4] Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922) 58.

[5] Antha Spreckelmeyer, "Reclaiming the Wayward Nun: Thematic Similarities in Three Middle English Versions of the Benedictine Rule" in *Magistra: a Journal of Women's Spirituality in History* (Summer 1996) Vol. 2: 51-62.

*Guidelines for this Study*

This study is broken into two parts in order to reflect these two different purposes. The first part includes two chapters. The first focuses on the backdrop to Rolle's life, including both pertinent historical information as well as a review of the disagreement among the secondary literature about Rolle's role in that historical context. "Orthodox Layman or Lollard Forerunner?" argues that most historians view Rolle's work as part of an upsurge in literacy and vernacular literature that stemmed from ecclesiastical promotion of lay instruction after the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. Scholars holding to this majority opinion argue that the rise in vernacular literature was a natural response to a gradual rise in literacy throughout England. In other words, literacy drove the desire for vernacular texts which the ecclesiastical hierarchy then fed by encouraging the production of orthodox devotional literature. Some scholars, however, argue the opposite: that the rise in literacy was largely driven by a desire to have greater access to religious texts and that the vernacular manuscripts written during this period reflect this subversive thought process. Instead of being driven by orthodoxy, then, these scholars argue that the impulse to produce vernacular text stemmed from heresy. After analyzing these two positions on vernacular literature and the role of Richard Rolle in history, this chapter concludes that Rolle fits squarely as an orthodox product of Pecham's Constitutions that existed apart from a heretical intent. To help better understand this interpretation of Rolle as well as the arguments to the contrary, "Orthodox Layman or Lollard Forerunner?" also provides an overview of the timeframe in which Rolle writes: the century between the issuance of Archbishop Pecham's constitutions in 1281 and Archbishop Arundel's constitutions in 1409.

"Woman Centric Eremitic" examines the specifics of Rolle's life, arguing further that Rolle's life fits best within fourteenth-century orthodoxy, despite its sometimes unusual aspects. The chapter begins by portraying Rolle's orthodox education at Oxford University, the then leading theological institution. It traces from this rather conventional beginning the sudden appearance of Rolle into the life of a lay, vernacular preacher and, eventually, hermit, arguing that even these unusual circumstances were not outside a life approved by the Catholic Church. Perhaps the most unusual aspect of Rolle's life was his relationship with women; namely the anchoress Margaret Kirkeby. "Woman Centric Eremitic" demonstrates the essential role women played in the life Rolle, contending that it was these relationships that caused Rolle to produce many of his texts. A study of the life of Kirkeby as well as the situation between the anchoress and the hermit reveals a curiously close bond, but one that was not outside the realm of normalcy or without precedent. This chapter discusses those precedents and concludes with Rolle's death and legacy, which show once again the intense devotion Kirkeby had for Rolle and his work as well as the devoutness Rolle displayed in his own life and encouraged in hers.

Part two of this thesis focuses on how significantly women influenced the writings of Richard Rolle. "Mystic and Magister" examines the codicology of Rolle's manuscripts, arguing that they were mostly for female consumption and that even in transmission throughout the years a fair number have been part of private collections. In addition to this, a closer reading of the text provides an understanding that the themes in Rolle's work, primarily *canor*, *dulcor* and *fervor*, were not only aspects of his experiences as a mystic but also functioned as the catalysts for Rolle's desire to write many of his vernacular texts. Once he had experienced this mystic sweet communion

with the godhead, Rolle was eager to share his raptures with others, especially the woman for whom he served as spiritual guide. Hence he constructed his vernacular texts.

Moreover, "Mystic and Magister" explores details of the guidebook Rolle wrote for Kirkeby in order to argue not only that he was acutely aware of his audience's femaleness but also that he remained well within orthodox limits. Despite his emphasis on the personal relationship with God, the devotions to which Rolle called Kirkeby and for which he outlined the appropriate steps were approved by the church. Indeed, this chapter illustrates how *Form of Living* reflects Rolle's individual tastes and preferences as well as an orthodox walk with God. This study of *Form of Living* leads well into the following chapter, for just as *Form of Living* instructs Kirkeby how to lead a pious life, the Rosebery Rolle manuscript would have provided her with the tools to do so.

Thus the final chapter of this thesis evaluates the document itself, looking first at its codicology and provenance. The manuscript is an excellent example of the importance of private collections in the transmission of Rolle's work. This initial overview of the manuscript in its entirety is followed by a detailed description of the verse fragment found at the end of the document and the process by which the Middle English in the fragment was deciphered. There is also a brief discussion of the Twelve Degrees of Meekness and how they are represented in Rolle's verse.

The bulk of "Rosebery Rolle," however, is filled with a discussion of how this text fits in an understanding not only of Rolle's verse but also in an understanding of other representations of the Twelve Degrees of Meekness in the Benedictine Rule. For what is most striking about this verse fragment is its very uniqueness, as it is not found replicated in other manuscripts or in the Index of Middle English Verse. The chapter

argues that the verse is very orthodox, as it should be in context of the rest of the manuscript and Rolle's life. The chapter looks at the uniqueness of Rolle's verse even amongst earlier and later representations of the Benedictine Rule, arguing that his ordering and wording follow the same order and wording that Thomas Aquinas's representation of the rule, and not in any of the other replications of the Benedictine Rule.

"The Rosebery Rolle" also argues that Rolle's verse was written with a female audience in mind, as was the rest of the manuscript. The chapter argues that this was not atypical, and provides examples of other feminine versions of the Benedictine Rule. Yet beyond the femininity of the fragment, the chapter maintains that it is unique in its representation of orthodox ideas. The chapter also addresses an earlier representation of these twelve degrees of meekness, found in St. Bernard's *Twelve Steps of Humility and Pride*, pointing out the possible impact Bernard's passage had on Rolle's understanding of the Twelve Degrees of Meekness. One later document that may have referenced the text is briefly introduced, though no direct correlation was found between Rolle's texts and this document.

*Conclusion*

Rolle deserves examination for his works that lay outside his mysticism. Although his history will rest securely in the pantheon of fourteenth-century English mystics, his vernacular texts move beyond the expression of mystical experiences. They are invitations to the women in his life to join in his passionate pursuit of God. An examination of the Rosebery Rolle manuscript, therefore, illuminates a text that was not written for his own personal use and reflection or as a broad theological treatise, "sed rudibus et indoctis, magis deum diligere quam multum scire." This thesis argues that the

fragment of verse at the end of the Rosebery Rolle manuscript reveals the orthodox nature of Rolle's devotional materials, compiled specifically for the private use of a woman.

Furthermore, this study implies that an understanding of the Rosebery Rolle manuscript reveals a more complex person in the Hermit of Hampole, for he was both a mystical eremitic and an involved member of the religious lives of numerous women. His relations were presumably chaste and thus the Rosebery Rolle manuscript reveals the importance of a woman's devotional life to her spiritual mentor and the trouble to which he would go to not only provide her a guide but also create devotional materials for private use in a language she could read, an invaluable tool in the practices of piety for any believer.

PART ONE

# CHAPTER TWO

## Orthodox Layman or Lollard Forerunner?

### *Historical Background*

Throughout the hundred year period after Richard Rolle's life, his texts were widely transcribed and spread throughout England. His work is mentioned in numerous accounts of the rise of the Lollard movement in the early fifteenth century; his work is also included in histories of the English scriptures, as he was an author of one of the early translations of the Psalter into Middle English. In order to understand the split opinions about the role played by Rolle in history, it is necessary to understand the historical context in which he was writing. This chapter both contextualizes the writings of Rolle as well as arguing that Rolle should be accounted with those authors who wrote in the vernacular in response to a rise in literacy and not with those authors who wrote to promote unrest and to buck the control of the church or ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The fifth century marked the creation of one of Christendom's most well known texts, the Latin Vulgate. This scriptural text, translated into Latin by Saint Jerome, allowed the church to have a uniform, codified version of scripture that could be used throughout all Christian nations. Although this *Vulgata*, as the *Doctor Mirabilis* Roger Bacon first referred to it in the thirteenth century, was the standard text of the Middle Ages, it was by no means the only scriptural text available. Vernacular editions of the scripture are far more abundant than many may suppose. From the tenth century onwards, the abundance of vernacular translations and other vernacular theological writings throughout Europe of portions of scripture forced the medieval church to address

the legitimacy of these vernacular texts.[6] Yet an examination of the unevenness of the church's attention to different vernacular writings illuminates that not all texts were seen as a threat to the church's authority and, instead, many were even accepted as valuable tools for a pious life. Thus both the range and use of vernacular scripture was varied between the eleventh and fifteenth century.

One period of translation and usage of the vernacular may be bookended between the Norman Conquest on one end and the issuance of Arundel's Constitutions in 1409 on the other. These bookends encompass a period in English religious history that witnessed what literary critic Nicholas Watson calls "a 'golden age' of religious writing."[7] Religious texts appeared throughout England during this time, many in Latin but many also in the vernacular. These texts include not only Biblical translations but also the writings of mystics and monastics, commonly used as part of this daily devotion. The Rosebery Rolle manuscript fits into this golden age well, as the document incorporates Latin scriptures with English translations, commentaries, and other tools to aid in living a pious life.

For the purpose of this study, the golden age may be further truncated to a period between Pecham's Syllabus of 1281 and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409. Rolle fits into this mini-golden age, as he wrote in the second and third decades of the fourteenth century. Pecham's Constitutions promoted the writing of English devotional materials for lower clergy in the early part of the century. In his ninth canon, commonly known as *Ignorantia sacerdotum*, Pecham states that "the ignorance of priests casts the people

[6] Throughout this text, the word "church" will be used in reference to the Roman Catholic Church.

[7] Nicholas Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409," *Speculum*, Vol. 70, No. 4 (October 1995) 823.

down into the ditch of error, and the foolishness and lack of learning of clerics, whom the decrees of canon law order to teach the sons of the faithful, is all the worse when it leads to error instead of knowledge."[8] Thus Pecham sought to correct what he observed as a problem in the lower clergy, that they were ill-equipped to teach the laity. Pecham's Syllabus is a collection of seven elements for Christians throughout the world to know, whether in Latin or English.[9] Within the next century, however, these elements of Christian faith shifted from being, in Pecham's Constitutions, the "*minimum* necessary for the laity to know if they are to be saved" to, in Arundel's Constitutions, the "*maximum* that [the laity] may hear, read, or even discuss."[10] Thus for the first part of the century, vernacular texts were abundant, as authors sought to provide for lay audiences the necessary tools to lead a pious life. The number of manuscripts created for lay piety abounded during this period, as the demand for vernacular devotional materials increased in order to provide access to these texts for the laity and low clergy alike. Yet through this period, a shift in the church's understanding of the role of vernacular texts occurred. Whereas at the beginning of the fourteenth century, the church supported the compilation of vernacular religious texts, towards the end of the fourteenth century, and particularly in the political turmoil upon the death of Edward II, the widespread access to religious texts had also created a variance in thought, as people were able to read and interpret religious ideas for themselves, often outside the realm of the church's authority.

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[8] Peter Brown, *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture, c. 1350-1500* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007) 408.

[9] John Raymond Shinners and William J. Dohar. *Pastors and the Care of Souls in Medieval England* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 127-132. These seven elements are 1) the fourteen articles of the faith, as enshrined in the Apostle's Creed; 2) the Ten Commandments; 3) Matthew 22:35-40; 4) The seven works of mercy; 5) the seven deadly sins; 6) the seven principle virtues.

[10] Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change," 828.

This shift in the church's perception of vernacular texts is key to understanding the reception of manuscripts like the Rosebery Rolle. During the period that Rolle was writing, he was working well within orthodoxy. Indeed, he was writing in response to a calling laid out by Pecham and was fulfilling a need that the church had identified in the care of souls. Yet within just half a century after his death, Rolle's work was being adopted by those who sought to disrupt the power of the church; his manuscripts were being identified as part of a movement to buck the church's authority and change the lay perception of orthodoxy. Falling at the early part of this period, Rolle would only have been aware of Pecham's Syllabus and he did not live into the political turmoil of the late 1370s and 1380s.

At some point within this period, the purpose of some didactic religious texts shifted from being purely to promote lay piety to a subversive shift in theological understanding. Authors of these texts, most notably John Wyclif and his followers, the Lollards, used vernacular texts and scriptures to work against the ecclesiastical hierarchy by encouraging their readers to learn for themselves, outside of the instruction of the church. This century-and-a-quarter, therefore, causes historians to question the relationship between authors of vernacular texts and the elite ecclesiastical structure. Historians and literary critics thus follow two schools of thought about the rise of vernacular religious texts. Either they argue that these texts were written because of a rising unrest on the part of the laity and lower clergy directed towards the ecclesiastical hierarchy or they argue that the texts were written in English due to an increased literacy and desire for knowledge that came about without malice towards any ecclesiastical structures. This focus on heresy is largely due to both the rise in Lollardy during the

1380s and increased interest by orthodox priests and laity to read scripture for themselves and hear sermons preached in English. As Rolle was not only a non-ordained layman but also preached and wrote in English, many historians and biographers seek to establish him as a rebel against orthodoxy by claiming him as a forerunner of the future Lollard movement, yet this assertion is by no means the prevalent view of Rolle's life.

### *Disagreements among the Experts*

Just as understanding Rolle's historical context provides an understanding of why and under what pretenses he wrote, an overview of what has been said about Rolle's authorship directly, and vernacular texts during this period in general, is necessary to understand the historical consensus of Rolle's life and work. Rolle is certainly not a Lollard, and he deserves no place in the Lollard movement. His work was pious and orthodox and reflected the trend set in motion through the call for lay understanding in Pecham's Constitutions. Due to Lollard publications of Rolle's work and because of his vernacular Psalter, his work is sometimes mistakenly included in the corpus of Lollard texts. The decision of whether or not to include Rolle as a member of a movement outside of the orthodox arises from a historians' perspective of the period. Some argue that a rise in vernacular texts was in itself a movement against the church. For others, the rise in vernacular texts simply filled a growing demand that followed a natural increase in literacy.

The next two sections split authors into two groups, those who view a rise in vernacular texts as the response to a natural rise in literacy and those who view that rise as a response to an increase in heretical thought. Because both theories cannot fully explain all manuscripts produced during this period, it is important to understand both of

them. Also, due to their complexity, it is important to understand differences in the insinuations of each theory. The fourteenth century was a time of great change in England. Not only was the church being forced, both by the power of the state and questioning from the laity, to reassess its position in power, but it also was in the midst of adjusting to a laity whose needs were changing, both due to the impact of the plague on peoples' understanding of death and to the accessibility of personal devotional materials, which allowed lay readers to create their own perceptions of orthodoxy. Historians are, therefore, divided on how to view religious manuscripts from this period.

### *Rise in Literacy as a Natural Stimulant*

One body of historians looks at both the rise in literacy and vernacular texts and the subsequent reaction of the church and concludes that the former was not reliant upon the latter includes Nicholas Watson, Margaret Deanesly, David Daniell, and Margaret Aston. These scholars are experts either the Lollard movement or English scriptures and argue, holistically, that it was not anti-orthodox ideas that led to an increase in vernacular scriptures. Although each of their arguments and foci are slightly different, the main thrust of their different arguments remains coherent.

Watson looks at the burst of fervor for writing vernacular scriptures as being a reaction to the release of Pecham's Syllabus and argues that it was the Syllabus that led to increased authorship that eventually led to an eager pursuit for individual knowledge and that this was what finally threatened the ecclesiastical elite. Watson traces this period of theological texts in his article *Speculum* from 1995, entitled "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409." This article focuses specifically on the period

between 1340 and 1410 and argues that these seventy years produced an "impressively innovative" body of vernacular theological literature that was not equaled in the hundred years after Arundel's Constitutions.[11] The texts to which his study is focused include a wide variety of readings, from Richard Rolle to Julian of Norwich to the author of the *Cloud*. Watson believes these texts are theological because of their particularly intellectual content, despite not being pure scripture. Furthermore, he believes that these "religious texts are often treated with condescension (especially in relation to Latin texts), encouraging reflection on the kinds of religious information available to vernacular readers."[12] Thus his article engages not only language difference between religious texts of the period but also the theological substance of these texts.

Watson's article is particularly relevant to this study because it traces the rise of theological writing from the release of Pecham's Syllabus of 1281, arguing that the increased knowledge base that Pecham encouraged created an increased desire in lower clergy and lay authors, like Rolle, to explore the theological writing and he argues that this promotion of greater religious instruction translated into an increase in religious writing that was that was not curtailed until Arundel's Constitutions of 1409. Ironically, these fifteenth century constitutions appealed directly to their thirteenth century counterparts. Yet Watson makes it quite clear that "no longer was the ignorance of the laity and their priests (*irnorancia sacerdotum*) that was a matter for concern; it was the laity's too eager pursuit of knowledge."[13] This eager pursuit of knowledge produced a wide body of religious vernacular literature that reached its peak in the years prior to

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 828.

Arundel's Constitutions. Thus Watson's argument follows the more prevalent trend in the scholarship about the rise of medieval vernacular religious texts, arguing that the rise in these texts reflected not a desire to rebel against the Church but rather a response to the increased literacy.

In a similar manner, Margaret Deanesly, in her *The Lollard Bible and other Medieval Biblical Versions*, argues that vernacular texts at this period were seen as orthodox not only by their authors but by the church as well. She traces the rise of vernacular translations throughout Europe, focusing in England, yet she allots a greater focus on Biblical translations prior to Wyclif than it does to Wyclif himself and is thus a valuable resource for any study of twelfth, thirteenth or fourteenth century religious texts in the vernacular. Deanesly's study engages sources from the continent as well as England. She asserts that "a vivid light is thrown on the history of translations in England by continental prohibitions of translations, the efforts of thirteenth and fourteenth century inquisitors to suppress them, and their defense by more liberal minded Catholics."[14] Though written nine years short of a century prior to this study, Deanesly's work remains one of the most comprehensive and valuable overviews of not only the rise of vernacular scriptures but also the Church's responses to these translations.

Because Deanesly includes the church's responses in her focus, her argument relies greatly upon five treatises written between 1380 and 1408 that sought to establish ecclesiastical precedent for vernacular texts of the full Bible, for "had any such orthodox translation existed, and been at all widely used by the faithful between 1350 and 1408, it is scarcely conceivable that the two anti-translation treatises should have been written at

[14] Margaret Deanesly, *The Lollard Bible and Other Medieval Versions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920) 13.

all."[15] Although these translations may not have existed in English, there were a number of translations present in French in the hundreds of years before Rolle's life. Despite a lack of full scriptural translations in the period directly prior to Wyclif, Deanesly points out that "the importance of the historical references in these tracts. . . is this: that it enables us to distinguish clearly between recognized translations and tracts, and those which existed at the time but were quite unknown, and without influence."[16] Thus even in the ecclesiastical turmoil caused by the rise of Lollardy after Wyclif's death, neither vernacular religious writings nor Biblical translations were seen as unorthodox. Indeed, authors of these five tracts devoted attention to the large swaths of Biblical texts translated into Anglo-Saxon in the late eleventh century. Deanesly argues that "there is, of course, no *a priori* reason why Anglo-Saxon scholars should not have translated the Bible, as fourteenth century critics believed that they did. . . . The western feeling against translations did not harden till the time of Gregory VII."[17] Yet Deanesly dismisses assertions made by the tract authors that translations were utilized for lay instruction, instead arguing that "popular knowledge of the Bible in the Anglo-Saxon period was based, not on translations, but on sermons."[18] She thus explores other avenues from which the laity would have received vernacular scriptures. This is just one example of the strength of *The Lollard Bible*. It is a chronological purview of vernacular authorship that places texts in their appropriate context, with an understanding of not only the

[15] Ibid., 132.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., 134.

[18] Ibid., 139.

historians' view and analysis of the manuscripts but also a contemporary reception as well.

Published almost one hundred years later and with a slightly different focus, David Daniell's impressive tome *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* follows a similar chronology to that of Deanesly, yet he looks specifically at the reception history of English scriptures instead of addressing a rise in vernacular texts in general.[19] Daniell's work goes into great depth on each step of the shift from the Vulgate being the most commonly accepted text to the English text being the most widely used and beyond. His study traces the English Bible all the way through the twentieth century. Daniell's text places great emphasis on the influence that the scriptures have had in history. "Bible stories, poems, proverbs, prophecies and teaching have the authority of great literature, shaping cultures. The Bible has been, and still is, the spiritual handbook of the faithful studied and cherished as a companion of daily religious life."[20] This understanding permeates Daniell's entire work, and he focuses his study on those works that most fulfill his understanding of the scriptures as a companion of daily religious life. Yet *The Bible in English* is one of the most detailed resources available for the study of English scriptures since the beginning of Christianity. As such, it shows the wide spectrum of vernacular scriptures available both before and during Rolle's life, placing Rolle's *Psalter* in a history of orthodox scriptural translations.

Some texts address the rise of heresy during this period and argue that it was not heresy that led to literacy but instead heresy led to the more easy accessibility of

[19] David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

[20] Ibid., 1.

vernacular texts. One such study is Judy Ann Ford's *John Mirk's* Festial: *Orthodoxy, Lollardy, and the Common People in Fourteenth-Century England*.[21] It examines John Mirk's *Festial* in the context of the increasing clamor for literacy and the desire of the laity to have access to personal devotional materials. "The issue of literacy is one that has not, perhaps, been sufficiently integrated into the historiography of popular religion. . . . In different ways, both the Revolt of 1381 and Lollardy were responses to the greater reliance on written rather than oral communication that was developing in late-medieval governments and towns."[22] Ford argues that the call for vernacular texts, therefore, was a byproduct of a shift from the oral tradition to the written tradition. To do this, she examines the content of the *Festial*, establishing the audience for which it was intended and placing the content squarely within conceptions of orthodoxy at that time. Her conclusion is that the narratives in the *Festial* "reinforce the authority of the established church against the Lollard critique."[23] In a body of literature that focuses preferentially on Lollard texts, Ford's examination of Mirk's *Festial* provides a needed look at literature during the fourteenth century that fell directly in line with orthodox beliefs. Likewise, Rolle's text also fit in line with that of medieval orthodoxy despite later attempts by Lollards to claim him as their own.

Margaret Aston's *Lollards and Reformer: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* traverses a time period that far exceeds the purpose of this study, yet the book contains two chapters that are particularly helpful to the study of literacy and vernacular

[21] Judy Ann Ford, *John Mirk's* Festial: *Orthodoxy, Lollardy, and the Common People in Fourteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001).

[22] Ibid., 14.

[23] Ibid., 15.

writing during the fourteenth century.[24] Her book follows a similar argument to that of the previous texts, as she theorizes that the vernacular texts were a natural rise in response to increased literacy and that the Lollards took advantage of this naturally-occurring trend. Her fourth chapter, "Devotional Literacy," and her sixth chapter, "Lollardy and Literacy," are well worth reading for a deeper understanding of the changing views of literacy at this time.

Aston also argues that the rise of literacy in England "owed much to the growth of government, towns and trade, and the practical secular needs of those involved in private and public affairs from the lowest officials and apprentices to the top levels of management."[25] Her argument explores the concept that an increase in letters in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, used for business interactions and as status symbols, such as deeds, grants, legal papers and the like, arose prior to a desire for greater accessibility to religious texts. "Things do not become metaphors until they have well and truly arrived. The way in which the instruments and forms of writing themselves appear in metaphorical dress in vernacular texts, shows how the extension of literacy modes impinged on religious teaching."[26] Aston establishes this rise in literacy among the people of England through an almost economic necessity, as literacy became a business necessity. She then traces how the increased literacy transferred to religious literacy, but states that "Christianity as a religion of the book and society was (at least in theory) Christian. From the church's point of view, however, there was no necessary

[24] Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (Gloucester: The Hambledon Press, 1984).

[25] Ibid., 101.

[26] Ibid., 104.

connection between conversion and letters, between the Bible as the source of faith and the people's access to the faith."[27] Thus she argues that at this time, vernacular religious texts were not only approved by but also encouraged by the ecclesiastical elite as a way to promote greater devotion amongst the laity. According to Aston, it was not until the later period of increased literacy that the church had to take a position on increased lay literacy and the popularity of vernacular devotional and scriptural texts. Aston suggests that instead of embracing the new forms of piety made available through increased literacy, the church moved too sluggishly in recognizing the benefits of a literate laity. "The widespread dissemination of writings and the developing abilities of all sorts of people, peasants upward, to deal with them, may be regarded therefore in the light of a challenge to ecclesiastical tradition."[28] Thus she asserts that the ecclesiastical leaders saw the change provided by personal access to the scriptures as alarming, not the rise in literacy itself.

In her sixth chapter, Aston takes one of the most adamant stands of all the authors in this category against the idea that heresy caused an increase in devotional materials; rather, she argues that the Lollards took advantage of this natural rise in literacy. Here she examines the shift from a general rise in literacy to the Lollard movement, which Aston argues sought out the literate laymen specifically to target for their heresies. One of the most distinctive aspects of the Lollard movement was its emphasis on reading Biblical texts and devotional materials in the vernacular. "One defender of their labors said that all Christians could be divided into three kinds: the lettered for whom were ordained books in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin; the completely unlettered; and lastly those

[27] Ibid., 105.

[28] Ibid., 197.

who—both clerks and others—can read but little or not understand and for whom there were books in the vernacular."[29] Aston argues, thus, that the early vernacular texts are nothing more than devotional tools, brought about to fill a felt need, outside any concept of Lollardy, for the laity to read scriptures in their own tongue.

It was this last group that the Lollards sought to recruit and it was the last group who absorbed the vernacular devotional materials of the earlier fourteenth century. Thus Aston argues that the transition from vernacular tools of devotion to heretical Lollard translation of scripture was not an abrupt shift but was, instead, a gradual shift. Instead, the heretics took advantage of this third group, that "it was *study*, by knights and clerks and others, which was to be the means of redemption. Read this book once a week and it will do you more good than saying your beads, one writer admonishes his readers."[30] It was ideas like this that flew in the face of orthodox teachings and thus cast a pall of heresy both backwards over the devotional texts of the early fourteenth century and ahead to the rise of Lollardy in the fifteenth century. In this way, Aston's argument fits nicely with one of the minor tenets of Watson's article as well, that the reaction of the church to the Lollard heresy affected not only the future vernacular texts but also the retrospective view of fourteenth century texts.

It is worth noting the strong stance Aston makes about heresy and its role, or lack thereof, in the rise of vernacular texts, for she utilizes the same tracts that Deanesly used in her evaluation of the period. In *Lollards and Reformers,* Aston remarks that "in their anxious search for precedents the Lollards (specially the early Biblical translators) eagerly hunted out the church's weak points: its own admissions about the uses and needs

[29] Ibid., 197.

[30] Ibid.

of the vernacular. They had of course no lack of examples—from Jerome onwards. Some of the more valuable and telling ones lay nearer to hand in contemporary England."[31] Aston uses this introduction to step into an overview of church-approved texts available prior to the issuance of the tracts. This discussion includes a rather in depth look at the work and role of Rolle's *Prose Psalter*, which Aston asserts was so widely circulated that it gained the position of being a standard version. The overview also examines the position of Rolle's *Prose Psalter* in the post-1409 period, arguing that both Lollard presses and church presses were printing versions of his translations with different introductions. These introductions were intended to work as a commentary to promote a specific view of the text. All of these discussions fold into Aston's overarching thesis for this chapter, that "there was [in the fourteenth century] an appetite for reading, vernacular reading on religious subjects, sharing the experience of the Bible in English, before the Reformation as well as after it. If this history. . . proves anything, it surely proves the claim of one of its founders that 'the lewed people crieth after Holy Writ, to kunne it and to keep it."[32] Thus Rolle's psalter, with its devotional purposes, was one of these highly sought-after, but orthodox, texts. In a book looking at the advent of the Lollard movement, Aston still clearly argues that the texts preceding the period of Lollardy were orthodox in the church's eyes.

### *Vernacular Texts as an Inherent Heresy*

Despite the overwhelming evidence of Watson, Deanesly and Aston, the fact remains that by 1409 *something* in the work of vernacular authors had caused the church

[31] Ibid., 209.

[32] Ibid., 217.

to cast a suspicious eye on their motives. Instead of ecclesiastical elite, like Pecham, encouraging the production of vernacular manuscripts and lay devotional materials in English, by the end of the fourteenth century the church hierarchy viewed this increased access to lay devotional materials as a threat to the monopoly of their religious instruction. While Watson, Deanesly and Aston argue that the church's shift in perception was not because of heretical assumptions, not all historians agreed with their position and instead point to heresy as not only existing prior to the outbreak of Lollardy but also argue that it was the catalyst for the rise in vernacular texts.

One such author is Anne Hudson. *Heresy and Literacy, 1000-1530* is a collection of essays edited by Hudson and Peter Biller that traces the comparative rise of lay literacy with the increased rulings on heresy throughout Europe. Of particular note is R. I. Moore's "Literacy and the Making of Heresy, c. 1000-1150," which examines the earliest rise of vernacular texts in opposition to the church.[33] The essay examines literacy throughout Europe, not just England, arguing that the rise in literacy and subsequent vernacular texts were in opposition to the church throughout Christendom. His argument goes that the lower clergy and ignoble laity desired to learn not only have access to religious texts but also an ability to think for themselves, thus vernacular tracts were widely disseminated and just as widely read, thus alleviating the need for the guidance of the ecclesiastic elite. If this were true throughout the entire fourteenth century, it would mean that Rolle's works, and the Rosebery Rolle manuscript, were written in direct defiance to the church. This idea is simple to refute by looking at the texts Rolle

[33] Peter Biller and Anne Hudson, eds. *Heresy and Literacy, 1000-1530* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

determined to include in the manuscript, for they are almost verbatim those things enumerated in Pecham's Syllabus, which was an orthodox constitution.

Sometimes authors may study the same aspects of a period and come to completely different conclusions. Ford's study of the change from oral traditions to written traditions acts as a foil to Gurevich's article, which focuses on the same shift but with quite different conclusions. [34] In this chapter, Gurevich examines the thirteenth century as a primarily oral society; thus any discussion of literacy, he argues, must be a narrow field of study, unless it includes the transmission of scripture and vernacular devotional materials by word of mouth. "I believe," Gurevich writes, "that the historian of medieval scholarship and literacy cannot escape the problem of how this all-embracing mental atmosphere created by the dominance of the spoken word formed the very approach to the written texts and their comprehension."[35] Gurevich raises an interesting distinction, as he asserts that the oral culture not only influenced the transmission of ideas but also impacted the ideas and mentalities themselves. Thus while Ford examines this shift, arguing that it was natural and the response was a rise in vernacular texts, Gurevich takes this argument one step further in proposing that the rise in vernacular texts carried with it a rise in heretical ideas, which were already present in the oral culture. Thus Gurevich asserts that in the century prior to Rolle's life vernacular texts were written to reflect a growing unrest in the oral culture about a lack of written resources for vernacular study. While Rolle's manuscripts certainly fill this very void of resources, it is not so easy to assert that Rolle's work was written to preserve an oral culture. Thus Ford's and Gurevich's observance of the dearth of vernacular texts coming out of an oral

[34] Ibid., 104.

[35] Ibid., 105.

history trend affords great understanding to why Rolle would have desired to write out devotional materials that previously would have been simply memorized. Yet Gurevich's argument that this oral tradition carried with it a heretical idea to undermine the church is not as easy to support, especially when manuscripts like the Rosebery Rolle manuscript are studied.

Just as this changing perception of the oral tradition gave rise to a chasm of need for written religious texts, so too did the manuscripts of these religious texts change understandings of the religious writings themselves. Two essays in Hudson's collection bear attention, as they address this issue. Hudson's chapter "*Laicus litteratus:* the paradox of Lollardy" and R. N. Swanson's "Literacy, heresy, history and orthodoxy: perspectives and permutations for the later Middle Ages" both lend themselves well to a greater understanding of the role that vernacular texts played in changing views of scriptures during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[36] Hudson's chapter presents a case study of a single man on trial for heresy and forced, against his will, to address his judge in Latin. She asserts that the central issue during the fight to make Lollardy heretical centered around the issue of vernacular texts. The definition of heresy at that time, Hudson reminds readers, involved neither literacy nor language. Instead, it was "an opinion chosen by human perception contrary to holy scripture, publicly avowed and obstinately defended."[37] Yet when this definition was applied to the heresy charged against the Wycliffites, heresy became entwined with both literacy and language. Thus, Hudson concludes that Wyclif's heresy began as a university movement because it appealed to those most educated. She asserts that heresy became popular first with the

[36] Ibid., 222 and 279.

[37] Ibid., 231.

educated, and they used vernacular texts and tracts to spread their ideas to the laity. "The heresy," she asserts, "therefore appealed to the literate, and in time gave impetus to the wider growth of literacy."[38] Hudson thus raises the juxtaposition of literacy in religion prior to Wyclif being quite different from that which developed in the fifteenth century. Swanson's article pursues a similar theme, yet extends his purview to include the sixteenth century as well. He argues that the literacy in the thirteenth and fourteenth century was fairly minor when compared to later centuries, yet it was during the growth of the Lollard movement that heretics began to utilize vernacular tracts, texts, and arguments for their own purposes, thus linking literacy and language in the minds of many with heresy, an idea that would continue through to the Reformation in the sixteenth century. Both Swanson and Hudson, therefore, observe a developed link between the rise in literacy and the rise in heresy, an idea that authors such as Watson, Deanesly and Aston did not note.

Arguments dealing with the connection between vernacular texts and heresy often seem to assume that all manuscripts were written for a broad distribution, when that was not always the case. *Studies in the Transmission of Wyclif's Writings*, also written by Hudson, focus specifically on Wyclif and his works, yet the information on the dissemination of these texts applies to other vernacular works as well and, as such, has broad applications. Hudson describes in the introduction that her work is "less concerned with the variety of topics discussed in [Wyclif's work]. . . and more with what, for want of a better term, must be described as 'publication,' the way in which a text was (or was not) released by the author to a public, whether individual, institutional, or general."[39]

[38] Ibid., 236.

Thus, Hudson brings up a quite relevant topic in her assertion that not all texts were created for a broad audience. Many of Rolle's texts, including the Rosebery Rolle manuscript, were not written for broad audiences. Furthermore, in examining the ecclesiastical responses to Wyclif's writings, Hudson traces the Church's actions towards not just Wyclif but also religious writings in England in general, for while some of the church's legislation referred specifically to Wyclif, more often it was a general pronouncement on the use and transmission of vernacular texts.

Additionally, Hudson's study of the transmission of Wyclif's works provides a direct parallel with the transmission of Rolle's texts, for both authors' work was tramitted in similar ways. In her essay, "The Survival of Wyclif's Works in England and Bohemia," Hudson explores the role that private collections played in the preservation of vernacular texts, such as the Rosebery Rolle manuscript. She uses John Bale, who created an index of texts in private ownership in England as a case study. In one of his indexes, Bale includes as a Wyclif text one of the copies of Rolle's Psalter commentaries, in addition to texts by other fourteenth century authors or even unidentified authors.[40] Thus, by tracing the spread of Wyclif's texts, Hudson provides an understanding of the dissemination of fourteenth century texts in general as well. This is true especially in her introductory essay, which establishes the large number of manuscripts that were both written for and passed down through private collections. Many of Rolle's psalters were part of private collections from their transcription, as they were tools for private lay

[39] Anne Hudson, *Studies in the Transmission of Wyclif's Writings* (Burlington: Ashgate Variorum, 2008) 1.

[40] Anne Hudson, "The Survival of Wyclif's Works in England and Bohemia," in Hudson, *Studies in the Transmission of Wyclif's Works*, XVI 22.

devotion, thus Hudson's understanding of Wyclif's texts' history and transmission fits well into the provenance of the Rosebery Rolle manuscript as well.

Just as Hudson seeks to place the provenance of medieval manuscripts into its appropriate position for understanding these texts, in her book *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* she treats with the codicology of manuscripts the same way.[41] Here she seeks to address a problem that she sees in the historiography of Lollard texts. Her dilemma is less with previous authorship and more with the codicology itself, as she explains that many of the manuscripts from this period adumbrate their authorship and date, thus they have often been attributed to Wyclif himself. Hudson places a wide variety of texts from the period directly after Wyclif's life in context with their correct authorship and, by so doing, to illuminate the large number of Lollard authors writing at this period. She evaluates not just theological manuscripts but also chronicles, poetry, clerical records and numerous other ecclesiastical documents. Her book thus provides an admirable guide for evaluating texts from medieval sources with the appropriate consideration and methods. In so doing, she also reveals how many texts, simply by their vernacular, religious nature were assigned to Lollardy. This shows the trend in historians to assume that, since a text was a religious text in the vernacular during the Lollard period, it must therefore be part of a heretical movement. Rolle's orthodox vernacular text, properly assigned to its date and author, is an example of how this is not the case.

[41] Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press, 1988).

One work that argues outright that heresy was an important factor in the rise of vernacular religious texts is Miri Rubin's *Medieval Christianity in Practice*.[42] This collection of essays places theological writings in the broader context of their usage and role in medieval Christianity. The fourth chapter, "Lollard Instruction," by Rita Copeland is the most useful in understanding the importance of vernacular texts. Copeland evaluates excerpts from Lollard texts that exemplify what Copeland terms heterodox religious instruction, which she traces as it spread "into lay communities, where it gained considerable following among artisan groups in towns, especially in the midlands, East Anglia, and Kent."[43] Copeland provides a few reasons for the popularity of this heterodox religious instruction, asserting that the most important reason was that these teachings "stressed the capacity and entitlement of lay readers to interpret Scripture themselves, without clerical mediation and mystification."[44] Thus Copeland believes that texts like the Rosebery Rolle manuscript would have been written to promote an individualistic faith, one that lay out of orthodox teaching. Overall, she makes the argument that the rise of vernacular religious texts, a body in her view encompassing translations of scriptures, heterodox glosses, and theological treatises, during the late fourteenth century was primarily in response to "the doctrinal interests and basic instructional needs of the lay dissenters reading Scripture in English."[45] Thus Copeland is arguing that vernacular works reflected ideas already present they were not, essentially, propaganda.

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[42] Ibid., 29.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., 31.

Yet although Rolle certainly wrote to fill the basic instructional needs of his readers, his readers were not dissenters at all, but rather orthodox members of the church. Copeland's argument focuses on just a few Wyclif texts and considers neither the broad body of work, nor the importance of codicology and provenance that Hudson discusses. Because of this, her argument is narrow in scope and cannot account for the theological texts written prior to 1380; still, her argument falls well in line with those authors, like Hudson and Deanesly, who argue that vernacular religious writing rose to provide needed access to religious instruction. The main difference between Copeland's article and those broader overviews of vernacular religious literature is that Copeland defines those people who hungered for these devotional materials as "dissenters." Although the England after Arundel's Constitutions considered as dissenters those who possessed vernacular religious materials, Wyclif and his followers were writing prior to 1409 and their audience could not be considered completely comprised of political or ecclesiastical dissenters; even less so was the audience who read Rolle's works.

All these works deal with the rise of heresy in connection with the rise of literacy; yet if, as Watson, Aston, and Deanesly argue, literacy and heresy were not in a relationship of causation, the fact remains that both rose during this period. Thus one interesting work to consider when placing Rolle's work is Malcolm Lambert's *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*.[46] Good Lambert examines the changing specter and focus of heresy, arguing that "events after Christianity became the official religion of the Empire also shaped the assumptions with which the Church of the Middle Ages met heresy. . . . Christians in effect held the

[46] Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reforms to the Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1977).

power of the State and, despite some hesitations, they used it to impose a uniformity of belief."[47] *Medieval Heresy* does not address the rise of vernacular texts directly, but his study of the changing definitions of heresy narrates the necessary backdrop to understanding why the church reacted differently to, for example, Rolle's translation of the Psalter in the early fourteenth century and Wyclif's translation of the scriptures barely more than fifty years later. Lambert discusses the difficulty in defining heresy and he asserts that "heresy was not thought to be the product of the individual speculative intelligence, or of devout men and women seeking a higher ethical life" but instead "heresy was taken to mean whatever the papacy explicitly or implicitly condemned during the period."[48] Lambert's study of heresy throughout the medieval period is a solid source for understanding many of the decisions made by the church at that time and he is able to clearly represent many of the church's decisions as centering on their desire to maintain order. Additionally, Lambert's commentary on the heretics and their interactions with the church does an excellent job of treating both parties without malice, but instead evaluates actions and reactions.

### *Conclusion*

The field of study on medieval vernacular texts is broad and the works discussed in this chapter are by no means everything of value in the field. They are, however, those works that provided a comprehensive overview of the period before and after the life of Rolle. Those texts that specifically address Rolle, his authorship and his works will be discussed in later chapters, when Rolle's life is discussed in greater detail.

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[47] Ibid., 3.

[48] Ibid., 4 & 8.

The authors in the two sections in this chapter are agreed on certain aspects of their understanding of the fourteenth century. All of them, despite their varied perspectives, agree that the years between Pecham's Constitutions in 1281 and Arundel's Constitutions in 1409 was a period of great upsurge in literacy, a century that saw the authorship of many devotional texts and that witnessed an increasing clamor for those texts to be written in the vernacular. Yet beyond this general understanding, there are two main schools of thought. The more prevalent school argues that heresy simply took advantage of an already existing rise in literacy. Hence heretical texts were simply part of a growing body of vernacular literature. The other school conversely argues that it was the heretical ideas, and those who fostered them, which led to an increase in authorship of vernacular texts during this period. In other words, heresy gave birth to the rising body of vernacular literature in late medieval England.

The Rosebery Rolle manuscript deserves a place in this first view of the period. It appears in the early fourteenth century not as an anomaly but as a member of the an ever increasing body of vernacular texts; it was written early enough, however, to not be a member of those texts scorned by the higher ecclesiastical elite of the church during the charges of heresy against Wyclif in the 1380s and the Lollards at the turn of the fifteenth century.

## CHAPTER THREE

## A Woman-Centric Eremitic

Richard Rolle's life centered around women. For a man known as the Hermit of Hampole, Rolle's attention to women is suprising. The Rosebery Rolle manuscript clearly demonstrates this centrality. It is a private devotional tool written to promote piety in the life of an individual woman—Margaret Kirkeby. Rolle's biography displays the constant presence of women and also sheds light on the influence those women had in his choices and work. In order for a modern reader to understand the purpose behind Rolle's manuscripts, therefore, it is necessary to understand the life of the man who was both mystic and personal spiritual guide; a man who was not only highly educated but also led a simple life, withdrawn from the world and without ordination or degree. His texts reflect a particularly northern language, as he spent the majority of his life in the northern areas of England around York. Rolle's early life and his audience during the time of writing the Rosebery Rolle manuscript adds a depth of perception to the reading of the text.

Rolle's life was intricately a part of not only in what language he wrote but also his subject matter and form of writing. It was his biographical circumstances and personal experiences as a mystic that caused Rolle to compose devotional verses for an anchoress and her nuns in a language they could understand and it was his relationship with these women that make his devotional texts so very unique. Thus this chapter first presents Rolle's life and mysticism, arguing that it was widely impacted by the women in his path. It argues that Margaret Kirkeby in particular was influential in Rolle's work,

specifically his vernacular work, yet also argues that Rolle's relationship with the anchoress was completely orthodox. Taking this one step further, other examples of similar relationships exhibit the normalcy of Rolle and Kirkeby's friendship. The chapter concludes with a brief examination of the hermit's death and legacy.

### *The Making of a Hermit*

In order to appreciate the ability of an unordained hermit to construct devotional tools, a historian needs to appreciate the intellectual environment in which their author was writing. Rolle was born at a time when the role of the church in England was changing. Subtle shifts in the relationship between church and state created a situation in which schools created their own theological understanding, especially in their education of priests.[49] Oxford, long a center of religious instruction, grappled with how best to remain orthodox in its instruction. It became clear not only to those directly involved with Oxford but also to the broader church in Rome that theological orthodoxy was no longer at the center of all religious instruction. A letter from John Lutterel, a former Chancellor at Oxford, illuminates just one of the rising debates at the institution. "But you will object against me," he writes to a friend in Rome, "what people here frequently object against us Englishmen, you will say: 'Now, you are answering according to logic; *tolle, tolle*—away with that, answer according to theology.'"[50] This letter illuminates one of the controversies arising in the theological hierarchy and also establishes the independence of the "Englishmen" in their religious instruction. The ecclesiastical

[49] William Abel Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century: Based on the Birkbeck Lectures, 1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 20.

[50] Cambridge University Library, MS li. III, 10, fo. 94 v; found in Pantin, *The English Church*, 21.

hierarchy feared it was losing some control over this orthodox institution that was gaining a reputation for free thinking. It was this independence, at Oxford and elsewhere, that eventually led to the rise of Lollardy in the 1380s. Rolle, though certainly not a Lollard or heretic, was a student of Oxford and thus well versed in the developing ideas. His mystical texts certainly support this understanding, as they describe a personal relationship with God, without the mediation of a priest, and this personal interaction is what Rolle seeks to call his reader to through the use of his devotional materials.

Yet it was also this situation of relative independence that created an environment that allowed for a rise in alternate forms of lay devotion. "This period offered more latitude to those who experienced a sense of direct encounter with God than would be the case in later periods. It was also a particularly strong period for women mystics and spiritual guides."[51] Just as Oxford theologians were stepping out of the parameters of orthodox theology, the laity found opportunities to explore expressions of devotion that fell outside the established monastic structure. Due to the importance of personal communion with God in their lives, the mystics played a large role in the development of ideas about personal devotion. "The more personal devotions of the later Middle Ages were intimately bound up with popular mysticism; they were to a large extent unsacerdotal, though not antisacerdotal; and here. . . we find mysticism stimulating free thought."[52] This is not to say that mysticism was not present long before this period, but the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century was a period that saw an unusual number of mystics come forth in the English church, living either as hermits or devoting

[51] Craig D. Atwood, *Always Reforming: a History of Christianity Since 1300* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2001) 32.

[52] G. G. Coulton, *Ten Medieval Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906) 198.

themselves to the monastic life. Furthermore, because these mystics were able to function outside the constructed oversight of the church, independent thought flourished. Their perceived intense closeness with God also added to the value placed on mystic writing, for the life of devotion was seen to provide greater insight to the mind of God. Thus this combined situation of a rising accessibility of free thought at the university with the unsacerdotal, though not anti-orthodox, tradition of mysticism provided an opportunity for writers like Rolle to flourish. Mystics like Rolle were respected as orthodox members of the faith, as testified by their ecclesiastically-sanctioned positions which allowed them to guide others in their spiritual journeys as well.

Not all mystics were the same, however. Each experienced God in a different way. Rolle's themes of *canor*, *dulcor* and *fervor* were uniquely his and his instruction to the women in his life encouraged them to seek the mystical union with God in the specific way that he had experienced it. During the turn of the fourteenth century, historians have defined four types of mystics. All mysticism was about a more perfect union with God, yet not all mystics described this union in the same way. The four types of mysticism were essential, affective, rationalistic, and volative. Essential mysticism saw the soul as being directly absorbed into the being of God, a complete union between the soul of man and the heart of God. For affective mystics, the union was an emotional one. Affective mystics utilized marital imagery, where spiritual and erotic desire combined and the soul's union with Christ was like that of the bride with the bridegroom on a wedding night. Rationalistic mystics, borrowing from neo-platonic philosophy, saw the union with the godhead as being more like a rational enlightenment than an emotional intertwining. Volative mystics take the idea of a union between soul and God to an

extreme. At the very least, volative mystics believe that the divine will subsumes the human will; in an extreme, many volative mystics have believed that the divine will completely destroys any remnant of the mystic's own will. This extreme, however, was ruled heretical and was therefore not as popular.[53]

To complicate matters further, not all mystics fit clearly into one category. Rolle, for example, was clearly affective but also had aspects of essential and volative mysticism in his writing. In *Incendium Amoris*, Rolle's primary mystical text, in which he describes the periods of union he had with the godhead, these affective aspects may be clearly seen:

> I cannot tell you how surprised I was the first time I felt my heart begin to warm. It was real warmth too, not imaginary, and it felt as if it were actually on fire. I was astonished at the way the heat surged up, and how this new sensation brought great and unexpected comfort. I had to keep feeling my breast to make sure there was no physical reason for it! But once I realized it came entirely from within. . . I was absolutely delighted, and wanted my love to be even greater.[54]
>
> Yes, I burn, I pant for you. If you come I will be safe. Ravished though I will be with love, yet I still cannot enjoy fully what I so desperately want; not until I taste that joy you are going to give me. . . . You can see how I am pining because of love, how I am longing. . . how I am aflame for you.[55]
>
> I long for love. . . and inwardly burn with fiery flame. . . . The heat is such that no one can imagine it unless he has experienced it. . . . For all the things I experience here, this is the most delightful: I nearly die while it builds up its fervent love.[56]
>
> For it is thus that a man regards his Beloved. He forgets himself and everything else for Christ's sake. . . . love is a great longing. . . and when he has got it a man rejoices, for joy is caused only by love. Every

[53] Atwood, *Always Reforming*, 33.

[54] Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love*, trans. Clifton Wolters (New York: Penguin, 1972), prologue.

[55] Ibid.,16.

[56] Ibid.

> lover is assimilated to his beloved: love makes the loving one like what he loves.[57]
>
> The lover of the Godhead, whose being is shot through with love for the unseen Beauty, rejoices in the deep recesses of his soul; he is gladdened by that most delightful fire.[58]

Though all of Rolle's *Incendium Amoris* is infused with this type of language, a concupiscence for union with the godhead, and a physically-felt fire when that union was achieved. In the same way, this theme of longing for a union with his "beloved" continues throughout much of Rolle's work. In *Mending of Life*, this theme is constantly repeated: "Come my beloved who are my whole consolation, to my soul languishing for your sake and toward you, and slip into it with most sweetly flowing love. Set ablaze with your heat the penetrable places of my heart and, by illuminating its inmost places with your light, feed the whole with the honey-flowing of your love, in order to snatch up mind and body."[59] This expresses clearly not only the extreme affective qualities of Rolle's work but also the essential bent, for Rolle longs not only for the fiery passion of union with his beloved but also a desire to be filled and overtaken with the soul of God. These quotes also show the slightly essential bent that Rolle took, for Rolle's seeking to be the lover of Christ includes a yearning to be subsumed by the soul of God. The majority of Rolle's work reflects this dual longing for union, his essential mysticism, and longing for the passionate embrace of his Beloved, the affective aspect.

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[57] Ibid., 17.

[58] Ibid., 32.

[59] Richard Rolle, *Mending of Life*, trans. M. L. del Mastro (London: Image Books, 1981) 79.

All of these forms of mysticism often seem surprising when considered in the realm of orthodox beliefs and practices. Most of the laity, indeed most of the clergy, were not having these same rapturous experiences and unions with the godhead directly. Though the church adopted mystics under the wings of orthodoxy, it was largely due to the political situation during the early fourteenth century that so many mystics were able to flourish. It was this same situation politically that allowed an unordained, unsanctioned hermit to work as an influential spiritual advisor.

Politically, the hermit of Hampole's life spanned the rule of England's first three Edwards. Born under the rule of Edward I, Rolle would no doubt have been aware of the English attempts to subdue the Scots, especially as his childhood home and first location as a hermit was many miles north of York and would have certainly been disrupted from time to time by soldiers trekking to the northern campaigns. Additionally, during the reign of the weak Edward II from 1307 until 1327, two important parliaments were held at York, the first in 1320 and the second in 1322. Whether Rolle was involved in any way with the political turmoil of Edward II's reign is unknown and quite unlikely. Yet Edward II was a king who was especially despised by not only his nobles but also many of the clergy. Unlike the reigns of Edward I and Edward III, where strife lay between the political and ecclesiastical nobility and an other (under Edward I this other was largely the Scottish and under Edward III it was his own peasants and the French), the rule of Edward II witnessed a period in English history in which the king was so massively incompetent that the attention of nobles and higher clergy lay primarily in ridding themselves of the king.[60] This distraction presented an opportunity for free thought in the

[60] May MiKisak, *The Fourteenth Century 1307-1399* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1959) 32-135.

laity that permitted Rolle to live, wander, preach and write without drawing the eye of the higher ecclesiastical structure.

### *The Women in Rolle's Life*

In many ways even the extremely passionate nature of Rolle's mystical writings were not as shocking as the audience for whom he wrote his devotional materials. Rolle's life, as well as his work, was split into two sections: one tells the story of a hermit seeking and embracing his God and recording those experiences in Latin for other theological men to understand, the other tells the story of a man whose life was in constant intersect with women and for whom he wrote devotional guides in English so that they too may seek to experience the sweet union with God that he had. Rolle's life was thus by no means that of a normal hermit; indeed his frequent interactions with women may seem to call into question the assignation of "hermit" at all. Yet Rolle's writings do not lie across a chasm from each other; instead it is his eremitic life that allowed his mystic experiences and it was these experiences that Rolle sought to communicate and encourage in his female companions. To understand the writings of the Hermit of Hampole, therefore, one must understand his life and the role that women played in his life.

Sadly, the history of the day-to-day life of the Hermit of Hampole is far from clear. This lack of information comes not from a lack of sources that discuss the hermit's life, but rather from the unreliable nature of these sources. In the era after Rolle's death, his works were widely disseminated. Many members of religious orders, male and female alike, were able to utilize Rolle's didactic texts throughout the years after his death and his renown as an author was widespread. Yet this orthodox author had a far

from normal life. Even Rolle's first appearance on the scene was one that lay quite outside the normal situation for a churchman. Most dramatic was his entrance into the eremitic life. Eamon Duffy portrays the scene thusly:

> Dressed in a bizarre costume improvised from two of his sister's kirtles and an old rainhood of his father's, he appeared unannounced in the Dalton family chapel in the parish church of Pickering one summer day in 1318. John Dalton was bailiff of Pickering, keeper of the forest and constable of the castle, a considerable man. . . . Though Rolle was a layman, the parish priest permitted him to preach an English sermon, and the Daltons were sufficiently impressed to take him into their house, and to clothe him formally as a hermit.[61]

A number of issues bear comment in this presentation. Firstly, Rolle's appearance in "bizarre costume" came in the year after the Great Famine had concluded in England. While no correlation may be confirmed between the Great Famine of 1315-1317 and Rolle's appearance on the Dalton estate in 1318, it does raise some questions about the timing of Rolle's decision to request the patronage of the Daltons. Secondly, Rolle was not only allowed to preach without being ordained but also preached in English, which was not entirely orthodox. Finally, the Daltons clothed Rolle as a hermit, despite the convention that "before either hermit, anchor or anchoress established themselves, they had to seek permission from the bishop, show that they had sufficient endowment, or some prospect of maintenance, and were suitable in character."[62] Rolle did none of these things, thus even the beginning of his eremitic life lay largely outside the traditional pattern.

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[61] Jonathan Hughes, "Rolle, Richard (1305-1349)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, Oxford, 2004; Jonathan Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries: Religion and Secular Life in Late Medieval Yorkshire*, (Woodbridge, 1988): 82-126, quoted in Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) xxiii-xxiv.

[62] Margaret Deanesly, *A History of the Medieval Church 590-1500* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd.) 216-217.

Although many of Rolle's actions lay outside the normative tradition, he was still quite well-received by the church. The reaction to his death and the compilation of stoires of his life, as well as this hope that this would be used to achieve canonization for Rolle, points to this fact. Indeed, much of the information recorded about Rolle's life comes from a hagiographic text, *Officium et Miracula*, drafted after the hermit's death in the 1380s in an effort to promote a canonization that Rolle never received.[63] Thus, the information in the *Officium* may not be wholly relied upon for its veracity, but it still provides illuminating facts about certain aspects of Rolle's life. Ralph Hanna admits that "the nine *lectiones* of the *Officium* mostly consist of stories of Rolle's early life, supported by convincingly specific details but too reminiscent of anecdotes. . . to be fully trusted."[64] With this caveat firmly in mind, the information in the *Officium* provides the clearest outline of Rolle's life, though many of the facts must be sifted from the ebullient praise that comprises most of the text. The hermit of Hampole was born in 1290 at Thornton, near Pickering in Yorkshire. His father's name was William and his mother's name was not recorded. Before embarking on the solitary life, Rolle was sponsored at Oxford by Thomas de Neville, archdeacon of Durham, who attended school at the same time as Rolle. For an unexplained reason the degree at Oxford was never received and Rolle left when he was nineteen to pursue a holy life. According to the *Officium*, Hanna describes that Rolle "later fled from home and became a hermit for the same reason and lived on the estate of a John de Dalton, one of his father's neighbors."[65]

[63] Ralph Hanna, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 32.

[64] Ibid., 32.

[65] Ibid., 32.

It was the end of this flight that Duffy portrayed so vividly and that thrust Rolle into his career as mystic, hermit and spiritual guide. Yet it is worth noting that this eremitic had the benefit of an Oxford education; an education that both familiarized Rolle with religious history as well as Latin and the scriptures.

Thus Rolle, though not ordained, was not an unorthodox or untrained wanderer by any means. In compiling the devotional tools for his spiritual pupil, Rolle had the benefit of a nearly complete Oxford education, one that had opened his eyes to numerous texts and that would most likely have introduced him to numerous manuscripts and teachers of theology. Access to these men and these documents is evident in Rolle's skills; for he could just as easily translate a Psalter and write his own gloss in English as he could express his exultations of joy in his experiences in his private devotions with God.

Additionally, this hermetic life was not a sedentary life, for Rolle stayed on Dalton's land only for a brief time. Yet it was one that was centered around women for whom Rolle acted as a spiritual guide. For example, the decision to remain with the Daltons at the outset of his contemplative life was not without cause. Hanna relates that "Dalton's interest in Rolle was aroused by his wife's finding him at prayer in their chapel, by the discovery that his sons had known him at Oxford, and by the quality of his spontaneous sermon; the interest seems to have been sustained by the women of Dalton's household, including his wife."[66] This involvement of women in this era of Rolle's life is not out of character with the rest of his biography. A large body of his work "sought to provide pastoral care to audiences (especially fluent) who were not fluent in Latin. If this is the case, Rolle's turn to the vernacular successfully increased his fame and influence

[66] Ibid., 32.

among his intended audience."[67] Although the *Officium* does not directly state so, it is easy to understand that Rolle's English works were composed in the vernacular in order to make them more easily accessible for the women in his audience, who would not have been educated in Latin during the fourteenth century. After all, despite a lack of degree Rolle was well educated at Oxford and proved his firm command of Latin in his Latin texts. As Horstmann asserts, "it could well have been the case that Rolle did not envision a larger audience for his vernacular works than the individual women for whom he wrote" and that it would place undue importance on Rolle to suggest that he had any other aims than communicating to those women for Rolle's "interest did not extend far beyond the concerns of the solitary life."[68] Yet this solitary life certainly included the women of the Dalton family. Despite this, Rolle left his life with the Daltons and, after a period of nomadic living, he ended up in Hampole, Yorkshire, from which he received the appellation "the hermit of Hampole."[69]

Even at Hampole Rolle's life revolved around a woman, or possibly women, for this solitary life included the anchoress at Hampole. Two of Rolle's vernacular works are instructional texts for how to lead an anchoritic life. Rolle was not the first to write a guide for living the anchorite life. The defining text on living as anchoress was the *Ancren Riwle*, which was written in the twelfth century in old French. A number of English translations of the *Riwle* also exist.[70] In England, the guide was introduced

[67] C. Horstmann, ed. *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle and his Followers* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999) preface.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Hanna, *Invention of Authority*, 32.

[70] A. Zettersten, ed., *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwle: Magdalene College Cambridge MS Pepys 2498, EETS* 274 (1976).

between 1127-1135 for use by Emma, Gunhilda and Christina, three maids of Henry I's Queen Maud. These three women were placed as anchoresses in a hermitage near Kilburn and the *Ancren Riwle* was drawn up for their usage and instruction and became the standard outline of leading a proper anchorite life. It "contained interesting and explicit directions: the anchoresses might consider that they were keeping the 'rule of St. James' since they kept themselves unspotted from the world, though belonging to no regular order."[71] Although commonly attached to a convent or other monastic structure, anchoresses lay outside monastic orders and, despite living under strict rules of acceptable behavior and daily schedules, they never took the vows that nuns took. The *Riwle* describes the daily steps of divine service, then outlines the need to maintain a purity of life, keeping the heart from sin and avoiding situations in which the woman may tempt another to sin. The third part of the text explore "Moral Lessons and Examples: Reasons for Embracing a Monastic Life," going through different reasons in scripture for embracing the life of an anchoress.[72] Part four discusses separate temptations, followed by a fifth section to discuss confession. The sixth and seventh sections discuss penance and love respectively, followed by an eighth section that explores domestic matters including clothing, gifts, food, and sustaining a modest demeanor.

This life of an anchoress was similar to the life of a hermit. It is perhaps for this reason that Rolle felt such affinity for the anchoress Margaret Kirkeby and why he devoted many of his vernacular texts to her. His works echo the sentiments and directions provided in the *Riwle* and his desire to act as a spiritual mentor to Kirkeby

[71] Deanesly, *History*, 219.

[72] James Morton, ed., *The Ancren Riwle: a Treatise on the Rules and Duties of Monastic Life* (London: Cooper Square Pub, 1926).

allowed them to transverse the path of eremitic life together. Furthermore, it is clear that Rolle had a profound impact on Kirkeby, for it was the anchoress who devoted her life to collecting the fabula and miracula of Rolle's for the *Officium* in order to seek his canonization. Thus, despite its possibly odd centrality, it was the women in Rolle's life who inspired his authorship of vernacular texts and for whom he wrote his devotional materials.

### *Margaret of Kirkeby and the Anchoritic Life*

The *Officium* describes Rolle's death near a Cistercian nunnery at Hampole, though it does not state for how long he resided at Hampole after his wanderings, though he "presumably had an association with the place for some time, since he acted as a spiritual guide to one of its nuns, Margaret Kirkeby, after her enclosure as an anchoress at East Layton, in Richmondshire."[73] One may not understand Rolle's writings, especially those in the Rosebery Rolle MS, without understanding his relationship with Kirkeby and by extension her life as an anchoress. Most of Rolle's later texts were written as devotional materials for the anchoress, and the nuns at the convent at Hampole, to use in their personal devotional lives. Additionally, because much of what historians may glean about Rolle's life comes from the sources compiled by the anchoress, an understanding of Kirkeby's experiences sheds light on the more obscure or forgotten aspects of the hermit's life.

Hampole was a Cistercian convent, founded in the late twelfth century to house fifteen sisters. It is proposed by Frances Beer, though not confirmed in other sources, that Rolle resided in a cell in the woods near the convent, which "stood in a pleasant vale

[73] Ibid., 33.

on the banks of a stream, in the south part of the west riding, near to the city of Doncaster."[74] Even beyond his relationship with Kirkeby, Rolle may have been attracted to an eremitic life at Hampole due to its numerous solitary personages or the presence of a Franciscan confessor who had taken a vow of apostolic poverty which may have appealed to Rolle, who seemed to live a life of self-imposed poverty, despite his never having taken vows to our knowledge. The convent at Hampole required no such adherence to poverty, despite a tradition of poverty, and thus served as a refuge for nuns fleeing from other northern areas during border raids between the English and the Scots. Due to its rather isolated location, Hampole's convent remained fairly aloof from much of the ravages of corruption that occurred elsewhere in Yorkshire. Yet the nuns by no means led a life separate from contact with those outside the convent. Beyond the obvious example of the friendship between Kirkeby and Rolle, there was clear interaction with the outside world due the need to work the land the convent owned as well as transact business dealing for their wool trade. It bears note that the freeness from corruption was not without its lapses, specifically two nuns being found guilty of unchastity, one in 1324 and one in 1358.[75] "Other lapses included such minor misdemeanors as eating in the guest house, or in private rooms; or of having children over five as visitors within the convent—not terribly pernicious."[76] It was in this calm, though far from perfect, environment that Kirkeby attached herself as anchoress, and it seems an almost idyllic place to do so.

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[74] Frances Beer, *Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006) 119.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid.

It was also in this environment that Rolle worked as spiritual advisor and perhaps because of the relative tranquility was able to write for the nuns with a focus on personal devotion rather than any rampant misconduct, though his work certainly encourages the avoidance of any sort of misconduct. It bears comment here that Kirkeby's relationship with Rolle was of utmost importance due to the impact it had on his writing. It was not entirely out of the ordinary for a male religious devotee to take on the instruction of a female religious personage, and indeed a number of stories from the centuries before and after Rolle's life exhibit quite similar relationships. It is only natural for historians to question the true nature of these relationships, but with a void of clear evidence of sexual misconduct, those questions will not be answered. In the case of Rolle and Kirkeby, the texts tend towards a simple mentor-mentee situation, as Rolle's authorship expresses and encourages intense concupiscence for Christ.

As much as the relationship between Rolle and Kirkeby must be noted because of its overwhelming influence on Rolle's writing, it may not necessarily be unusually notable. In her article, "'A Reasonable Affection' Gender and Spiritual Friendship in Middle English Devotional Literature," Anne Clark Bartlett discusses a similar relationship nearly a century and a half later. In this situation, James Grenehalgh, a Carthusian monk from Sheen, saw as his tutelage the intellectual devotional growth of Joanna Sewell, a nun from a nearby Bridgittine house of Syon. "That Grenehalgh saw himself as Sewell's spiritual advisor and friend is clear from the many instructional sections that he marks with her initials" and with occasional comments on the text meant

for her spiritual benefit.[77] Bartlett points out one such mark, a gloss on Rolle's *Contra amatores mundi,* in which Grenehalgh marked *"Sewellam renue*," obviously associating her with the "fleshly friends" and "vain joys" about which Rolle discusses. Although it may be implied that more than a spiritual friendship existed between Grenehalgh and Sewell, Bartlett warns her readers that this assumption may not be entirely valid. She examines that, although male-female relationships were by no means encouraged, there *was* an idea of spiritual friendships, in which both male and female monastics might take part. "Treatises such as *The Tree, The Twelve Fruits of the Holy Ghost, Speculum Devotorum*, and *The Chastising of God's Children*, to name a few, all represent female and male religious as parallel partners in intellect, zeal, and worth before God."[78] Thus although Rolle and Kirkeby's relationship may not have been entirely the normal practice, evidence exists that neither the relationship nor the devotional materials that came out of it was particularly striking, but instead remained in an orthodox history of similar relationships.

Similarly, a century before Rolle and Kirkeby, Roger, a monk of St. Alban's, and Christina of Markyate carried on a spiritual mentor-mentee relationship. Christina was forced into a marriage with Burfred after taking a vow of celibacy. Proving her devotion to Burfred by fleeing to an eremitic life, she remained in Roger's dwelling, living under his tutelage, until his death. Much the same way that Kirkeby remained a devoted disciple of Rolle long after his death, so too did Christina remain Roger's devoted disciple after his death in 1122, when she became heir to his hermitage. Unlike Kirkeby

[77] Anne Clark Bartlett, "'A Reasonable Affection' Gender and Spiritual Friendship in Middle English Devotional Literature," in *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism* (St. Edmundsbury Press, Ltd: Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, 1995) 131.

[78] Ibid., 137.

and Rolle, however, Christina's renown was more widespread than her mentor's by far. Indeed, the anchoress Christina was so popular that her handiwork was presented to the English pope, Aidan IV, by her abbot in an effort to curry favor.

Bartlett's article and these two anecdotes are important because they reveal two possibilities for the relationship between Kirkeby and Rolle. On one side, Watson could be completely correct in asserting that Rolle's propensity for being in close relationship with and spiritually mentoring women, both in the form of the Dalton ladies during his early years or Kirkeby in his latter, was quite unusual.[79] Rolle's acquiescence to such a association went against the conventional understanding of the danger in male-female relationships, as outlined in the *Ancren Riwle*, which asserted that women walked in sin when they "do anything by which a man is bodily tempted by you, even though you may be unaware of it. . . unless you are absolved, you must, as they say, suffer the rod, that is, feel pain for his sin."[80] If this is the case, all three friendships walked a fine line between orthodoxy and sin, one that should have been scorned by those aware of them. Yet the fact that Dalton allowed Rolle to remain as teacher for his wife and daughter, as well as Rolle's long tenure at the Hampole convent, point to Rolle and Kirkeby's ability to walk this line unsullied.

Bartlett's article supports this possibility, that Rolle's relationship with Kirkeby was a purely spiritual friendship, and Rolle's own texts seem to bear this option well. In *The Form of Living*, a text written to Kirkeby by Rolle to instruct her how to live the eremitic life, Rolle extols her that "For þat þou hast forsaken þe solace and þe ioy of þis

[79] Watson, *Invention of Authority*, 47 & 229.

[80] M. B. Salu, trans. *The Ancrene Riwle* (*the Corpus MS: Ancrene Wisse*) (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1990): 25; found in Bartlett, "A Reasonable Affection," 136.

world, and take þe to solitarie life for Goddis loue. . . ledynge and lernynge þe how þou shalt þynke, how þou shalt prey, what þou shalt worche, so þat in a few yers þou shalt haue more delite to be by þyn on and spek to þi loue [and] þi spouse Ihesu, þan if þou were lady of a thousand worldes."[81] Rolle shares his own experience with denying his concupiscence of earthly things for a greater fulfillment in the mystically sweet communion with Christ, which he urges Kirkeby to seek as well. As spiritual guide and mentor, therefore, Rolle's relationship may remain completely orthodox, as the two travel a path together towards great devotion. Rolle takes the role of spiritual guide and mentor and Kirkeby submits to the role of respectful pupil. This relationship falls within Bartlett's definition of spiritual friendship between genders; thus at the least one may assume a Platonic relationship between the anchoress and the hermit and need not retrospectively attach any sexual misconduct to the two.

Rolle's relationship with Kirkeby is ambiguous and lacks details, yet it is of utmost importance to a full understanding of Rolle's vernacular texts. Why the hermit would devote so much time to writing for a specific anchoress, and dedicate his works specifically to her, is a mystery that the *Officium* does not resolve. The relationship between Rolle, his vernacular texts, and the anchoress at Hampole must be realized fully, however. Even Hanna calls for heavy emphasis to be placed on Kirkeby when evaluating the reasons for Rolle's prolific writing:

> *The Form of Living* was not meant as the personal monument it is sometimes taken to be, but as an epistolary treatis to help a close friend settle into her anchorage. The Passion meditations are the products not of an inner compulsion but of the fact that somebody had need of them. The same is also true of most of the lyrics and prose pieces, and certainly of

[81] Richard Rolle, *The Form of Living*, I.125-126 & 128-130; in S. J. Ogilvie-Thomson, *Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse edited from MS Longleat 29 and related manuscripts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) 6.

> the other epistles. Even the *English Psalter*, an ambitious work which must have taken a year or more to complete, probably began as a response to Margaret Kirkeby's desire to understand the doctrine behind the spiritual songs she was to spend so much of her life, as nun and anchoress, chanting.[82]

Here Hanna elucidates that Rolle wrote for Kirkeby not simply because of a mentor relationship but because he saw a need for those guides to be provided for the anchoress. Although no letters exist between Kirkeby and Rolle and none of Rolle's works further enlighten their reader to how the two contemplatives first struck up an acquaintance, it is clear that the relationship was important to Rolle and was at least one crucial aspect to the reason behind Rolle's composition of the *English Psalter*.

Indeed, it seems to be a pattern in Rolle's life, as well as his writing, to be involved in the lives of women. Watson remarks in *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority* on the scarcity of specific details about the life of the hermit, pointing out that "neither the order of most of his works nor the occasion of their composition has been established."[83] The clear majority of those texts that do bear dedications to specific individuals, however, are dedicated or written to women. One of the copies of *Ego Dormio*, MS Dd.v.64, was written for a nun of Yedingham, a burrough near Pickering, which is an interesting note due to Rolle's birth at Thornton, near Pickering, and thus may mean that Rolle wrote for this Yedingham nun early in his career as a hermit, perhaps even before throwing himself upon the boon of the Daltons, having become acquainted with the convent during his childhood. Additionally, *The Commandment* was inscribed for a nun of Hampole, who was most likely not Kirkeby, as Kirkeby was never

[82] Ibid., 223.

[83] Watson, *Invention of Authority*, 32.

known to have been a nun, only an anchoress. It was to Kirkeby, however, that Rolle dedicated both *The Form of Living* and *English Psalter*.[84]

### *Rolle's Death and Legacy*

Living a hermitic life did not protect Rolle from the ravishes of the plague. He died during the great outbreak of Black Death in 1348. Yet the corpus of his work continued to be transcribed, most likely at the prodding of Kirkeby, for years after his death. In his 1938 book *Pre-Reformation England*, Herbert Maynard Smith asserts that "there are more MSS. of Richard Rolle extant than those of any other English mediaeval writer."[85] Since the writing of Maynard's book, many other manuscripts have been found so this is probably no longer true, but the fact remains that Rolle's work was diffusely disseminated and tolerated by the Catholic church and heretics alike in the years leading up to the Reformation. His mystic verse has been included in numerous collections and his *English Psalter* was touted by the Lollard followers of Wycliffe as being the first step in standing against the Catholic church, despite their approval from the higher ecclesiastical structure. The devotional texts he wrote for Kirkeby and others lasted as tools for promoting personal piety, especially among medieval women. Even his non-English mystic texts were widely read and Deanesly described Rolle as "one of the most remarkable of the later hermits."[86] This renown came surely because of the usefulness of so many of his texts in promoting personal devotion, and understanding Rolle's life,

[84] Ibid. Watson states that "*The Form of Living* [was written] for the anchoress Margaret (ff. 29r., 34r., Ir.), called 'Margareta de Kyrkby' in MS Longleat 29 (f. 30r), for whom the *English Psalter* (according to MS Laud Misc. 286, f. Ir.-v.) was also made."

[85] Herbert Maynard Smith, *Pre-Reformation England* (New York: Macmillan, 1938): 339.

[86] Deanesly, *History*, 217.

specifically his relationship with Kirkeby, allows the historian to gain a further understanding in why a hermit's writing was so focused and utilitarian.

PART TWO

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Mystic and Magister

In *Stripping of the Altars*, Eamon Duffy describes Rolle's impact on Margery Kempe, an English mystic commonly associated with the fourteenth century mystics, but actually writing in the early fifteenth century: "The enormous imaginary power of this form of meditation. . . is evident from the accounts Margery Kempe has left of her visionary experiences, which seem in places little more than literal-minded paraphrases of the relevant sections of. . . Richard Rolle's. . . influential *Meditations on the Passion*, [a] work read to her by the spiritual directors she found in such abundance in fifteenth-century East Anglia."[87] Duffy also describes Rolle's writing as "classic" and part of a group of texts that have "all the vividness of imagery and the warmth and urgency of tone which is so much a feature of late medieval religious sensibility."[88] These descriptions of Rolle's impact on other mystics reveal not only his importance in the lives of those who directly followed him but also his continuing importance to any historical understanding of the period. Rolle's texts, with their multifaceted but focused purposes, were not only widely used but also broadly disseminated and show a visionary independence of thought from the mainstream ecclesiastical hierarchy while remaining essentially orthodox, in context.

An understanding of the place Rolle's work had in the lives of those who read him after his life and were involved in his transmission is crucial to understanding the

[87] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 237.

[88] Ibid., 254.

reception history of Rolle's ideas. This chapter therefore explores the codicology of Rolle's manuscripts, except for the Rosebery Rolle manuscript, which will be discussed in the next chapter. A close examination of the life of Rolle's writing after his death allows the student of this period to notice three main features. Firstly, the wide production of Rolle's texts points to his orthodoxy, for his manuscripts were being replicated in convents and monasteries that would not have otherwise produced heretical manuscripts. Secondly, the importance of women in Rolle's life is further emphasized by the overwhelming majority of Rolle's replicated texts including either the *Prose Psalter* or the *Form of Living*. Indeed, not only was it *for* women that Rolle compiled these devotional tools but also it was *by* women that a number of these texts were transcribed and promulgated after Rolle's death. Finally, the number of devotional texts replicated points to the need for these guides in private life. Yet not only the codicology of Rolle's texts but also an understanding of the matter within these texts avails a better conception of Rolle's unique place in instructing women. Thus at the end of this chapter, two texts are discussed in order to portray the themes found in Rolle's writing, themes which are similarly found in and possibly the reason for his construction of the Rosebery Rolle manuscript.

### *Codicology of Rolle's Manuscripts*

The body of works currently attributed to Rolle is vast and spans not only two languages but also multiple genres. Ralph Hanna's compendium, *The English Manuscripts of Richard Rolle: a Descriptive Catalogue*, is currently the most complete

publication of Rolle's English manuscripts.[89] For scholars unable to travel to each of the libraries in order to view the documents themselves, Hanna's book is an invaluable asset for understanding the codicology of Rolle's works. In another work, *Richard Rolle: Uncollected Prose and Verse, with Related Northern Texts*, Hanna evaluates past collections of Rolle's works and reviews changes in understanding about Rolle's authorship over time. The manuscripts he discusses are arranged by the library in which they may be found and the descriptions of the manuscripts that Hanna provides are thorough and quite useful codicological tools. Within the manuscripts there are often multiple booklets. A booklet, according to Hanna in his *Pursuing History: Middle English Manuscripts and Their Texts*, is the medium between a quire and a full codex. It can be a collection of multiple quires but does not necessarily need to be comprised of quires at all. Understanding the spread of these texts, as well as examining the works collected in booklets, allows historians to grasp at the importance of Rolle's texts as it demonstrates the large amount of work that went into transcription for dissemination.

One of the reasons that Rolle is often gathered with the Lollards may be because some of his writings have been collected with Wycliffite texts. At the Bodleain Library at Oxford University there is a booklet titled the Don. C. 13 manuscript. Though primarily comprised of a Wycliffite sermon cycle, the booklet also contains Rolle's lyrical "Hail Jesus," directly followed by the Rollean verse, included in the *Index of Middle English Verse* as #1733. The manuscript also includes Rolle's commentary, in Latin, on the Pater Noster.[90] The large inclusion of Rolle texts may lend itself to an

[89] Ralph Hanna, *The English Manuscripts of Richard Rolle: a Descriptive Catalogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

assumption that the theories behind the authorship were similar, this is simply not the case, as evidenced by the large number of Rolle manuscripts that were collected with other orthodox works.

A number of Rolle's manuscripts were either purposefully copied to be collections of Rolle works or were associated with other orthodox works of similar bent. The Ashmole 751 manuscript, found at the Bodleian library, mixes a few of Rolle's Latin works with other religious texts from the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. Specifically, the bundle includes Rolle's commentary on the Song of Songs, the exemplum "Beatus cesarius telles," and *Super novem lecciones*.[91] To include such texts, especially Rolle's commentary, points to Rolle's adoption by the church as orthodox. Additionally, the Bodleian also houses the Rawlinson D. 913 manuscript, folio 61. This document is remarkable and points to Rolle's orthodoxy because every work in this bifolium are Rolle's. The works included are brief portions and the conclusion of the "Epistle of St. Machary the hermit" and a short excerpt from the "Epistle of St. John the hermit."[92] The Hatton 12 manuscript, also found in the Bodleian library at Oxford, includes large swathes of Rolle's texts. The *Prologue to the Psalter* is at the front of the document with a copy of the *Prose Psalter*, the *Canticles*, the *Magnificat* and Rolle's writing on the *Ten Commandments*.[93]

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[90] Carleton Brown and Rossell Hope Robbins, *The Index of Middle English Verse* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1943). Additionally, Hanna, *Invention of Authority*, xxiv.

[91] Ralph Hanna, *The English Manuscripts of Richard Rolle: a Descriptive Catalogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[92] Ibid., xxii.

[93] Ibid., xxxiv.

The Ashmole 751 manuscript points to another aspect raised by the codicology of Rolle's texts. The *Prose Psalter* is rarely reproduced without other additions, most usually the *Canticles,* the *Magnificat* and one or two other additions used for promoting devotion. Thus historians may posit that these manuscripts were being used primarily for devotion, most likely for the pious practices of individual readers and, as such, were fulfilling much the same purpose of the Rosebery Rolle manuscript, which was compiled to be used for Margaret Kirkeby's own personal devotion. One of these *Prose Psalters* is found at Aberdeen University. This manuscript includes a copy of the *Prose Psalter* without any prologue and a copy of Rolle's *Old Testament Canticles* and the *Magnificat* and the "Lessons of Dirige." The "Lessons" is a Rolle text that was not identified or discussed academically prior to the 1991 publication of Henry Hargreaves' "*Lessons of Dirige*: A Rolle Text Discovered."[94] This text is written in the vernacular, and Hanna identifies its dialect as being particularly northern, specifically from southern West Riding, Yorkshire, or Wakefield, a fact that aided the identification of Rolle as the author. The Hatton 12 manuscript includes large swathes of Rolle's texts, including the *Prologue, Psalter, Canticles,* and *Magnificat*. At the end of this collection is Rolle's writings on the *Ten Commandments*.[95] This pattern may be found in smaller collections as well. The Huntington Library at San Marino holds manuscript HM 148, a collection that includes copies of the *Prologue to the Psalter*, the *Prose Psalter*, the *Old Testament Canticles* and *Magnificat*, the *Commandment*, "Diliges dominum deum tuum," the "Epistle of St. Machary the hermit," and the "Epistle of St. John the hermit." Of special

[94] Henry Hargreaves, "*Lessons of Dirige*: A Rolle Text Discovered," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 91 (1990) 311-319.

[95] Hanna, *Invention of Authority*, xxxiv.

note in this manuscript, however, is "an extensive series of exempla" from Rolle's "Verba seniorum."[96] Thus these collections of works follow a pattern also found in the Rosebery Rolle manuscript and show the widespread nature of that arrangement.

One of Rolle's most popular vernacular texts was the *Form of Living* he wrote for Kirkeby, a text that outlines the orthodox life of an anchoress. The wide transmission of this work illuminates its value, for the text includes by far the most spread about manuscripts. At the British Library in London there is a copy of "The Epistle of St. Machary the hermit" and "The Epistle of St. John the hermit," and the Arundel 507 Manuscript, a collection of shorter pieces, some of which are attributed to Rolle.[97] These shorter pieces include an incomplete text of *The Form of Living* that includes chapters six and twelve, as well as excerpts from chapters one through four, the first one hundred twenty-four lines of *Ego Dormio*, a complete copy of *The Seven Gifts*, and an excerpt from Rolle's *Incendium Amoris*.[98] The British Library also owns the Harley 1022 manuscript, which includes a few of Rolle's exempla, *The Form of Living* and "Oleum effusum."[99] Also, at the Bodleian Library is MS Rawlinson C.285, a manuscript comprised of four booklets, the first three of which include Rollean texts. Booklet one includes *The Commandment* with an excerpt from chapter eight of *Emendatio vitae*. The second booklet includes *The Form of Living*. The third contains "The Epistle of St. John the Hermit."[100] Thus once again the same pattern found in collections including the

[96] Ibid., xxxv.

[97] Ibid., xvi-xix.

[98] Ibid., xviii.

[99] Ibid., xxxi.

[100] Ibid., xlix.

*Prose Psalter*, of including a guide for devotional life with extra, smaller portions of text to promote this devotional life may be seen in folios of *The Form of Living*. In the Lambeth Palace Library in London MS 853 resides. This manuscript includes an incomplete chapter nine of *The Form of Living* and two lyrics, "Love is Life," and "Jesus God's Son."[101]

The pattern is continued at Cambridge, where Manuscript Dd. v. 64 resides. This booklet is actually a compilation of three separate manuscripts. The first includes Rolle's *Emendatio vitae* as well as a Latin Pater Noster commentary; the second has *Incendium amoris*. The third manuscript includes Rolle's *The Form of Living*, *The Seven Gifts*, *Ego Dormio*, *The Commandment*, *Ghastly Gladnesse* and eight of Rolle's lyrics.[102] The manuscript also includes a portion of "Of the wyrkyngs in mans saule." The texts in this manuscript were first published in two volumes in 1895 and 1896 by C. Horstmann in a book entitled *Yorkshire Writers* and Hanna asserts that the Dd collection has "been recognized since Horstmann as one of the most important manuscripts conveying Rolle's English texts."[103]

Although the Dd collection may be one of the most important manuscripts, it cannot compete with a booklet found at Dublin's Trinity College, which houses a manuscript with six booklets under the simple title Manuscript 155. The first booklet in this collection includes *Ego Dormio* in totum. The second booklet includes an almost complete copy of *The Form of Living* and the third booklet includes Rolle's "Diliges

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[101] Ibid., xl.

[102] Ibid., xxviii. The lyrics that the third manuscript in the Dd collection includes are: "My truest treasure," "All sins," "Mercy is most," "Jesus God's son," "Love is life," "Hail Jesus," "All vanities forsake," and "The joy be ilka del."

[103] Ibid., xxix.

dominum deum tuum." Although there is nothing in the fourth booklet authored by Rolle, the fifth booklet includes his "oleum effusum."[104] Hanna observes that in this manuscript, the scribe "appears to have been consciously producing a Rolle-anthology."[105] If true, this would explain the willingness to devote over forty-seven pages of vellum to copying *The Form of Living* almost in its entirety.

The devotional texts are remarkable due to their broad dissemination, yet it is also important to note how many were part of private collections and even remain to this day in the private collections. One such manuscript is found in the Lincoln Cathedral Library. This manuscript, MS 91, is divided into four booklets, of which only the third has any of Rolle's texts. The "Oleum effusum" is immediately followed by the "Narracio: a tale yat Richerde hermet." This is followed by "Deus noster refugium O creator noster et virtus," a Latin prayer that is supposedly Rolle's, though that is unconfirmed. The manuscript also includes a number of autobiographical texts, such as "De inperfecta contritione Rycharde hermyte" and "Allswa he reherces anothyre tale of verraye contrecyone." Additionally, the manuscript includes two Latin meditations, a number of his mystical works, such as *All vanities forsake* and *They joy be ilka dele, Desire and Delight*, and the *Seven Gifts*. "A notabill Tretys off the ten Comandementys Drawen by Richerde the hermit off hampull" and "Moralia Richardi heremite de natura apis" are also included in this manuscript.[106] MS 91 is particularly noteworthy due to its provenance. Robert Thornton compiled the collection in the mid-fifteenth century and was passed down through the family until the late seventeenth century. The manuscript

[104] Ibid., xxvi.

[105] Ibid., xxvii.

[106] Ibid., xxxvi-xxxviii.

then transitioned out of the family and eventually arrived in the Lincoln Cathedral Library. Unlike many of the other manuscripts, however, the path which this manuscript traveled is easily traceable.[107] John J. Thompson provides a complete look at MS 91's codicology in his article, "Another Look at the religious Texts in Lincoln, Cathedral Library."[108] Family-owned devotional texts were not uncommon but were, for the most part, orthodox, and Rolle's texts were widely used as such tools.

The Marquess of Bath has just such a collection in his collection at Longleat House, MS 29. This manuscript holds five booklets, although Rolle's texts are found only in the second. This second booklet has complete versions of *The Form of Living*, *Ego Dormio*, *The Commandment*, *Desire and Delight*, and *Ghastly Gladnesse*. These are followed by five lyrics and, after a few non-Rollean filler texts, the *Meditation on the Passion A*, a text found in only one other manuscript in the British Library.[109] This manuscript draws special attention not only because the text is in an unusually good state but also because S. J. Ogilvie-Thomson, who published *Richard Rolle Prose and Verse*, argues that parts of this manuscript, partnered with parts of the MS Lyell, were created as a gift for Margaret Kirkeby. If this folio was created specifically for Kirkeby, then the collection and transcription may have been personally overseen by Rolle.

The large body of texts that have reproduced the *Prose Psalter* and *Form of Perfect Living* attest to those works' importance as tools for pious living. Yet Rolle's other works were also transmitted throughout England. The British Library in London

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[107] Ibid., xxxix.

[108] John J. Thompson, "Another Look at the Religious Texts in Lincoln, Cathedral Library," found in A. J. Minnis, ed., *Middle English Poetry: Texts and Traditions: Essays in Honor of Derek Pearsall*, York Manuscript Conference Proceedings Series 5. York: Woodbridge, 2001.

[109] Ibid., xlii.

houses a number of manuscripts that contain Rollean texts. The MS Sloane 1009 has a partial copy "Of thre wyrkyngs in mans saule" among other works, including Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Tale of Melibee*.[110] Also at the British Library there is MS Stowe 38, a manuscript of three booklets, the third of which has a fragment of "Oleum effusum."[111] In the library of Cambridge's Trinity College there is a manuscript comprised of four portions, the first of which contains two booklets. In the first booklet is a text attributed to "Rich hermyte" called "Of thre wyrkyngs in mans saule."[112] A few manuscripts of note may also be found in smaller libraries. Durham University Library houses the Cosin V.I.12 manuscript, which includes Rolle's *The Bee*, a work as yet largely unknown.[113]

A number of these manuscripts have notes in the margins that hint at the intense commitment to and respect for Rolle that many of his readers held. Emily Hope Allen explained that Rolle's readers' "captivation is apparent in biographical notes in MS Vienna 4483, interesting for the seriousness of their attempts to reach back through his writings to his personality."[114] In many of the other manuscripts, there are drawings and sketches of Rolle himself, commonly referred to as *Ricardus*.[115] Additionally, it is clear that Rolle's reputation, even in the years after his death, was that of mystic *and* devotional writer. Watson explains that this may be seen in the fact that "later devotional writers also discuss the dangers of an excessively literal imitation of Rolle's mystical

[110] Ibid., li.

[111] Ibid., liii.

[112] Ibid., lv.

[113] Ibid., xxx.

[114] Allen, 39-45.

[115] Nicholas Watson, *Invention of Authority*, 33.

practices, in a way that suggest the imaginative appeal his spiritual life must have had for his readers."[116] Thus while not giving a year-by-year account of his life, Rolle's manuscripts highlight Rolle's position as spiritual advisor not only to the women for whom he wrote but also for those who interacted with his works after his death.

The codicology of these different documents allows a reader of Rolle to understand a few things about the author. Firstly, the sheer quantity of Rolle manuscripts in existence speaks to his popularity. Secondly, the fact that these manuscripts are spread throughout libraries across Great Britain exemplifies the broad dissemination of the texts. The fact that many of these manuscripts also remain in private collections, or were in private collections at some point, makes sense when one considers that his most popular texts were meant to be used as lay devotional materials. The large number of Psalters and *The Form of Living*, both of which were highly utilized as personal guides for piety. Finally, the large corpus of vernacular texts, written specifically to increase personal devotion, attests to the design behind Rolle's writing, for these manuscripts to be used as tools in lay piety.

### *Canor, Dulcor and Fervor*

The themes in Rolle's works, especially in his vernacular texts, further illuminate this purpose. Rolle wrote not only to express his own inward ecstasy for the Lord in his mystical writings but also to encourage a more fervent passion in others, like Kirkeby, in his devotional texts. His Psalters have vernacular glosses to further educate the women in the convent. Additionally, the *Meditations on the Passion* was used for years as part of cycles of readings during the Easter season.

[116] Watson, 33.

In seeking to determine Rolle's purpose for writing, one must understand his themes in writing. Rolle writes two types of texts. His mysticism did not live across a chasm from his devotional duties, they were entwined in the same purpose and goals. Throughout the whole corpus of Rolle's work there are recurring themes. In his mystical writings, he expresses these themes as his own soul yearns for God. In his devotional tracts, Rolle exhorts his readers to find similar passion for Christ and his work. *Meditations on the Passion* and *The Form of Living*, as well as *Incendium Amoris*, all portray three recurring themes, spiritual conceptions around which Rolle's mystical life anchored. These three are *fervor*, *dulcor* and *canor*. Watson explains that these three experiences "made [Rolle] a prophet of joy, an exultant praiser of God who believed that penitence is for spiritual beginners."[117] Rolle describes in one of his earlier works, *Incendium Amoris*, his conversion experience and first interaction with *fervor, dulcor,* and *canor*. After experiencing these things Rolle's writing reflected them in almost all of his texts. He wrote not only to express his own experiences, however, but also to extol others to seek similar heights of exultation.

These three aspects are repeated throughout the corpus of Rolle's texts and it is to an experience of these things that Rolle seeks to lead Kirkeby, in *The Form of Living* and his *Prose Psalter*. *Fervor, dulcor* and *canor* are experienced only by the mystic, thus for Kirkeby to ever reach the heights of these three mystical experiences, she must lead the solitary life. For Rolle, *fervor* is found in the *Incendium amoris* as "when the mind is truly kindled by eternal love."[118] Gordon Mursell, in *English Spirituality: from Earliest*

[117] Watson, *Richard Rolle*, 33.

[118] Richard Rolle, *Incendium amoris*; found in Gordon Mursell, *English Spirituality: from Earliest Times to 1700* (London: John Knox Press, 2001) 206.

*Times to 1700*, explains that Rolle would have had in mind "an experience at the end of a long period of prayer, when he was suddenly granted a powerful sense of the love of God in response to God's love for him."[119] Rolle uses the concept of *dulcor*, sweetness, to represent the sweet fulfillment of his intense longing for union with Christ. *Dulcor* seems to be a singularly affective mystical desire, as the longing is almost sexual in nature, the need to be filled similar to the lusting after a woman. Yet it is *canor* that is the highest aspect of mystical union. *Canor* is for Rolle a special language of the soul, experienced at a time when "the mind, abounding in ardour, is received the sweetness of eternal praise: thought is turned into song, and the mind dwells in mellifluous song."[120] This song of the soul is reflected throughout Rolle's writing, for even his prose retains a sense of metrical song, an almost prose-poetry form, both through the intentional alliteration but also his use of words and even, on occasion, the verse inserted into his prose in order to express his exultation further.

Although these three themes are primarily mystical, they are seen throughout all his writing and in his textual guides for Kirkeby. Rolle hopes, therefore, to lead her to a life in which she, too, may experience these things. Rosamund S. Allen identifies *The Form of Living* as one of Rolle's "greatest and most mature works."[121] Written in Middle English, *The Form of Living* was an instructional guides for the nuns of Hampole, specifically to the anchoress Kirkeby, Richard's beloved disciple. In the Cambridge Dd V.64 manuscript, the text begins with the inscription: "incipit forma vivendi scripta a

[119] Mursell, *English Spirituality*, 206.

[120] Rolle, *Incendium amoris*; found in Mursell, *English Spirituality*, 206.

[121] Rosamund S. Allen, trans. and ed., *Richard Rolle: the English Writings*. New York: Paulist Press, 1988.

beato Ricardo heremita ad Margaretam anachoritam, suam dilectam discipulam."[122] The text, though prose, is "a rhythmical, cadenced prose, so that frequent alliterative verses can easily be made out."[123] This, then is a representation of his theory of *canor*. Many of Rolle's prose texts have metrical undertones, as it was in the spirit of song that the worshipper's soul and the being of God best communicated. Allen places the date of Rolle's composition between 1348 and Spetember of 1349, thus it would have been one of the last texts that Rolle wrote before his death. *The Form of Living* was written as a guide for how best to live the Christian life and it is this work that was most widely circulated, as it is generally thought that the work was disseminated by Kirkeby for use of other anchoresses and even female monastics.

*The Form of Living* follows a pattern much like that of the *Ancren Riwle*, in that it is divided into sections that explore both how to avoid sins that are common in the hermitic life and practices that will engender greater stability and piety in a life of devotion, leading eventually to greater union with the being of God. There is a natural divide in this text between the sixth and seventh chapters, as the first six chapters discuss the concept of the perfect life and ways to avoid the sinful life and the last chapters explore the concept of divine love and how one's life might be led to take the most advantage of that love. Rolle shows a preference for categorizing and listing his issues throughout most of his writing, including the verse at the end of the Rosebery Rolle Mansucript. This logical, almost symmetrical, order also fits well into a conception of poetry being the medium of the soul's communication, for verse form naturally creates

[122] Horstmann, *Yorkshire Writers*, 3. Translation by the author of this paper: "This form of living begins with writing by Richard the Hermit to the anchoress Margaret, his most favored disciple."

[123] Ibid.

order, thus by establishing a similar order in his argument in *The Form of Living*, Rolle seeks to communicate soul to soul even outside of verse.

There are plethora examples of this throughout the text. In the first chapter he lists "three kinds of weaknesses which bring [men and women] to the everlasting death of hell" and "three respects the Devil has the authority to inhabit a person."[124] The first chapter calls the reader to understand their need for God, expounding on the ills of a perverse life and describing the sins available to commit in the world. Rolle also brings to light the different ways that the devil tempts man to live a life apart from God, explaining that despite the lure of the sinful life, all will come to ruin in the end. "Because they choose the vile sinfulness of this world, and take more delight in the mire of their own flesh than in the beauty of heaven, they lose both the world and heaven."[125] The anchoritic life was not void of temptation for Rolle, and he encouraged Kirkeby to keep that in mind. Here Rolle's list of sins and devilish temptations, though not strictly following an outline of the seven deadly sins, does seem to at least call to mind the orthodox listing of dangerous sins, a listing he reiterates in the Rosebery Rolle manuscript.

In the second through fifth chapters, Rolle explains to Kirkeby that appropriate relationship between a woman totally devoted to God and God himself, giving details on both party's expected actions and responses. Rolle is mindful not only in *The Form of Living* but also in the Rosebery Rolle Manuscript of his audience's femaleness, as he alters his instructions accordingly. The second chapter explores what an anchoress might expect from Christ: "because you have abandoned the comforts and the pleasures of this

[124] Allen, *Richard Rolle*, 152 & 154.

[125] Ibid., 154.

world and devoted yourself to the solitary life for the love of God, in order to endure distress and hardship in this life and subsequently to come to rest and joy in heaven. I believe most sincerely that the consolation of Jesus Christ, and the sweetness of his love, with the fire of the Holy Spirit. . . shall be in you and with you."[126] Here Rolle wishes his own *dulcor* and *fervor* on to the anchoress; he expresses in his metrical prose, his soul's *canor*, that Kirkeby too might experience the *dulcor* of Christ's love and the *fervor* of the Holy Spirit. The chapter continues with Rolle's assurances that the solitary life is that which is best suited for experiencing the revelations of the Holy Spirit. He asserts that in a life in the outside world, the devil too often tempts the believer or makes himself into a deceiving form to trick the believer into thinking that the devil was actually God revealing himself. Rolle argues that a life without too many material comforts, without a longing for those comforts, is truly the best life as it removes the temptations naturally and allows a smoother transition to achieving the *fervor*, *dulcor*, and *canor* with the being of God. Rolle ends this chapter with a list of six kinds of dreams, detailing for the reader how to determine the degree of truth in a dream's revelations.

Rolle's affective mysticism is particularly apparent in the third chapter, which addresses how the life of a bride of Christ should appear to the outside world, calling for a balance between excess piety and excess deprivation. This again emphasizes the specific attention Rolle was giving to the fact that his audience was female. He does not urge Kirkeby to purge herself wholly of all worldly comforts, instead urges her to set her eyes on Christ. The chapter is also an excellent example of Rolle's affective mysticism, as he explains his own concupiscence for Christ to Kirkeby, seeking to compel her to lead a life that would provide her with the greatest opportunity to experience the *fervor*,

[126] Ibid., 157.

*dulcor* and *canor* that he so relished. Rolle ends his chapter with the exhortation: "and so endeavor, to the full extent of your ability, not to be worse than you seem to be. And if you are willing to act as I am instructing you in this brief form of living, I am confident through God's grace, that if people consider you good, you are bound to be much better."[127] This, in addition to the modifications in his instructions that allow for her gender, adds quite a personal touch to the manuscript. Rolle was entirely conscious in *The Form of Living* as well as in the Rosebery Rolle Manuscript of his position as spiritual guide and mentor to Kirkeby. The hermit continues by calling upon Kirkeby to turn her life over to God completely, seeking no longer to love the things of this world. He provides, to establish a sense of order, a list of four things to consider whenever she felt tempted by the world and ends with a warning to remember should those four things not convince her to turn to God: "consider what agony and grief and torment those are destined to have who do not love God above all other things which one can perceive in this world, but defile their bodies and souls in physical cravings and carnal desires of this life, in arrogance and acquisitiveness and other sins. They are born to be consumed in the fire of hell, with the devil whom they served for as long as God is in heaven with his servants—in other words: forevermore."[128] Here Rolle uses the inverses of the issues he has been addressing throughout the rest of the chapter—for, just as the *fervor* of God can burn away the sins and sinful desires of the flesh, if the worshipper does not seek that holy fire the result is to be burnt by the fire of hell; in the same manner, if one sought not the *dulcor* of walking with the Holy Spirit, and instead were defiled by carnal longings, Rolle argues that this only opens the door to further sins and temptations. In essence,

[127] Ibid., 162.

[128] Ibid., 163.

Rolle spends a chapter urging his pupil to flee temptation in order to find the fulfillment of union with God but ends the chapter with a different approach, arguing that one should also flee temptation because of the lasting repercussions of hell. As with all of his devotional works, including the Rosebery Rolle Manuscript, Rolle writes with a sense of equality, extolling his readers to find the same *fervor*, *dulcor* and *canor* that his soul found; yet he never forgets that his reader has not yet found that mystical union with Christ and, especially in his devotional tools for Kirkeby, that his audience is a woman and thus more likely, in Rolle's mind, to fall into temptation.

The fifth chapter exhorts the anchoress to be ever growing in an understanding of Christ and his love. He warns against starting in too fervent a mode, that one should begin at the bottom of their love for Christ and then slowly climb their way to the top. His encouraged method for accomplishing this climb is thus: "apply all your thought on how you may love your Jesus Christ more than you have been doing, then I venture to say that your worth is increasing and not diminishing."[129] Rolle's encouragement to turn all her thought on how to love Christ is interesting because the very purpose of his writing these devotional texts for Kirkeby was to help her learn how to love Christ. Chapter Six, the final chapter in the first section, outlines four things that the anchoress must understand in order to grow in a love and understanding of Christ. It also lists the sins of the inner feelings, the sins of speech, the sins of action and further sins. Following explanations of these lists are an outline of three things "which purify us out of corruption" and allow Christians to counteract those three ways of sinning. Each of these three methods to avoid the three methods of sin are broken down more in depth, usually with lists of their factors. Furthermore, Rolle warns against relying on others' approval

[129] Ibid., 163-164.

and affirmations as proof that one is leading a pure life. This probably resonated greatly in Rolle's own life, as he lived outside the orthodox establishment of the church, neither finishing his Oxford education and receiving ordination nor being officially clothed as a hermit. The final list provided in the sixth chapter, by far the longest chapter of the first section, is three factors that "induce us to bring our will into conformity with God's will."[130] This sentiment reveals Rolle's volative mysticism and is repeated throughout much of his writing, including passages in the Rosebery Rolle manuscript. Rolle concludes the first part with an affirmation of Kirkeby's desire to lead the holy life: "I am very well aware that you especially want to hear some particular details. . . of the life of contemplation, which you have adopted in public notice. As far as I am given the grace and skill I want to instruct you."[131] Rolle is consistently reiterating his goal for writing these devotional tools, always consciously keeping Kirkeby as his audience.

The final six chapters have a fairly coherent main thrust, which is what to do with the overwhelming love of Christ that Rolle expected the anchoress to receive. Chapter Seven applies the intimate type of love described in Song of Songs to a solitary life, once again bringing out the dominant affective mysticism in Rolle. The eighth chapter expands upon three degrees of love: insuperable, inseparable and singular.[132] Singular love, for Rolle, was the highest: "the third degree is the highest and most wonderful to attain; that is called singular because it has no equal. Singular love is where all comfort and consolation are excluded from your heart except those of Jesus Christ alone."[133] This

[130] Ibid., 168.

[131] Ibid., 169.

[132] Ibid., 170.

[133] Ibid., 171.

is the goal of all Rolle's writing; a truly eremitic life, one devoted to seeking union with Christ. In this chapter Rolle also indulges his soul's longing for *canor*, when he writes his lyrical *Cantus Amoris*, a verse commonly grouped with Rolle's lyrics. It is fitting that Rolle would use verse form here, as *canor* is the soul's true language and Rolle is writing in this chapter about the highest form of love. In the same way, Rolle uses verse form in the Rosebery Rolle manuscript to call Kirkeby's soul to true meekness.

In the ninth chapter, Rolle explains how a state of true love, in which the soul's *canor* speaks directly to the being of God, may be achieved. Ironically, Rolle encourages a personal devotion that is not reliant on devotional tools. While the sentiment is understandable, *The Form of Living* as well as the *Prose Psalter* fulfill the definition of devotional tool completely. It is perhaps possible that when Rolle wrote: "if you are willing to act in accordance with this instruction, then there is no need for you to be very eager for a lot of books" that he was not including his text as one of those "books," but either way the prescription is an odd one to find in the midst of a book written for personal devotion.[134] Rolle addresses his own deficiencies in the tenth chapter. There he admits that he is "weak and merely human" but attempts to answer the questions regardless, relying on the assistance of Jesus. The eleventh chapter, which is not included in all the manuscripts of *Living*, explores the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, the twelfth chapter identifies the differences between the active life and the contemplative life. Rolle summarizes what role the love of Christ has in each life and concludes with a personal note to the anchoress that reiterates the overarching purpose of his work: "well now, Margaret, I have briefly outlined for you a pattern for life and described how you can reach perfection, and love the One whom you have given yourself

[134] Ibid., 173.

to. If it helps you and is useful to you, thank God, and pray for me."[135] The last three chapters and this closing all repeat the same theme, that of pointing Kirkeby's eyes towards God and seeking to love him perfectly in this life, while providing advice on how best to do that in a way that may not necessarily follow his own path.

An examination of *The Form of Living* provides not only a glance at the spiritual intimacy of Rolle's relationship with Kirkeby, for he writes it clearly as a spiritual guide to a woman embarking on the spiritual life, but also the order and rationality Rolle imposes in a devotional tool. He has written instructions for Kirkeby that will, if followed, lead to the same spiritual union that Rolle experienced with God; it will lead her to experience the *fervor*, *dulcor* and *canor* that Rolle found in his mystical communion. This document shares a similar purpose with Rolle's *Prose Psalter*. Both were written for Kirkeby to use in her spiritual walk and both seek to equip her with the necessary tools for leading the anchoritic life. Yet the themes found in these devotional tools, with their symmetry, order and lists, are no less expressed in the more chaotic expressions of mystical passion.

A brief glance, therefore, should be made at one of Rolle's mystic expressions for it was his mysticism and writings on his own spiritual journey that gained his the respect and loyalty of one like Kirkeby. Furthermore, it was his expressions of devotion, love and piety in these mystical texts that express the point of union with the being of God for which he extols the readers of his devotional tools to strive. Rolle's *Meditations on the Passion* take a longer and shorter version and have been adopted as worthy meditations ever since Rolle's death. Indeed, even Charles Williams, a British poet and theologian from the twentieth century, uses Rolle's *Meditations* in his devotional book, *The New*

[135] Ibid., 183.

*Christian Year*. The meditations express raptures of joy at the love of Christ as well as despair over Rolle's own sin. They call for an increased union and rejoice when it is achieved. Rolle expresses elation at his union with Christ because of Christ's work on the cross and explore Rolle's own wretchedness over the pain his sin caused. "Dear lord Jesus, have mercy, you, the fount of mercy. Why will my heart not crack and split in two?" Rolle laments, pleading to be rid of his earthly confines and allow the *canor* of his heart to commune directly with God.

The tenor of the hermit's writing in *Form of Living* is in sharp contrast with that of his *Meditations*. Whereas *Living* is littered with lists and organized outlines of ideas, *Meditations* is comprised of the scattered ramblings of an elated mind and is punctuated by appeals to both Christ and the Virgin Mary, the Lady. Additionally, in the *Meditations* Rolle's focus on the cross ranges across the whole spectrum from Christ's trial and pain getting to the cross to the redemptive work and the changing power it has had in Rolle's life. The spiritual experiences expressed in *Meditations* express the sweetness he finds in his life of divine union, a life for which Rolle seeks to provide a guide-map in *Living* and the *Prose Psalter*. As is discussed in the next chapter, the intense sense of purpose in *Form of Living* as well as the conscious intent of writing for a woman, as a spiritual guide, becomes even more apparent in the verse at the end of the Rosebery Rolle Manuscript.

## *Conclusion*

The wide body of Rolle's texts exhibit his popularity long after his death, despite the occasional inclusion of Rolle works in Wycliffite collections. It also gives rise to an understanding of the extremely widespread distribution of Rolle's work, that so many

private and public copies of these manuscripts would have been made. Additionally, these texts were made for private devotion, a fact which falls in line well with the understood usage for the Rosebery Rolle manuscript, and also supports an understanding of orthodoxy for the texts, for they were created in a period before the rise of heresy and were replicated for private use.

Beyond this, a reading of Rolle's texts reveals themes that he learned during his periods of passion in his mystic experiences with Christ. It is his joy in these experiences that drove Rolle to create guides for others to move towards a time and place in which they could also take part in his ecstasy. Thus a look at both Rolle's mystic writing and his devotional tools, such as *Form of Living*, show the interconnectedness of Rolle's ideas and roles in life and how his experience in one drives his actions and goals in the other. Finally, Rolle's devotional tools were not written simply to an abyss but to a specific person and he was mindful throughout the text of his audience's femininity, as he is in the Rosebery Rolle manuscript.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## The Rosebery Rolle

This thesis focuses on the Rosebery Rolle Manuscript, which is currently part of the Passages Exhibit in The Green Collection.[136] Access to the document was provided through the Green Scholars Initiative.[137] This study focused specifically on the section of verse at the end of the manuscript, though the verse cannot be understood or examined properly outside the context of the manuscript as a whole. The whole manuscript may be seen as a devotional tool, which is only supported by the inclusion and content of the verse at the end. Thus studying the verse as a microcosm illuminates aspects of the manuscript as a macrocosm. The verse, by both its content and location, is meant to encourage the devotion and practice of piety in the Psalter's reader, as it instructs its reader in the best life of a "holy man." It is this verse, added to one of the most widely copied texts that Rolle wrote and created for the private use of a single woman, that shows Rolle's orthodox view of the need for his spiritual pupil to truly seek to live a life

[136] The Green Collection describes its collection as "the compilation of more than 30,000 biblical antiquities is currently featured via the worldwide traveling exhibition *Passages* and will eventually form the core of a permanent, international, non-sectarian museum of the Bible. The driving force behind the initiative, Steve Green now devotes half his time to providing vision and financial resources to The Green Collection. By applying his business acumen and marketplace vision to biblical antiquities, Green's desire is for people of all interests from around the world to interact with the Bible like never before. Source: http://explorepassages.com/collection

[137] Formed in the summer of 2010, the Green Scholars Initiative brings established and young scholars together to pioneer groundbreaking research on items in The Green Collection, the world's newest and largest private collection of rare biblical texts and artifacts. Dr. Jerry Pattengale, director of the Green Scholars Initiative, works closely with the Director of The Green Collection Dr. Scott Carroll and the curators of The Green Collection to orchestrate a radically new research program that makes advanced biblical research more accessible to students than ever before. Source: http://www.greenscholarsinitiative.org/About

of holiness and one that would lead her to experience the same *canor*, *dulcor* and *fervor* that his mystical musings and private devotions have allowed him to experience.

### *The Rosebery Rolle Manuscript's Codicology*

The Rosebery Rolle document was a woman's manuscript. The beauty and care of this manuscript is evident. As one of the oldest Rolle texts on record, the manuscript estimated to date from approximately 1400.[138] Additionally, the document is an excellent example of the interplay between changing trends in literacy and shifts in the production of manuscripts that was discussed in the second chapter, for its codicology reveals a manuscript that was produced with the intent of being included in a private collection and possibly copied so that more than one family could benefit from it.

The manuscript is a Psalter in pre-Wycliffite English, with a commentary, the Canticles, and the verse on which this study focuses on the last page. The manuscript is intricately decorated with red and green ink on vellum, with most of the text written in two shades of brown ink. On a few of the leaves throughout the manuscript there are extended calligraphic initials along the upper border. Elsewhere there are a number of small initials in red or green, usually denoting different aspects of the text. These colored initials are dwarfed, however, by three colored initials with quite intricate and flourished piece-work and a foliate penwork infill. Throughout the entire manuscript there is some "dampstaining" around the edges of the pages and the document sustains minor

[138] Thus there is not definitive proof that Rolle himself wrote the text in the manuscript or the verse passage at the end of the document. For the purpose of this study, and since the document has been identified as a Rolle *Psalter*, the verse fragment at the end of the manuscript is assumed to have been either influenced or written by Rolle himself. Yet in assuming this, this thesis is not making a statement on whether or not there is any veracity in that assumption.

discoloration.[139] The last two leaves of the manuscript have tears and are missing large portions of the page. The final leaves are "partially restored [with] early nineteenth-century dark brown leather over wooden boards with carved edges, with foliage sprays blind-tooled at [the] corners around a central lozenge."[140]

The manuscript is comprised of one hundred and ninety-three leaves total, measuring 293 millimeters by 195 millimeters. The written space on each page spans between 130 and 150 millimeters by 230 millimeters, thus leaving a border space throughout. Each page consists of two columns. In the Psalter, there is a repeating pattern of Latin verse, English translation and English gloss. The canticles are written in prose form. The final verse passage consists of twelve lines of six rhyming couplets, clearly marked as couplets by red corner marks. Throughout the manuscript there are three different hands that reveal both textura and anglicana scripts.[141] Textura script is the most common form of writing for medieval manuscripts. It is calligraphic, which means that the transcriber lifts his brush from the vellum after each stroke and that letters are made from multiple strokes. This naturally was a long and involved process, yet it provided for the neatest handwriting overall, thus it provided for the most long-lasting manuscripts. Because of the method of writing, the resultant letters are rather angular and comprised of vertical strokes called "biting."[142] In the Rosebery Rolle manuscript, the textura script is often drawn out to fill a line or contracted to fit in necessary text.

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[139] Sotheby's Catalogue, "Western Manuscripts: Lot 48." Accessed from http://www.artfact.com/auction-lot/the-rosebery-rolle,-the-psalms-and-canticles-in-p-1-c-1d4a0580b0.

[140] Ibid.

[141] Ibid.

[142] Harvard University's Paleography Guide. Accessed from http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic453618.files/Central/editions/scripts.html.

Anglicana script is far less rigid. It developed due to an increase in keeping written copies of legal documents, even on a local level. Additionally, during the fourteenth and fifteenth century, far more noble families desired libraries of their own, so the demand for individual books increased substantially. In order to fulfill this demand, scribes began to script their letters more, leaving the rigid confines of the textura hand. In so doing, the script began to flow with a smoother edge.[143] Much of the text in the Rosebery Rolle manuscript is Anglicana script, which is sometimes far more difficult to read than the more rigid, sculpted textura script.

The Rosebery Rolle manuscript is a fairly cohesive body of devotional material. The folios are noticeably ordered and comprised of the necessary tools to lead a pious life. The Prose Psalter fills the first 181 folios, up to the first column of the recto side of folio 181. A number of the psalms in this document are missing, as many of the leaves have been lost over the years. Since the manuscript does not even begin until Psalm 7:18, this means that the first seven psalms are also not in the document. The folios that are missing are 29, 71, 72, and 172. For this Psalter, this means that it lacks Psalms 23:4 to the end, all of 24, 25:1, 47:6 to the end, all of 48, 49:1-24, 68:41 to the end, all of 69, 70, 71, 72:1-23, 118:153 to the end, all of 119-139, and 140: 1-11.[144]

The Prose Psalter is followed by prose Canticles, commonly referred to today as *Song of Songs*, and the Magnificat, which together fill the remaining space in the first column of the recto side of folio 118 through to the first column of the verso side of folio 192. There begins a vernacular prose section that includes aspects of Pecham's Syllabus. "This discusses, in order, the Decalogue, sacraments, works of mercy (both sets),

[143] Ibid.

[144] Ralph Hanna, *The English Manuscripts of Richard Rolle*, 200.

theological and cardinal virtues, five wits, and fourteen articles of the faith, the conclusion lost in the torn final leaf."[145] This torn final leaf is in fact the first column of folio 193, and the tear to which Hanna refers also removed any couplets of the verse from the second column that may have been present. Hanna also notes that this passage of verse at the end of the manuscript, most likely due to its long residence in private collections, is not found in the Index of Middle English Verse.

*Provenance*

The document is "a notably early witness to Middle English, as well as a crucially important and early witness to Rolle's translation of the Psalter."[146] It is easily recognizable that the document was written for a woman, for female contemplation, and it is thought that the manuscript was even copied by nuns, not monks, in a north-west Yorkshire convent. The manuscript was probably completed by the nuns in 1380, though it shows signs of having been added to in the later fifteenth century.[147] This provenance fits well into what is known about not only Rolle's life but also Kirkeby's efforts to copy and disseminate his work after his death. In theory, the north-west Yorkshire convent could have been one close to Pickering, where Rolle was born and raised, though that cannot be proved definitively. Women apparently maintained a close relationship with the Rosebery Rolle manuscript, for there is a note on folio 177r that says "Elizabeth" that was not added until the late fifteenth- or sixteenth-century.[148] It is hypothesized that the

[145] Ibid.

[146] Sotheby's.

[147] Ibid.

[148] Ibid.

manuscript, which remained in the convent until the mid-eighteenth century, could have been used by preachers and perhaps even for public consumption.

It was during the eighteenth century that the Rosebery Rolle manuscript began to travel between private owners. It was first bought in either the very late eighteenth century or the early nineteenth century by Adam Clarke, a Wesleyan Methodist pastor. Shortly after Clarke's death, the manuscript was sold, at Sotheby's Auction House, to Thomas Thorpe for £19, 19 shillings on June 20, 1836. From there the document was sold by Sir Thomas Phillipps on May 17, 1897, and then sold again on March 27, 1905, by John Scott of Halkshill, Largs, Ayrshire. Both sales took place at Sotheby's Auction House.[149] The final sale, prior to The Green Collection's acquisition, established the manuscript in the collection of the Rosebery family. Archibald P. Primrose, the Fifth Earl of Rosebery and later Prime Minister, bought the manuscript from John Scott and it became part of the family library and was passed from generation to generation for the century it remained with the Roseberies.[150]

*Understanding the Manuscript*

The verse itself raises a number of interesting features for this document. The main body of this manuscript is the psalms, followed by aspects of Pecham's Syllabus written in prose. Both the vernacular of the Psalter and the vernacular gloss were written so that Kirkeby, or the nuns in the convent at Hampole, could read the scriptures for themselves and understand what they meant. The verse at the end of the manuscript, discussed in the next section, was also for Kirkeby and women's devotion. While the

[149] Ibid.

[150] Ibid.

verse brings to light a number of interesting details about Rolle, the value he places on orthodoxy, and his consciousness that female piety is different from that of male monastics, deciphering the verse presented a fair number of problems of its own.

The verse passage is abruptly ripped approximately two inches into the text, thus a few letters in the last line are missing as well as any additional lines or verse or commentary that may have originally existed. The verse is written in an Anglicana script hand, with no embellished lettering. There are twelve lines, rhyming couplets, that are clearly marked into their rhyming pairs by red corner-marks on the left side of the column. Three of the couplets are also linked in their rhymes by sketched red lines on the right side. Oddly, lines four and five, which are not part of a rhyming couplet, are linked with a similar red mark. Many of the lines contain faded ink, which made the lettering difficult to decipher. This was particularly problematic in lines five, six, and nine, where the letters toward the center of the line were practically illegible until context provided a clue to their definition. Additionally, there is a large rectangle of the vellum cut out of lines eleven and twelve. The ink on these two lines had retained its dark-brown hue, though, and thus the lines did not prove as difficult to determine as those with faded ink. A small rectangular portion of the vellum between the furthest extremities of lines ten and eleven has also been removed, though this did not affect legibility at all.

The scribe of this portion of the text has a quite extravagant script for his or her "w," making it a quite noticeable letter throughout the text. The scribe also took advantage of the opportunities to use tildes in order to maintain the appropriate length of each line. Specifically, tildes are used to represent a missing "n" on line one, to represent "n" and "e" on line seven, and to replace a lacking "st" on line eight. On all occasions

that the scribe needed to write "and," he supplemented with a brevigraph symbol instead. Finally, there were numerous occasions, usually when a word began with "y" or "w" that the scribe inserted a superscript in place of the rest of the word in the text. The most common occurance of this was in the word "the," where the scribe wrote instead y".

To a new reader of Middle English, this verse portion, as well as any of the rest of the text, proves quite daunting. Thus this passage was not deciphered by a single person but rather through the collaboration of four researchers. Initial guidance and a brief overview of understanding medieval texts, especially the explanation of the tilde and its role in Medieval script, was provided by John Kloosterman, a M. A. candidate in Medieval literature at Baylor University. Additionally, the expertise of Dr. Hope Johnston, assistant professor of Medieval literature, at Baylor University's English department, was quite illuminating and confirmed that much of the work already done on the manuscript had been correct or, at the very least, plausible. Finally, Dr. Beth Allison Barr, assistant professor of European women's history at Baylor University, devoted much time working with the manuscript to determine the verse's content.

*Content of the Poem*

Deciphering the verse took some time. Once the first two lines, which were by far the easiest to decipher, were read it became clear that the verse was not one that has been widely disseminated. Not yet having received Hanna's note on the verse's absence from the Index of Middle English Verse, a number of search engines were used to discover any other publications of this passage. None were found. After many weeks of very little understanding of the verse, within the span of only a few days a rendering was

finally made. Thus this is the text of the twelve lines of verse existent at the end of the manuscript:

> Be nogt redy and light unto laghyng
> Hald stilnes thee within unto asking
> The corona rewel of halikirk lok thou hald ay
> Thiself vilest of all trowe thou and say
> Halde thee unworthi unto states all
> Schrifis thee fully of thi syn and on god cal[l]
> Bath in harde and scharpis hald pacience
> Put thee under all men in obedience
> Luf thou nogt they awne will
> With drede of god kepe ye fra ill
> [????] xii degrees of meknes [??????][151]
> [pre]ched saynte Benet to the haly man.[152]

*Understanding the Verse*

Just as Rolle had it in the forefront of his mind at all times, when considering anything written by the hermit for the anchoress the reader must remember that Kirkeby was the intended audience. As such, Rolle has compiled in this Rosebery Rolle Manuscript not only vernacular scripture that his spiritual student, presumably illiterate to Latin, could embrace but also a number of devotional tools to aid Kirkeby in her personal, private devotion. In *Form of Living*, Rolle instructs Kirkeby to seek the Lord, to meditate on his word, and this is the useful tool by which she may do so. It provides for her not only the scripture, in the form of the Psalter, but also meditations for the anchoress and parts of Pecham's Syllabus, which would provide her with the minimum known to lead a devout life. In a similar manner, the verse is intended to promote greater

[151] This line has "x"es because those parts of the passage have yet to be deciphered. Help has been sought, but at this point, the words on either end of this line remain unknown.

[152] Richard Rolle, *The English Psalter*. Oklahoma City, OK: The Green Collection.

piety in Kirkeby, by allowing her to metrically experience the Twelve Degrees of Meekness.

*The Twelve Degrees of Meekness*

The Twelve Degrees of Meekness, which are also occasionally called the Twelve Degrees of Humility, were laid down by St. Benedict in his *Holy Rule*. Although these degrees of meekness were not commonly copied outside of the *Holy Rule*, it is not out of the realm of reasonability for Rolle to have included them in a devotional guide for an anchoress. For St. Benedict, the Twelve Degrees of Meekness represented twelve steps "to that perfect love of God which casts out fear."[153] This perfect love is that to which Rolle encourages Kirkeby—both in *The Form of Living* and in this devotional text. Rolle would have been familiar with the Rule of St. Benedict through his Oxford education; either he read the rule himself as part of his studies or he first became acquainted with the rule through reading St. Thomas Aquinas, who also discusses Benedict's steps to meekness. Benedict believed that once a sinner had climbed the steps of meekness, and achieving the perfect love of God, that "all the things [the sinner] did out of fear he will begin to perform without effort, out of habit and naturally, no longer out of the fear of hell but as a good habit out of the love of Christ and delight in virtue."[154] This is the very point of Rolle's *Form of Living* for Kirkeby. He extols her to reach this point in her spiritual walk here on earth, for only then would she truly be able to experience the mystic union with the being of God. Benedict concludes his comments in Chapter VII by blessing the monk's efforts in ascending these steps of meekness, asking that "the Lord in

[153] Caroline White, ed. *The Rule of Benedict* (London: Penguin Books, 2008) 26.

[154] Ibid.

his kindness will, by the Holy Spirit, give evidence of this in his workman."[155] For Rolle, the evidence of this interaction with the Holy Spirit would have been an experience of the *fervor*, *dulcor*, and *canor* that he himself attained. Thus, as his instruction to Kirkeby has as its purpose the goal of the anchoress herself experiencing those three ecstasies, it makes natural sense to include any possible guide for her to follow, including the Twelve Degrees of Meekness

It is interesting, though not extraordinary, that Rolle does not follow the sharp outline that Benedict provides for the steps. Indeed, one may posit that Rolle's interaction with the twelve degrees came not directly from blessed Benedict's rule but rather from reading St. Thomas Aquinas, who, in Article 6 of his *Summa Theologica*, outlines the twelve degrees "set down in the Rule of the Blessed Benedict" in reverse order to the pattern followed by Benedict.[156] Additionally, where Benedict examines each degree of meekness in great detail, wandering around with his words in a difficult to summarize manner, Aquinas summarizes Benedict's twelve steps quite nicely in his *Summa Theologica*:

> The first is to be "humble not only in heart, but also to show it in one's very person". . . ; the second is "to speak few and sensible words, and not to be loud of voice"; the third is "not to be easily moved, and disposed to laughter"; the fourth is "to maintain silence until one is asked"; the fifth is "to do nothing but to what one is exhorted by the common rule of the monastery"; the sixth is "to believe and acknowledge oneself viler than all"; the seventh is "to think oneself worthless and unprofitable for all purposes"; the eighth is "to confess one's sin"; the ninth is "to embrace patience by obeying under difficult and contrary circumstances"; the tenth is "to subject oneself to a superior"; the eleventh is "not to delight in

[155] Ibid.

[156] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II, q. 61, a. 6. accessed from: newadvent.org/summa/3161.htm.

> fulfilling one's own desires"; the twelfth is "to fear God and to be always mindful of everything God has commanded."[157]

Yet even Aquinas's concision does not fully inform historians whether Rolle became familiar with the twelve degrees through reading Benedict or Aquinas, though Aquinas's seems the more likely text. Either way, Rolle *was* familiar and thought the steps worth including in Kirkeby's devotional tool. Furthermore, and perhaps because of his understanding of *canor*, Rolle presents these steps in metrical verse. Just as the text of *Form of Living* is prose-poetry because of Rolle's high regard for metrical expression, so too would it make natural sense for the author to extol his reader to seek union with the godhead through the closest approximation to that sweet language of the soul that she would experience, should she follow these steps. If one considers *Form of Living* as the textbook to leading a devotional life as an anchoress then this collection in the *Prose Psalter* is the accompanying workbook. Should Kirkeby follow the twelve steps, she will reach union with the soul of God, and Rolle is giving her a taste, through his metrical representation of the degrees, of the language her soul will experience when she communes with God.

Yet a close look at the lines in Rolle's verse reveals that he had no compunction with altering the Twelve Degrees of Meekness for his own use. Since the lower portion of the folio is torn away, it is important to keep in mind that this verse is not understood in its entirety. If assumptions may be made based on the rest of the verse, it is most likely that either two couplets, one an introduction followed by the first two degrees of meekness, or one couplet, simply the first two degrees of meekness, were in the first column of the folio. That caveat firmly in place, the verse remnant fits rather nicely with

[157] Ibid.

the remaining ten of the Twelve Degrees of Meekness. Rolle presents the degrees in the same order that Aquinas does, thus in the reverse order from the blessed Benedict. The first line that remains in the manuscript, *Be nogt redy and light unto laghyng*, is almost a direct echo of the third degree, according to Aquinas's ordering. *Nogt* here negates the sentiment and being *redy*, prudent, and *light*, knowledgeable or wise, unto *laghyng* (laughing); thus Rolle incites Kirkeby to not be one who's intelligence and prudence are mocked or mocking. He follows this with the fourth step, as *hald stilnes thee within unto asking* means to keep oneself still and silent until asked for interaction. *The corona rewel of halikirk lok thou hald ay* is a quite different from Aquinas's "to do nothing but what is exhorted by the common rue of monastery."[158] *Hald ay* was in common usage in the 1330s, and meant to hold on with great firmness and tenacity. The *corona rewel of halikirk* is also commonly known as the golden rule and comes from Matthew 7:12, thus Rolle instructs Kirkeby to hold fast to this rule and live a life in accordance with it. *Corona* is crown, thus the crowning rule of the church is to what Kirkeby should adhere. This is a slight, yet understandable modification from both Benedict and Aquinas, both of whom focus on the guiding rules of the monastery. Kirkeby was not of monastic orders, despite her role as an anchoress, and even more, she was female and thus would not have followed the rules of a monastery, but a convent even if she had taken monastic orders. That aside, this line is specifically altered for Kirkeby's situation, as she should certainly adhere to the rules of the Catholic church.

The sixth degree of meekness is quite similar in both Aquinas's recitation and Rolle's verse. *Thiself vilest of all trowe thou and say* simply means to believe or pledge (*trowe*) that you (the reader, in this case Kirkeby) were the vilest of all and to not only

[158] Ibid.

believe it in your heart but confess it aloud. The seventh degree, Rolle's fifth line of the remnant, was far more difficult to read. Initially it was thought that the line read *Halde the vowe thi unto states all*, thus referring to keeping a vow or pledging a certain state. While this could be twisted to make sense in the light of a guide for an anchoress, in the context of Benedict's Twelve Degrees of Meekness, it makes little sense. Upon a second study, the line was determined to be *Halde thee unworthy unto states all*. This fits well with the Benedictine rule, as believing oneself to be unworthy in every situation, *unto states all*, is the seventh degree in the ordering that Aquinas uses. The eighth degree extols Kirkeby to *schrufis thee fully of thi syn and on god cal*, which means that she was to shrive herself of her sins and call on God, essentially to confess her sins and rely on God for forgiveness. The ninth degree in Aquinas's representation calls upon the monk to "embrace patience by obeying under difficult and contrary circumstances."[159] Rolle thus exhorts Kirkeby to *bath in harde and sharpis hald pacience*. *Sharpis* during this period meant "stinging" or "nattily," essentially contrary.[160] *Harde* may be understood as difficult. Thus, Kirkeby is to hold pacience in both hard and stinging situations, with the situations being implied.

The final three degrees of meekness are the most easily identifiable as being part of the degrees of meekness. Remarkably, they also all have to do with a subjection of will, another of the themes in *Form of Living*, and thus hint at a volative mysticism, for they have as their end goal the submission of one's will to the will of God. The tenth

[159] Ibid.

[160] Oxford English Dictionary, accessed through baylor.edu/lib.

degree of meekness is, in Aquinas and Benedict, to "subject oneself to a superior."[161] In Rolle's verse, however, this is altered to *put thee* [Kirkeby] *under all men in obedience*. Benedict never called for a monk to submit himself under *all* men in obedience, nor would he have had any reason to do so. Kirkeby's status as a woman, however, and one committed to a life of chastity, thus leaving her with no earthly husband, was reason for Rolle to make this alteration. The eleventh degree calls her to *luf thou nogt thei awne will*, or to not love her own will, but instead to cleave to the twelfth degree of meekness, which is to, *with drede of god*, or fear of the Lord, *kepe ye fra ill*, avoid ill deeds, otherwise written, to keep his commands. This completes the Twelve Degrees of Meekness, first established by St. Benedict in his *Holy Rule*, but presented in the order, and in accordance with the summary, provided by St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica*. The final couplet of the verse concludes with an identification of the above couplets, *xii degres of meknes* as well as an identification of their source, as Rolle informs his reader that these Twelve Degrees of Meekness were *[pre]ched* [by] *saynte Benet to the haly man*. *Benet* is a common abbreviation of Benedict and Benedict originally taught these degrees, or steps, as guides for a monk, or holy man.

### *Questions Raised by Rolle's Verse*

There are a few questions that are raised by an understanding of Rolle's verse and a few issues worth noting. First of all, the Twelve Degrees of Meekness were not widely published or used outside of Benedict's *Holy Rule*. Unlike the Decalogue, sacraments, two works of mercy, the theological and cardinal virtues, five wits, and fourteen articles of the faith, all of which were standard inclusions in devotional materials both before and

[161] Aquinas, newadvent.org/summa/3161.htm.

after Pecham's Constitutions came out and Pecham's syllabus became standard. The Twelve Degrees of Meekness were far less standard, however, and even the use of Benedict's *Holy Rule* was fairly limited to the Benedictine order, though that is not to say that academics outside the order would not have been familiar with the *Holy Rule*.

It is clear that Rolle was not only familiar with Benedict's *Holy Rule* but also with Aquinas's discussion of aspects of the rule. It is also clear that Rolle so valued the rule that he thought it worth including in his collection of devotional tools for Kirkeby. What is unclear is how Rolle included the Twelve Degrees of Meekness as outlined and ordered in Aquinas. It is possible that Rolle may have been persuaded by Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, in which he makes a strong case for the validity of the twelve degrees being important to attaining a greater spiritual walk for the soul. Indeed, Aquinas states that meekness "has essentially to do with the appetite, in so far as a man restrains the impetuosity of his soul, from tending inordinately to great things: yet its rule is in the cognitive faculty, in that we should not deem ourselves to be above what we are."[162] In order for the soul to seek union with God, therefore, he must restrain the appetite of his soul by subduing its recklessness in the mind. This was one of the chief aims of Rolle's *Form of Living* and it was certainly one of the factors that would lead Rolle to create such a broad devotional tool for the anchoress; for, by having the Psalter, Canticles, Magnificat and Pecham's Syllabus at hand, in a language she could read, Kirkeby would be able to lead her soul away from earthly lusts and towards a union with God.

Aquinas's discussion and ordering of the Twelve Degrees of Meekness would have also appealed to the symmetry and order Rolle so highly prized. Aquinas breaks down the Twelve Degrees into three different groups, two with three degrees and the

[162] Ibid.

third with five, all aiming to achieve the highest stair-step, that is the twelfth degree, by Aquinas's listing, "that a man fear God and bear all His commandments in mind."[163] The last three degrees, numbers nine through eleven he sees as including "certain things with regard to the appetite, lest one aim inordinately at one's own excellence."[164] Degrees eleven, ten and nine are "certain things with regard to the appetite, lest one aim inordinately at one's own excellence."[165] Aquinas views the eighth, seventh and sixth degrees as "referring to the estimate a man forms in acknowledging his own deficiency."[166] And finally the rest of the degrees, the first five in his organization, deal with outward signs of meekness. "One of these regards deeds. . . . Two others have reference to words. . . . The others have to do with outward gestures."[167] It is importance to understand Aquinas's logic in understanding the Twelve Degrees of Meekness, for this logic clearly induced Rolle to represent the degrees in his order instead of referring to the order outlined in Benedict's own writing. Furthermore, the logic Aquinas applied to these Twelve Degrees reflects the same logic Rolle used in ordering his *Form of Living* chapters. He thus uses the Twelve Degrees to instruct his spiritual pupil once again to seek meekness by subverting the lusts of the soul to the logic of the mind, in essence repeating the main thrusts of his own spiritual guide.

Any historian presented with such similarities between two writers can only hope to find a link in the biography that would have allowed the elder to have been a mentor in

[163] Ibid.

[164] Ibid.

[165] Ibid.

[166] Ibid.

[167] Ibid.

some capacity to the younger. Alas, there is not a definitive link between Aquinas, who died in 1274 and Rolle who was born in 1290. However, a puzzle does exist in how a poor northern Yorkshire hermit could have had access to Aquinas's work within the less than fifty years since Aquinas's death, although Rolle's education at Oxford could answer that question. Despite his tenure at Oxford, still another plausible scenario may be hinted at by Rolle's close connection with Aquinas, for there was a period of time in Rolle's life that remains unaccounted for and during which Rolle may have traveled overseas himself, to study at the Sorbonne.

Two of Rolle's biographers from the turn of the twentieth century, Maurice Noetinger and Emile Arnould, asserted that Rolle spent a period of time studying at the Sorbonne. If this was the case, Rolle could even have been a pupil of one of Aquinas's pupils, thus offering him ample opportunity to have studied Aquinas's work. Noetinger in particular, in his article "The Biography of Richard Rolle," makes a definitive statement that Rolle must have studied for a period at the Sorbonne, for how else, in Noetinger's mind, could anyone have preached a sermon, acted as a spiritual mentor for nuns or experienced a life of such prolific writing? Noetinger asserts that, if one assumes Rolle attended the Sorbonne, "it will easily be seen that it not only makes Rolle's life more intelligible but that it also improves the character of his holiness. . . . It seems to us that Rolle does not lose by the change."[168] The winning or losing of Rolle's character is simply not enough evidence to support an assertion of such magnitude, which neither the *Officium* nor any of Rolle's own writings supports; yet, the idea that this situation would even be possible is one that certainly tugs at the mind of any reader of Rolle's text that so closely aligns with Aquinas's.

[168] Maurice Noetinger, "A Biography of Richard Rolle," *The Month*, 1926, 30.

Allowing for the possibility that Rolle's access to the *Summa Theologica* will always be hypothetical, the question remaining is why are there discrepancies between the original Twelve Degrees of Meekness and those represented in this verse fragment? It is quite clear that Benedict wrote out his degrees for use by monks living under orders in an established monastery. Rolle, though, was not. His audience was an anchoress and possibly the nuns at the convent at Hampole. Rolle thus had to alter certain aspects of the steps to attaining meekness in order to account for the femaleness of his readers. This is highly important because it shows how devotional literature was tailored specifically to meet the needs of its readers. The two alterations are mentioned above; beyond these, Rolle saw no need to make other changes, largely because the steps to meekness for the monks were not largely different than the calls to piety for the anchoress. Just as the *Ancrene Wisse* teaches that a life of humility is the best life to avoid temptation, "by the teaching of the Holy Spirit," so too does Rolle seek to engender this life of humility by providing Kirkeby with outlined steps to lead her to the humble life, drawing on his experiences with the Holy Spirit.[169]

Although Benedict and Aquinas both discuss the merits of the Twelve Degrees of Meekness, Rolle is unique in his application of verse form to the degrees. Rolle's theory of *canor* illuminates a plausible reason behind Rolle's metrical degrees of meekness. Verse form lies strewn throughout the corpus of Rolle's work, thus there is no reason to expect that it would not appear in his devotional materials. Rolle is striving to lead Kirkeby in his footsteps to a mystical union with Christ, a height about which Rolle wrote that, "when I had attained this high degree, I could praise God with joyful song

[169] James Morton, ed. *Ancren Riwle: a Treatise on the Rules and Duties of Monastic Life, edited and translated from a Semi-Saxon Manuscript of the Thirteenth Century* (London: Camden Society, 1852) 177.

indeed."[170] Furthermore, the twelve degrees of meekness are a logical representation of Rolle's own path to Christ. Thus, as he exclaims in *Incendium amoris*, Rolle "will express my joy and gratitude because you have made me like one of those whose superb song springs from a clear conscience. . . . And virtue, beautiful, truly lovely and faultless, flourishes before the face of his Creator. His song suffuses his whole being, and with its glad melody lightens his burden and brightens his labour."[171] This is Rolle's understanding of from where song springs, and its unique position in convening with the Holy Spirit.

In his mystical writing, Rolle expresses his desire to teach others how to achieve the heights of ecstasy he experienced in his communion with Christ during his solitary times, thus it comes as no surprise that he would include steps to a decreasing of one's will under the will of God. For the steps of meekness, which lead to a subverting of the sinner's will to God's will, to be "sung" in verse form represents the very goal of Rolle's work for Kirkeby. The twelfth degree of meekness is the goal of many volative mystics, no less so does Rolle desire it for Kirkeby. Surely the hermit could scarce contain his metrical delight in contemplating the *canor* his own soul sang when united with Christ; writing the steps for Kirkeby in a form that she could sing would also provide for her a small taste of the *canor* towards which she was climbing by following the steps. Rolle commonly comments on his desire to have someone with whom to share his *canor*.

[170] Dan Cohn-Sherbok, Livinia Cohn-Sherbok, *Jewish and Christian Mysticism: an Introduction* (New York: Continuum Publishing Country, 1994) 109.

[171] Ibid.

In *Cantus Amoris I*, Rolle expresses that "I sytt and syng of luf langyng"[172] and continues later "Jhesu, my dere and my drewry, delyte ert [th]ou, to syng."[173] Even in the *Form of Living*, written for Kirkeby, Rolle declares that "[th]ou (Christ) gyf me grace to syng / [th]e sang of [th]I lovyng."[174] These verses are just a few of the more than a hundred that are scattered throughout Rolle's corpus to express his desire to commune with God through song. On an even more practical level, rhyming couplets are far more easy to memorize than prose. Kirkeby, being an established Christian and approved anchoress most likely had already learned many of the aspects of Pecham's Syllabus as a youth, but the Twelve Degrees of Meekness would have been entirely new and the meter allows her to learn them more quickly.

What is most remarkable about the verse in the Rosebery Rolle Manuscript is its absence in the other manuscripts of Rolle's work. Outside of the Rosebery Rolle Manuscript, no other record of the verse can be found. This is odd, as there are multiple copies of Rolle's *Prose Psalter* and many of them even have the Canticles or Magnificat at the end of the Psalter. Yet none of them have any record of the verse form of the Twelve Degrees of Meekness. This could be due to the fact that this is one of the earliest copies of the text that is available and perhaps, due to its obscurity, the verse was not seen as being worth copying into later versions of the text. Whatever the reason for its singular existence in the Rosebery Rolle Manuscript, the verse remnant is significant because its alterations due to Kirkeby's gender illustrates the intense consciousness with

[172] Richard Rolle, *Cantus Amoris I*, line 21; from Allen, H. E., ed. *English Writings of Richard Rolle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963).

[173] Ibid., line 29.

[174] Richard Rolle, *The Form of Living*; from Allen, *English Writings of Richard Rolle*.

which Rolle approached the compilation of a devotion tool for the anchoress, which alludes to the great weight he placed on being her spiritual advisor and friend. It also attests to the importance of *canor* in all aspects of Rolle's writing, for it was used to express his joy of the thought of union with Christ even in a devotional tool, and it points to Rolle's level of education, for he was familiar not only with Benedict's *Holy Rule* but also with the logic of ordering the degrees found in Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*.

### *The Benedictine Rule in Bernard of Clairvaux*

Outside of reading the Benedictine *Rule* directly, Rolle was probably also quite familiar with Bernard of Clairvaux's discussion of the Twelve Steps of Humility and Pride, as not only would he have read it during his time at Oxford but also it was widely read throughout manastic lives. One of Bernard's first texts was *Twelve Steps of Humility and Pride*, a tract dated approximately 1125 that addresses the Twelve Degrees of Meekness found in the Benedictine *Rule*.[175] Barton R. V. Mills, in the introduction to his translation of Bernard's book, asserts that, "St. Bernard does not consider it necessary to recapitulate [the Twelve Degrees of Humility from the Benedictine *Rule*], for the *Rule* was to his readers as familiar and almost as authoritative as the Bible itself."[176] Thus the Twelve Degrees of Meekness are not actually represented in Bernard's *Twelve Steps of Humility and Pride*, though they are discussed in detail.

Rolle's intentions in including the Twelve Degrees of Meekness will never be completely understood, yet it is possible that his reading of Bernard's texts could have influenced his conception of the importance of this guide. Bernard's writings certainly

[175] Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Twelve Degrees of Humility and Pride*, trans. Barton R. V. Mills (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1929).

[176] Ibid., ix.

would have appealed to Rolle's sense of seeking a union with God, for of the Twelve Degrees of Meekness, Bernard writes: "St. Benedict enumerates twelve degrees in this law by which the return to truth is made. . . the recognition of truth begins when the height of humility is reached" and he urges that his readers truly seek to attain this height by following the steps of humility for once at the top of the ladder, the sweet embrace of Christ may be found: "the monk who has passed through all the degrees of humility will ere long arrive [at love]. Truly love is delightful and pleasant food, supplying, as it does, rest to the weary, strength to the weak, and joy to the sorrowful."[177] Thus in seeking to lead Kirkeby to a more fully devout and pious anchoritic life, he would, upon reading Bernard, seek also to include these steps for her guide. Kirkeby would have already been familiar with these steps, however, for Bernard's work was required reading for Cistercian nuns.

### *Other Representations of the Benedictine Rule*

Rolle was not the first to write out aspects of the Benedictine rule for a woman. Since Benedict's life there have been most masculine and feminine versions of his *Holy Rule*. The most notable "feminine" version of the rule is included in the Winteney Version, a manuscript dating from the early thirteenth century. This feminine version is particularly interesting due to its dual-language. The Latin version of the rule is copied on the left, with an Hampshire English translation to the right. This manuscript predates Rolle's by almost a century, and its section of the Twelve Degrees of Meekness follows the order of Benedict's writing, not Aquinas's, yet it is an important document in understanding Rolle's inclusion of the Twelve Degrees of Meekness, for he was not alone

[177] Ibid., 12-13.

in seeking to apply the rule to a female; instead, that had largely been a common use of the rule since its inception.

The Northern Prose version, which is dated at the beginning of the fifteenth century, nearly one hundred years after Rolle's life, also has aspects of a feminine version; for, though the text begins with a masculine text, the portions towards the end switch to a feminine version. This manuscript, part of the Lansdowne collection, also follows the order of Benedict in its Twelve Degrees of Meekness, despite its being post-dated after both Aquinas and Rolle. Yet this Northern Prose version brought out many of the same characteristics that would have appealed to Rolle, for it encourages obedience not only to lead a good life here on earth but also in order to avoid the troubles of hell in the future: "In Þis sentence spekis sain benet of obedience, what it is at saie. . . . [m]eke yu to godis seuise in hali kirke and do yure miht Þar-to, Þat ye may fle Þe fir of helle and cum til heuin-rike."[178] It is this same flight from evil and rush towards heavenly things that was both orthodox in its thought and also a prevalent theme in Rolle's texts. Thus not only in his works but also in his attention and extolation of the women in his life does Rolle orthodox.

In a similar fashion, the Northern Metrical Version urges the particular care of religious people in adhering to these degrees of meekness: "obediens Þus, if it be stabil, / to go and man es acceptabil / not to tary ne gruch o-gayne, / ne to answer with worde in

[178] Timothy Frey et al., eds. *Northern Prose Version of the Benedictine Rule RB80* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1981) 9. Translation by Fry: "In this sentence Saint Benedict speaks of obedience, what it is said [to be]. . . humbly to [do] God's service in holy church and use your might there that you may flee the fire of hell and come to heaven, where it is fair to be."

vayn / ne to be heuy in hert or thoght / for swilk obedience profites noghte."[179] This passage encourages its convent readers to learn obedience to the Benedictine rule without grumbling or complaining. Rolle seemed to not worry for such a reaction from Kirkeby, for his verse presents simply the degrees, very straightforwardly. The Northern Metrical Version is also a striking example of the entire Benedictine Rule having been written in verse form *and* the feminine version, follows the order and length of Benedict, not Aquinas. What is interesting, though, is that outside of Rolle's metrical representation of the Twelve Degrees of Meekness, there are no other known metrical versions from the fourteenth century of the Benedictine Rule. Even more striking is "an analogous appendage, somewhat longer on account of several Latin prayers being given in full, is found after the other Northern Versions. . . . [with] the heading *The Method of Making a Nunn*."[180] This is noteworthy due to its purpose, for Rolle was not unique in writing a manual for leading a life of feminine devotion, although he remained unique in his reliance upon Aquinas's ordering and summary.

### *Influences of the Verse*

For the verse fragment to be new to modern scholarship is not to say that it is entirely new. The Rosebery Rolle manuscript resided at a convent for many years and it is probable that others would have had access to the text over the years. The manuscripts of the *Pore Caitif* are such texts, which show an influence not only by Rolle but also, perhaps, by his verse of the Tweleve Degrees of Meekness. Although no direct link may

[179] Spreckelmeyer, "Reclaiming," 57. Translation from Spreckelmeyer: "Obedience then, if it be strong, / is acceptable to God and man. / Not to dealy or repeatedly grumble / nor to answer with words in vain / Nor to be resistant in heart or thought. / For such obedience profits nothing."

[180] Ernst A. Kock, ed., *Three Middle-English Versions of the Rule of St. Benet and Two Contemporary Rituals for the Ordination of Nuns* (London: Early English Text Society, 1902) xi.

be proved between Rolle and the author of the *Pore Caitif*, due to that author's disregard for references to the authors whose texts he uses, it is clear that Rolle had been heavily read by the *Pore Caitif*'s author.

Teresa Brady has written numerous articles discussing the links between Richard Rolle's works and the texts of the *Pore Caitif*. In "Rolle and the Pattern of Tracts in 'The Pore Caitif,'" Brady discusses the influence of *Emendatio vitae*, *The Form of Living*, and *The Commentary on the Canticles* in the *Pore Caitif*. Specifically, Brady asserts that "Passages from Rolle's *Form of Living* were used in *PC*, 'Desiir of Ihesu,' 'Of Mekenes,' and 'Of Actif Liif and Comtemplatif Liif.'"[181] While *Pore Caitif*'s section "of verri meknes" may have been adopted from *Form of Living*, with the knowledge that this verse exists extolling the virtues and degrees of meekness, a connection could also be made between Rolle's *Prose Psalter* and *Pore Caitif*. The text in *Pore Caitif* states: "to ony degree of verri loue of ihesu may no soule / ateyne either come to but if he be verily meke for a proud soule sekith to haue his owne wil and so schal he neuere come to ony degree of goddis loue meekness is the modir of crist."[182] This speaks of meekness in a general form, outside of verse, so a direct link may not be found; yet it must be remarked upon that Rolle's discussion of meekness is far more in depth in his verse representation of the Twelve Degrees of Meekness than in his mention of meekness in *Form of Living*. Thus it is quite possible that *Pore Caitif*'s author was familiar with Rolle's verse of the Twelve Degrees of Meekness.

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[181] M. Teresa Brady, "Rolle and the Pattern of Tracts in 'The Pore Caitif,'" from *Traditio*, Vol. 39 (1983) 456.

[182] Oliver S. Pickering, Veronica M. O'Mara, *Index of Middle English Prose: Handlist XIII: Manuscripts in Lambeth Palace Library* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999) 40.

Furthermore, although it was Benedict, not Rolle, who used the Twelve Degrees of Meekness as ladder imagery, *Pore Caitif* echoes this image of climbing to the heights of virtue. Indeed it even echoes the affective mysticism of Rolle. The devotional material of *Pore Caitif* was created to "teche simple men and wymmen of good will that rigt weie to heuene," by following a "ladder of dyuerse rongis. . . fro vertu into vertu."[183] Thus the *Pore Caitif* seeks to fulfill the same purpose of the Rosebery Rolle Manuscript. Both are meant to be tools for lay devotion, a collection of those things that would lead the soul to the heights of union with the being of God. For *Pore Caitif*, the audience was broad and undefined, a mix of genders. For Rolle's *Prose Psalter*, however, the audience was a specific woman to whom the author felt special responsibility as a spiritual mentor.

[183] Brady, *'Pore Caitif'*, 1:1-2:9.

# CHAPTER SIX

## Conclusion: Questions to Ponder

The Rosebery Rolle manuscript provides an unique look at both Rolle's orthodoxy and his interaction with women. Rolle was a mystic but also a mentor, one who sought to share his mystical experiences with another by working as Kirkeby's spiritual guide. Just as he lived an eremitic life, he sought to impart to Kirkeby the tools needed to live as an anchoress. Rolle wrote not for the ecclesiastical hierarchy or the political elite, "sed rudibus et indoctis," for those who sought to lead a pious life and could thus faithfully use the devotional tools that Rolle wrote. By examining the verse passage at the end of the Rosebery Rolle manuscript, historians glimpse the compilation of orthodox materials for a female's private usage.

The first part of this thesis brought this argument out in two chapters. "Orthodox Layman or Lollard Forerunner" examined the broad historical background into which Rolle was born, providing context about the world in which Rolle lived and wrote. By understanding England's political situation, the historian grasps the shifting nature of literacy in which Rolle was able to write, as well as the encouragement offered by the ecclesiastical hierarchy in Pecham's Constitutions to produce vernacular texts. Rolle's compilation of these manuscripts fell naturally into a time when more and more lay people were learning to read and thus desired access to religious materials, an access that for the majority of the fourteenth century, the church certainly encouraged.

This idea continued in the same chapter through an examination of the secondary literature discussing the increase in vernacular texts in England during the fourteenth

century. While historians have traced a rise in vernacular texts during this period, they disagree about the catalyst behind the increased literacy. "Orthodox Layman or Lollard Forerunner?" argued that the consensus remains with those scholar that view the increased literacy levels as stimulating the growth of vernacular religious texts, most of which were orthodox. They were written to encourage a more pious religious life, as called for in Pecham's Syllabus; they were not written to promote heresy. Rolle's writings fit well into this group of medieval authors who promoted orthodoxy through their texts, for he wrote specifically to encourage a closer walk with God and not to instill a desire for a separation from church authority. Additionally, Rolle's work was written for a specific audience, not for broad distribution, so it would be difficult to argue that his ideas sought to encourage any movement of ideas on a broad scale. This first chapter concluded by addressing a few historians who do identify heresy with the rise in literacy, asserting that Rolle and his work did not fit with their arguments.

In order to continue the idea that Rolle's work was not an early fourteenth century forerunner to the Lollard heresy that swept England in the fifteenth century, the second chapter focused on Rolle's biographical details. "Woman-Centric Eremitic" asserted that the hermit led an unconventional life in many ways, but his abnormalities were not unorthodox. Instead, the well-educated eremitic was able to earn the patronage of a wealthy landowner and, later, live as a hermit but respected member of the society around Hampole. An examination of the Hermit of Hampole's orthodox life also brought to light the premise of the second argument in this thesis: Rolle's interaction with women.

The women in Rolle's life highly influenced his work, especially his decision to create vernacular texts. "Woman-Centric Eremetic" brought this out, examining Rolle's

relationship with Margaret Kirkeby in numerous lights. Rolle acted as a spiritual guide for the anchoress, creating written guides for a life of focus on Christ and the supplemental devotional tools, like the Rosebery Rolle manuscript. Thus this chapter argued both that Rolle's life was orthodox, as was his relationship with Kirkeby, and that women played a quite central role in that life. The chapter also provided a brief look at a few similar spiritual mentor-mentee relationships in the centuries before and after Rolle's life.

This theme of the role and importance of women in Rolle's work continues as the more emphasized thesis in the second part of this thesis. The final chapters in the body argue that the Rosebery Rolle manuscript was written specifically for Kirkeby and that this attention to the females in his life caused him to create devotional tools with a purpose to instill in his readers a more ardent passion for the religious life. In his dedication to *Form of Living*, Rolle encourages Kirkeby to lead a devout life in order that she, "ledynge and lernynge þe how þou shalt þynke, how þou shalt prey, what þou shalt worche, so þat in a few yers þou shalt haue more delite to be by þyn on and spek to þi loue [and] þi spouse Ihesu, þan if þou were lady of a thousand worldes."[184] His vernacular text, *Form of Living*, sought to provide an opportunity for her passion for the religious life to grow and it is clear that he is writing specifically to a woman, not to a broad audience. "Mystic and Magister" argues firstly that a study of the codicology of Rolle's texts and their widespread transmission, usually through private collections, reveals the orthodox acceptance of these texts for if they were not church-approved they would not have been so widely transcribed. Secondly, this third chapter argues that

[184] Richard Rolle, *The Form of Living*, I.125-126 & 128-130; in S. J. Ogilvie-Thomson, *Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse edited from MS Longleat 29 and related manuscripts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) 6.

Rolle's works, and their themes of *canor*, *fervor* and *dulcor* stay well within the realm of orthodoxy. Furthermore, it is these experiences that Rolle desires for Kirkeby to have, thus he wrote in vernacular for her comprehension, in order to be her spiritual guide.

Just as part one moved from broad to narrow, so too did the second section. Whereas chapter three argued using the broad corpus of Rolle's work, the final chapter in the body pushed forward both theses using the verse passage found at the end of the Rosebery Rolle manuscript as a specific example. The verse passage at the end, simply because it is an excerpt from the Benedictine Rule, which had been orthodox for centuries, shows Rolle's desire to promote the appropriate devotion. This excerpt from the rule had been widely read, and she may have already been familiar with the Twelve Degrees, as St. Bernard of Clairvaux believed his readers to be. Yet Rolle wrote the verse out for Kirkeby in verse form, which was unusual but not unique, most likely to better express the *canor* of the soul and to allow her to remember these steps of meekness all the better. Additionally, the poem follows the ordering of Thomas Aquinas's representation of the rule, not that found in Benedict's *Rule*.

"The Rosebery Rolle" continued with more details about this fragment, looking at each line in turn. Despite this, the verse fragment deserves further study. As discussed in "Mystic and Magister," a number of Rolle's *Prose Psalters* exist and many of them also include the *Canticles* and the *Magnificat*. Yet none of these manuscripts, indeed none of the folios that include any of Rolle's work, includes the verse fragment of the Twelve Degrees of Meekness. The inclusion of these steps is not outside normalcy, for a number of devotional tools from this collected together different religious texts to improve a

pious life. Yet Rolle does not include other aspects of the Benedictine Rule, which makes his selection of the Twelve Degrees of Meekness all the more purposeful.

The fact that there are so few representations of the Benedictine Rule in verse sets Rolle's fragment apart from other representations of the rule. Even the Northern Metrical Version of the Benedictine Rule, discussed in the fourth chapter, presents the entirety of St. Benedict's *Rule* in the same order and with the same attention to detail that may be found in St. Benedict's version. The Rosebery Rolle manuscript, however, contains a fragment that is clearly influenced by Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*. The ordering and wording of Rolle's Twelve Degrees of Meekness follows that of Aquinas, which raises an interesting question for future study. While there were certainly opportunities for Rolle to have either studied under one of Aquinas's students or possibly read his manuscripts while at Oxford, the link between the two religious writers could certainly afford further study.

Altogether, though, the verse fragment fits nicely with the body of Rolle's text, as it is both orthodox and written for a woman. The verse is unique in its representation of a succinct form of the Twelve Degrees of Meekness that follows the reverse order from that laid out in the Benedictine Rule. Additionally, an examination of this verse fragment in the context of the *Prose Psalter* shows a devotional tool that is packed with materials to be used in the practice of lay devotion. Viewed in the corpus of Rolle's work, the Rosebery Rolle manuscript is a useful text for leading a pious life, one driven by a desire for union with the godhead. Rolle recognized and encouraged this desire in Kirkeby and, having already experienced the *dulcor*, *canor* and *fervor*, of union himself he wrote guides for his pupil and compiled these tools for her to reach similar heights of love.

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