

Chapter 9

Encoding and Decoding: Metaphorical Discourse of Love in Richard Rolle's Commentary on the First Verses of the Song of Songs¹

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In *Ego Dormio*, a Middle English epistle written for the spiritual direction of a nun of Yedingham, the first of the great Middle English mystics Richard Rolle (ob. 1349) writes in his prologue:

Ego dormio et cor meum vigilat. The þat lust loue, hold þyn ere and hyre of loue. In þe songe of loue I fynd hit written þat I haue set at þe begennyng of my writyng: 'I slepe and my hert waketh.' Mich loue he sheweth þat neuer is wery to loue, bot euer, standyng, sittinge, goyng, or any oþer dede doyng, is euer his loue þynkyng, and oft sithe þerof dremyng. Forþi þat I loue þe, I wowe þe, þat I myght haue þe as I wold, nat to me, bot to my Lord. I wil becum a messenger to bryng þe to his bed þat hath mad þe and boght þe, Crist, þe kynges son of heuyn, for he wil wed þe if thou wil loue hym.²

Not only the Song of Songs' verse (Cant. 5:2) which begins the first line of the epistle and gives the work its name, but the direct reference to the Song of Songs ('þe songe of loue') in the third sentence, as well as other borrowings elsewhere in the epistle, all testify to the importance of this Biblical book in the making of the epistle.³ Thus, the role of 'messenger' which Rolle ascribes to himself in the above quotation is the result and product of his knowledge and practice of the commentary tradition that

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had grown up around the Song of Songs, as well as his experiential knowledge of the relationship between the soul and God.⁴ In fact, the 'messenger' embodies the whole of the definition which Isidore of Seville had given to the word *interpres* in his *Etymologiae*:

Interpres, quod inter partes medius sit duarum linguarum, dum transferet. Sed et qui Deum [quem] interpretatur et hominum quibus divina indicat mysteria, interpres vocatur [quia inter eam quam transferet].

[Interpreter: because one is between the parts, midway between two languages, when one translates. But he is also called an interpreter who is placed between God, whom he interprets, and men, to whom he reveals the divine mysteries, because that which he carries over is between.]⁵

The evidence gathered here, as well as the results conveyed on a larger scale by the work of Nicholas Watson on the chronology of Rolle's writings, indicate that the access to *Latinitas* and the practice of vernacular translation were momentous in the shaping of the role of spiritual director which Rolle took on in the last stages of his life.⁶ Many people are familiar with Rolle as translator in his last works—the idea of 'messenger', and the fact that he actually includes translated material in them.⁷ The process by which Rolle came to this understanding of his own function is perhaps less well known, notwithstanding Watson's recent study, and I should like to show how Rolle's idea of translation is working very differently in an earlier work, commonly called *Super Canticum Canticorum*.⁸ My concern in this paper is with the textual practices of Rolle as a medieval *interpres*, and especially as a commentator of the Song of Songs.

Rolle's commentary deals only with the first two-and-a-half verses of the Song of Songs.⁹ The most accurate title given to the commentary is that copied by the scribe of MS. Trinity College, Dublin, 153: *Incipit Expositio Super Primum Versiculum Canticum Canticorum Secundum Ricardum Heremitam* (hereafter *Super Cant.*).¹⁰ In view of the length of the existing commentary, it is quite clear that Rolle never intended to write a commentary on the whole of the Song of Songs.¹¹ Nevertheless, *Super Cant.* is arguably a finished piece, in which the triad of *calor*, *dulcor* and *canor*, characteristic of Rolle's mysticism, appears prominently. It could be argued that Rolle uses the commentary genre as a flashy wrapping to give greater credit to his mystical experience. On the other hand, and more probably, literary competence, necessary for the creation of the affective and metaphorical discourse which takes place as Rolle peruses the verses of the Song of Songs, is part and parcel of his mysticism.

The interest shown in the spiritual experience, and the occurrences of the terms *experientia* and *experire*, increase in proportion as medieval commentators devote their writing—as most of them do—to the tropological sense of Scripture.¹² With Rolle, the spiritual experience is translated into the metaphorical language. The interpreter of Scripture becomes translator of his spiritual experience, appropriating to himself the imagery, displacing the textual practices of the commentary and accommodating them to his effusive prose. Rolle uses the verbal signs of the Song of Songs to encode the mystical experience.

In this respect we may observe an instructive contrast with Rolle's vernacular translation of and gloss on the *Psalter*.¹³ Manifestly dependent on the Latin original, which precedes both translation and gloss, the translation is designed to function as textual facilitator to allow the audience access to *Latinitas*.¹⁴ This is Rolle's justification for the use of simple English words and for his word-for-word translation:

In this werke .i. seke na straunge ynglis, bot lyghtest and comonest. and swilk that is mast lyke til the latyn. swa that thai that knawes noght latyn. by the ynglis may com til mony latyn wordis. In the translacioun .i. folow the lettere als mykyll as .i. may. And thare .i. fynd na propire ynglis .i. folow the wit of the worde, swa that thai that sall red it thaim there noght dred errynge.¹⁵

In *Super Cant.* and other texts equally replete with the imagery of the Song of Songs, by contrast, Rolle moves away from the role of textual interpreter and liberates himself from the notion of service to an authoritative text.¹⁶ If in the *Psalter* Rolle indicates in the prologue that 'In expounynge .i. fologh haly doctours',¹⁷ in this work he uses the textual strategies of the commentary genre to constitute himself as *auctor*. The recuperation, and replacement, of the *auctoritas* by a text which claims to be authoritative, allows Rolle to build up a textual tissue ideal for the encoding of his spiritual experience. Rolle's concern has moved away from the one exposed in his prologue to his *English Psalter*: the notion of service of the *interpretes* towards the *auctoritas* has disappeared.¹⁸ The *interpretes*, transmuted into an *auctor*, uses *Latinitas* as a means of consolidating his standing among the fathers of the church.¹⁹

Most commentators of the Song of Songs reflect in their prologues on the difficulty of unveiling the mystery hidden in this book. St Bernard of Clairvaux refers to individual experience as the only means of understanding the message of the text.²⁰ William of St Thierry addresses the holy spirit and asks to be filled with love in order to take part in the conversation of the bride and the bridegroom.²¹ Their approach is cautious and reflects the concerns of the *interpretes* before divine *auctoritas*. Rolle instead does without a prologue and embraces the Song affectively

to project himself as the bride.²² The effect of such a personal apprehension implies a radical transformation of the contextual setting of the Song. Rolle may be the most extreme in the ways the authorial text is subject to displacement, but he follows a long tradition which set some of its verses in a variety of contexts, such as mariological commentaries or various liturgical offices.²³ Commentators of this particular book are unable to accept the literal meaning in the Biblical context. The overt sensuality of the vocabulary of love challenges any simple view on the divine origins of this Biblical book. William of St Thierry believes that God placed it with the other books in a condescending gesture to man's frailty, as a compound of both the material and the spiritual. Richard of St Victor regards the silliness of the literal sense as a means for the contemplative to look beyond the literal horizon.²⁴ Commentators resort themselves to explanation and interpretation to justify the position of the Song in the Bible. The necessity for a constant reappraisal of its place within the Bible provides clear evidence of the difficulty of making sense of the vocabulary of love within the Biblical context. A literal understanding, that is, is not appropriate within this special context. The task of the commentators is to create a new context for the text which allows for new conditions of reading.²⁵

The depiction of *caritas* is an important element of those new conditions.²⁶ *De IV Gradibus Violentae Charitatis* (hereafter *De IV Grad.*) of Richard of St Victor offers a detailed and systematic study of this virtue. Some of the major ideas and images of this important work are echoed in *Super Cant.* and *Melos Amoris*.²⁷ The metaphor of love as fire, with its strong physical basis,²⁸ as well as the degrees of love, called *insuperabilis*, *inseparabilis*, *singularis* and *insatiabilis*—with the omission in Rolle of the final degree, are without doubt borrowed from the Victorine treatise.²⁹ Moreover, Richard of St Victor defines further his four degrees as first, the love of the heart, second, the love of the whole heart, third, the love of the soul, and fourth, the love of all the virtues.³⁰ For each degree, the articulation of the relationship of the individual with God is couched in a distinct affective mould:

Forte adhuc David in primo gradu erat, sed jam de secundo presumebat quando psallens dicebat: *Confitebor tibi, Domine, in toto corde meo*. Qui in secundo gradu est fiducialiter psallere potest: *In toto corde meo exquisivi te*. Qui tertium gradum obtinet profecto ejusmodi jam dicere valet: *Concupivit anima mea, Domine, desiderare justificationes tuas in omni tempore*. Qui quartum gradum ascendit, et Deum ex tota virtute diligit, dicere potest profecto: *Non timebo quid faciat michi homo, eo quod sit paratum cor ejus sperare in Domino; confirmatum est cor ejus, non commovebitur in eternum, donec despiciat inimicos suos*.³¹

[Maybe David was still in this first degree, while ruminating about the second, when he was saying in his psalm: *I will praise thee, the Lord, with my whole heart*. The one who is at the second degree can sing confidently: *With my whole heart have I sought you*. The one who obtains the third can already say: *My soul has desired with longing your ordinances at all times*. The one who has ascended to the fourth degree and who loves God with all his strength can say in all security: *I will not fear what man can do unto me, because his heart is disposed to trust in the Lord. His heart is strengthened, he shall not be moved until he looks down upon his enemies*.]

Richard of St Victor also qualifies the degrees of charity according to the model of natural love. The first degree celebrates the betrothal, the second the wedding, the third the consummation of the marriage, and the fourth the childbirth.³² In many ways, *Super Cant.* stands as the expression by Rolle of the third degree described by Richard of St Victor.³³ The *jubilatio* theme, also an important feature of *De IV Gradibus*, reaches in *Super Cant.* a climax in the *Encomium Nominis Jesu*, which makes the fourth section of the commentary.³⁴ The *jubilatio* theme, the *incendium amoris*, the *Quia amore langueo*, the liquefaction image, and, above all, the notion of *caritas*, all present in *De IV Gradibus*, are important elements of Rolle's mysticism, assimilated into his own mystical system through reflection and meditation.³⁵ The Victorine presentation of the contemplative life by means of the fusion of the carnal and spiritual senses had an immediate appeal to Rolle.³⁶

The conflation of those traditions with Rolle's more idiosyncratic characteristics creates a context suitable for the articulation of more daring utterances. Rolle needs to secure the meaning of the terms of love by stressing their metaphorical potential. The Biblical narrative of the wise and the foolish virgins (Math. 25:1-13) allows him to define the spiritual lover against a background which depicts the behaviour and attire of the carnal lover:

Amodo igitur O virgines celo suspicite; ibi sponsum querite; cum amatoribus mundi nolite vos inquinare. Fatuas enim virgines Christus se non cogniturum asserit, quas mundialis amore vanitatis ab illo nunc expellit. Ille utique iam pompose muliercule in tortis crinibus, cornibus elatis incedentes, solo amore carnali decorari appetunt. Illam solam viam que Christo ducit odiunt et abhorrent, quia autem formam et substantiam a deo datam frustra et nequiter non curant effundere.³⁷

[Henceforth accordingly look up to heaven, o virgins; there seek the bridegroom; don't corrupt yourselves with the lovers of the world. Indeed Christ declares he will not recognize the foolish virgins, whom he expels for their love of wordly vanity. In any case at present those pompous little women with their curled hair, going (about) with

elevated horns, strive to be adorned only for carnal love. They hate and abhor this only way which leads to Christ, because they don't care that they are pouring out the form and substance given by God in deception and worthlessly.]

The importance of the Song of Songs is crucial to his habilitation as a psychologically confident hermit. Moreover, his mysticism, both in its formulation and perception, relies heavily on the linguistic implications of the metaphorical discourse of love.³⁸ The transfer of the terms of love into a new semantic field belongs to the process of spiritual purgation.

The vehemence with which Rolle opposes two sets of meaning for the whole range of the vocabulary of love supports the view that Rolle charges his metaphorical utterances with more than an ornamental or affective value. As with Hildegard of Bingen, and most of the mystics, the metaphorical meaning of Rolle's lexical terms of love conveys the contemplative experience.³⁹ As a concept taken from the domain of the *affectiones*, love, as *eros* or as *caritas*, has a basis in bodily experience.⁴⁰ The process of interiorization of the external language of love marks out Rolle's most mystical pages. The interiorized language of love comes out as metaphorical discourse. In the course of the process, Rolle operates the transfer of meaning from the semantic field of carnal love to that of the conceptual domain of God by attempting to assign the latter with a series of defining terms. The terms of love lead to the understanding of some of God's attributes as the eternal light, *caritas*, the celestial melody, *dulcor*, the fire and its heat. In one of his long condemnations of the carnal lovers, Rolle argues that it is not possible to play with the world and still rejoice with Christ in the future life. In his crude language, he asserts: 'Venter saturatus venerem potius quam Christum amplexatur' [A full stomach embraces more easily Venus than Christ].⁴¹ The terms of love in Rolle's mind retain the double meaning expressed by metaphorical discourse. Because of his propensity for feminine beauty and his desire for concupiscence, Rolle refrains from exploring too daringly the cognitive possibilities of metaphorical discourse in a loose context.⁴² As the terms of love convey simultaneously two meanings, the commentators of the Song have to build up a context for the vocabulary of love to limit their literal meaning. Some of Rolle's passages reflect his psychological difficulties in using the material taken from the semantic field of love to express his contemplative experience. The frantic tension prompted by the encounter or visualization of enticing women forces Rolle to effect a drastic transfer of the sexual desire, which serves instead to establish the loving relationship of the soul with God. In the spiritual state which he claims to have reached, Rolle maintains: 'eciam inter feminas possumus vivere et delectacionem femineam in animo nullam sentire' [we are indeed

able to live among women and feel no delight of women in the soul].⁴³ In theory, the sexual desire has lost power to seduce and invade the soul by means of the imagination. The use of women as a gauge to measure spiritual progress is a remarkable feature of Rolle's idiosyncratic mysticism. This sexual inhibition could account for the use by Rolle of his three personal concepts of *calor*, *canor*, and *dulcor*, whose literal contexts, although not necessarily devoid of possible links with the semantic field of love, do not relate to it strictly.⁴⁴ But the metaphorical language needs its literal referent to convey meaning. By trying to block it, Rolle also puts at stake the metaphorical meaning, which is always in need of its original primary sense in order to exist. *Super Cant.* is mostly concerned with the use of textual commentary practices to fix the metaphorical meaning of the terms of love as a translation and gloss of a mystical experience. The Song of Songs as such is not Rolle's principal concern. His concern indeed consists in using the imagery of the Song to encode his own relationship with God.⁴⁵

The oddity in delineating the essence of God, and the relationship of the soul to Him, is caused by the impossibility of the mystic's expressing it in the discursive mode.⁴⁶ For that reason, Rolle resorts to, and counts on, both traditional vehicles and made-up terms as cognitive tools expressing the conceptual reality of the mystical experience, without saturating his commentary with a list of symbols. Instead, Rolle's preference for metaphorical meaning implies the resurgence and the interplay of two distinct components: on the one hand that of the world of love and courtship, and on the other that of the field of contemplation. The notion of transference of meaning from one component to another does not imply the rejection of the meaning given in the first semantic field. This fact is supported by the mystical texts and the experience which they provide, as well as by the nature of metaphorical meaning itself. Moreover, the cognitive force of metaphorical meaning depends largely on the virtuosity with which the writer organizes his utterances according to the relations of affinities and contrasts which the terms bear with one another.⁴⁷ *Super Cant.* demonstrates the difficulties with which Rolle, like most commentators, maintains those relations. If the Song of Songs provides most of its vocabulary of love to define the contemplative experience, it does not however unfold itself according to the natural progression of a human love relationship. Furthermore, the displacement of the text in the commentary form makes it vulnerable to the intentions of its interpreters. As the human *auctor* becomes more inquisitive before the divinely inspired texts, he acquires the techniques to set them in his own chosen context, at his own pace.⁴⁸ Commentators are startled, for instance, by the first line of the Song: *Osculetur me osculo oris sui*. Bernard of Clairvaux develops a theory of contemplative progression

from this first verse. The kissing of Christ's feet, hands and face symbolize the different stages of the contemplative life, from a love of Christ in his humanity to the love of his Godhead. From a lexical term borrowed from the semantic field of love, Bernard creates a new set of functions for the kiss, unrelated to the originating field.⁴⁹ This is the manner by which Bernard slackens the pace of his commentary, in order to affix a theory of contemplation upon it. The interpretation of Bernard in this case is symbolic. Rolle instead maintains the double meaning of the term of love, and clearly interprets the gesture of kissing with regard to both the semantic field of love and the conceptual domain of God. In relation to other love attitudes, the kiss denotes an advanced stage of the love relationship. It bears the same position with respect to the contemplative experience, as no other term can possibly articulate it in as explicit a manner. Rolle evaluates the position of the utterer of the first half verse with respect to the contemplative life:

Nimirum immundicie amatores in hiis verbis nequaquam placuerunt Christum. Rapitur autem divine contemplacionis dulcedine, ardorem incircumscripti luminis presentit veraciter, qui in hiis verbis, *Osculetur me osculo oris sui* deum recte glorificat.⁵⁰

[Surely the lovers of filth in those words by no means have pleased Christ. On the other hand she is ravished by the sweetness of divine contemplation, truly she feels beforehand the flame of the infinite light, who in those words, 'That he may kiss me with the kiss of his mouth', glorifies God properly.]

Rolle's view of carnal love is expressed here in strikingly negative terms. Those performing and enjoying fornication and impurity (*amatores immundicie*) will certainly not be able to understand and learn inwardly from the metaphorical meaning of those terms. The ways by which Rolle ponders on the language of love reflect an important aspect of his psychology which is responsible for the effective way in which his spiritual experience is encoded at the metaphorical level. As Rita Copeland has pointed out, the use of metaphorical terms in Rolle's writing is not arbitrary and conventional, but is the essence of the experience itself.⁵¹

Super Cant. is structured around a series of discussions on the sinful nature of carnal love, so as to establish a contrast with the most elevating passages using the same vocabulary of love. This textual practice protects the text from intrusion by readers whose assumptions and expectations would not be those of a lover of God. Unlike the monastic and scholastic commentaries which were aimed at a certain milieu, the circulation of Rolle's work was not circumscribed by any social or religious barriers. Rolle alludes only once to possible audiences for *Super Cant.*: thus he

distinguishes a primary audience made up of hermits like himself, and a secondary audience of laymen. This important allusion is set right after a passage dealing with the meaning of the breasts in comparison with the kiss. Rolle has come to make this comparison by joining the verse *Osculetur me osculo oris sui* to the *Quia meliora sunt ubera tua vino fragrantia unguentis optimis*:

Set et ideo languet ad osculum *quia meliora sunt ubera tua vino*. Nam si ubera Christi meliora vino non intelligeret, profecto querere osculum non auderet. Quia nisi in divinis doctrinis delectari satagimus proculdubio ad suavitatem eterne dulcedinis veraciter non suspiramus. Hoc manifestum est quandoquidem et laicus, quam cito divino amore se tactum senserit, ad audiendum et loquendum de deo, secularibus curis postpositis, vehementer inardescit. Quanto etiam magis nos qui etiam, iuvante deo, scripturas sacras intelligere possumus ad legendum et audiendum verbum dei ac aliis scribendis et docendis nos accingere debemus.⁵²

[Yet and on that account she languishes for the kiss 'because your breasts are better than wine'. For if she did not understand that the breasts of Christ were better than wine, certainly she would not dare ask for a kiss. Because if we are not busy to be pleased in divine instructions, without doubt we do not truly long for the pleasantness of the eternal sweetness. This is plain seeing that even the layman, as soon as he has experienced himself touched by divine love, impetuously burns to hear and to talk about God, neglecting secular concerns. Hence much more we who, with the help of God, can understand sacred scriptures, we must gird ourselves to read and hear the word of God and for other things which are to be written and taught.]

Being a lover of God implies an understanding and knowledge of the religious background, as well as the ability to trace the different layers of discourse. Rolle assumes that lovers of God will read his text with a set of inbuilt assumptions helping them to understand the terms of love spiritually.⁵³ Yet at some point Rolle reminds his audience to interpret what they read in the spiritual light:

Hic igitur ab hac protectione dei reprobis excluditur qui instabilis in prosperis cadens in adversis a demone deportatur. Sicut enim beata sunt ubera que sancti suxerunt, sic maledicta sunt ubera que peccatores nutrierunt. Set volo ut hic nichil carnale intelligas, set totum spirituale. Cum diabolus inventor sit primus et pater peccati, mali cum peccant quasi ab eo nati sunt. Illos eius ubera nutriunt, dum ad gulam et luxuriam et ad cetera vicia letantes vadunt.⁵⁴

[Then the reprobate is excluded from this godly protection, who, unstable in prosperity, falling in mischief, is carried away by the demon. So indeed blessed are the breasts which the saints sucked, but accursed are the breasts which nourished the sinners. But I want you to understand nothing here carnally, but everything spiritually. As the devil is first the inventor and the father of sin, so the evil ones are as if they were born from him when they sin. His breasts nourish them, while rejoicing they rush towards gluttony, lust and other vices.]

In *Super Cant.*, the authorial voice becomes the mouthpiece for the soul, whereas previous commentators took an objective standpoint in their description of the bride and the bridegroom according to an exposition of the four senses of Scripture.⁵⁵ If Richard of St Victor shares a strong interest in the metaphorical meaning of the terms of love, he refrains nevertheless from narrating from the bride's point of view. Rolle however strongly identifies with it in his narration: the Song thus becomes expressive of his effusive voice.⁵⁶ No other commentator appropriates the Song of Songs in such a drastic way. While being a pure expression of the mystical state, this kind of commentary defies the genre in which the text is couched: the narrative voice loses the flexibility which would allow it to pass from an interpretation based on one of the four senses to another sense, as is the practice in traditional commentaries. The mystical commentary of Rolle bears witness to a strong tradition, necessary to its making, but one which filters through to the individual declamations of the narrative voice.

Thus, *Super Cant.* is replete with a substantial number of terms from the semantic field of love which have been interpreted metaphorically numerous times. Yet the new context in which they are set demands a re-interpretation of their metaphorical meaning. In fact, each mystical text demands to be decoded by the reader, regardless of the tradition from which it emerged. As the reader apprehends the text, he will have to solve the incongruities of the metaphorical meaning individually, according to his spiritual needs. *Ruminatio*⁵⁷ on the Bible and other mystical texts allows readers to measure their spiritual progress by checking the gap which separates the literal meaning of the lexical terms from their understanding of the term's metaphorical meaning. Rolle in fact actualizes this process textually, when he opposes the two senses of the vocabulary of love. Whether this process is didactically oriented is unclear, but it inevitably leads readers to compare their own understanding with that of the narrative voice, which becomes a matrix against which a measurement and a comparison are possible. Seductive as it may be, the process implies an acceptance of a form of contemplative experience which is circumscribed by the assumptions of the narrative voice. Nevertheless, if the opposition of the different meanings of the vocabulary of love throws

light on the different layers of interpretation of the lexical terms, it does not explicate the nature of the higher meaning. Metaphors force the audience to rethink accepted concepts, to extend them, or to invent new conceptualizations.

The ways by which the narrative voice moves from the effusive tone inspired by the anagogical sense to an interpretation of carnal love support the argument for a metaphorical interpretation of the conventional terms of love. Conceptually, the domain of God has no set pattern, is discursively non-expressible, visually non-describable. It therefore needs metaphorical utterances to have existence and meaning. Thus the function of metaphorical language is far from being only ornamental. Metaphors are essential components of the expressive capacity of language, which is not devoid of cognitive import. Rolle has no interest in constructing a mystical theology. Unlike Bernard, who systematizes through the use of symbols, Rolle sticks closely to the metaphorical interpretation. The ways by which both treat the term of the kiss for the contemplative life are significant. Bernard elaborates an entire system around this term, whereas Rolle uses the terms *osculum* and *osculare* in their different forms thirty-nine times in *Super Cant*. He combines the kiss metaphor with other terms to enhance its expressive capacity, or alters its meaning by setting it in new contexts. Thus Rolle's concern with the vocabulary of love is poetical, expressive and cognitive, as he tries to improve its strategic force within the contemplative field by widening the meaning of its metaphorical sense. The more often a term, like *osculum* for instance, is combined with words from other semantic fields, the greater the informational content conveyed by the metaphorical utterance will become. In his quest for a pure language that is a channel through which communication and fusion between the soul and God may be achieved perfectly, Rolle posits his high style, rich in metaphors and metonymies, as a potential solution. His incessant warnings against a carnal understanding of the terms of love may be accounted for, not only as the result of a personal sexual inhibition, but also as the fear of seeing his pure language mistranslated.⁵⁸ The most difficult task for Rolle consists in his reconciling of two original texts: on one hand, the spiritual text, not within ordinary human reach, sacred and untouchable, and on the other hand, the carnal and erotic vocabulary, available to all and highly effective in awakening an emotional response.

Metaphors of love are alive as long as they convey simultaneously the two contents; one originating from the field of courtship and carnal love, and the other, the field of mystical love, which is organized with reference to the originating field. Without the metaphorical utterance, Rolle's mystical experiences could not be conveyed. The literary theories and textual practices which emerged from the commentaries of the Song of

Songs are echoed in the sophisticated use of the metaphorical discourse of love by Rolle.⁵⁹ That discourse rests on a tissue of Biblical analogies which were woven already in the early days of the commentary tradition. The vocabulary of love translates best the mystical phenomena, and the relations the terms of love bear with one another in the originating field serve to guide the relations which they continue to share with one another in the new field. Ideally speaking, the contemplative experience can be scanned in an epistemic way by defining the relations each term bears with the other. The terms of love delineate most precisely the mystical experience. Their high-powered emotional potential can affect the audience when the terms are used in a strategically effective way. The position of the terms of love in their new context is essential to the development of the new affective strategies of the text.⁶⁰ Terms like *osculum* and *amplexio* each convey a certain aspect of physical love which, transposed to a mystical context, express also a notion of the contemplative experience. However, those two terms keep the same relation with one another. As the embrace and the kiss are often used jointly in the description of a love scene, so is it when they are transferred to the field of contemplation. Rolle uses the terms together three times, first at the beginning of his exposition:

Amplectitur igitur sponsas suas, que omnes una sunt sponsa, et mellifluo amoris osculo omnes et singulas saciat, eternisque amplexibus confortat.⁶¹

[He embraces then his brides, who are all one bride, and he satisfies all and each one with the honey-dropping kiss of love, and comforts with eternal embraces.]

The two terms are joined again towards the middle of the exposition, in a passage dealing with the maidens and their love for Jesus:

Est itaque verus amor, castus, sanctus, voluntarius amatum pro seipso non pro suis amans, in amato se totum figens, nil extra se querens, de se contentus, flagrans, estuans, ex amato inardescens, vehemens, se in se ligans, impetuosus miro modo, omnem modum excedens, ad solum amatum se extendens, cuncta alia contempnens set et obliviscens, in amato canens, illum cogitans, illum incessanter meminiens, ascendens desiderio, pergens in amato, ruens in amplexibus, absorptus in osculis, totus liquescens igne ardentis amoris, ut tibi, O bone Ihesu, merito dicatur: *Adolescentule dilexerunt te nimis*.⁶²

[And accordingly it is true love, chaste, sacred, loving freely the beloved for himself, not for his goods, setting itself completely in the beloved, seeking nothing outside of him, contented about himself, blazing, being inflamed, taking fire from the lover, ardent, binding

itself to him, impetuous in a marvelous way, exceeding all measure, stretching out to the only beloved, despising and also forgetting all other things, singing in the beloved, thinking him, remembering him constantly, increasing in desire, proceeding in the beloved, rushing towards embraces, absorbed in kisses, melting completely in the fire of ardent love, so that to you, O good Jesus, it is said justly: 'The young maidens loved you exceedingly'.]

They appear again in the last fourth of the *Super Cant.*:

Et dum a priori rigore et nocivo frigore liquescit, ad amplexandum, ad osculandum dilectum eciam aliquando nec tracta nec vocata currit.⁶³

[And when she melts by the prior chilliness and the hurtful cold, neither dragged along nor called, she runs to the beloved sometimes to embrace and kiss.]

Terms of love create a tension between vehicle and topic as the latter, while not being discursively definable, needs physical imagery to be expressed.⁶⁴ The use of the vocabulary of love to define the domain of God differs significantly from its use to define the domain of Jesus in his humanity. As the latter can find some articulation outside the sphere of metaphorical expressions, the conceptual domain evades a clear delineation by means of those expressions. Without an appropriate and moderate application of the terms of love, the depiction of the relationship of the soul with Jesus in his humanity resounds with powerful and explicit sexual allusions.⁶⁵ But the conceptualization of the godhead necessitates metaphorical meaning as a means to give it cognitive strength. The special resourcefulness of the language of love in conveying metaphorical meaning to express different aspects of the contemplative life is due to the essential similarities of the two fields. Indeed, the notions of desire and love expressed by the terms of love also define the contemplative experience. Those notions constitute the common boundary of the two fields, which is exploited by the mystics and other religious writers to persuade the audience to accept a metaphorical transposition of relations. Rolle works with the Latin language to carry out the encoding of his mystical experience. After this first translation stage, once the terms have been solidly grounded in their new context, the second translation stage, from Latin to the vernacular, may take place. Rolle preserves his characteristic high style when he describes the third degree of love in his Middle English epistles. He however needs to provide a sort of *accessus* to that highest degree of love in the form of a description of the first and second degrees. Rolle expects the English audience to be as able as the clerical one at

decoding and construing meaning from the metaphorical discourse of love. However, in the epistles, the 'messenger' is more negotiator between God and man than expositor of his own *auctoritas*. The careful and well-explained didactic programme of the epistles reflects a new attitude. The epistles invitingly offer themselves as practical exercises and systems for the audience to use according to its needs. Having invented a language in which his inner world may translate itself, Rolle preserves that language and its style in the vernacular with the provision of a new contextual apparatus that still shows the language to be characteristically his own, but also potentially that of his audience.

NOTES

1. My thanks are due to Vincent Gillespie, Fellow of St Anne's College, Oxford, and Roger Ellis, whose numerous valuable suggestions I have incorporated into this paper. I am also grateful to Frank McGovern for suggesting improvements to the English. Any inconsistencies, of course, are my sole responsibility. Without the support of the Berrow Foundation, it would not have been possible to pursue my DPhil research at the University of Oxford.
2. S.J. Ogilvie-Thomson (ed.) Richard Rolle, *Prose and Verse* Early English Text Society 293 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) p. 26, ll. 6-10. I have not reproduced all of Ogilvie-Thomson's editorial diacritics.
3. Some parts of the first meditative lyric included in the *Ego Dormio* derive from a fragment of a Latin meditation, the *Respice in Faciem Christi*, ascribed in the Middle Ages to Augustine. Other parts of the same lyric are free translations of Rolle's own *Incendium Amoris*. Another Latin poem, the *Candet Nudatum Pectus*, already translated into the vernacular in the early thirteenth century, also finds its way in the *Ego Dormio* lyric, albeit as a free translation; see Ogilvie-Thomson (ed.) R. Rolle, *Prose and Verse* p. 205; see also Carleton Brown (ed.) *Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1924, revised 1957) pp. 1-2.
4. For an introduction to the commentary tradition, see Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*; see also Minnis and Scott (eds) *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c.1100-c.1375*; for a study of the Song of Songs tradition, see E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990); see also Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990).
5. See W.M. Lindsay (ed.) *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum Sive Originum Libri XX* 2 vols. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1911, repr. 1962) 10. 123; quoted in Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation* pp. 89-90 (translation by Copeland).
6. See Nicholas Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 13 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); see esp. Excursus I, 'The Chronology of Rolle's Writings', pp. 273-94; for alternative chronologies, see Hope Emily Allen, *Writings*

- Ascribed to Richard Rolle, and Material for his Biography* Modern Language Association Monograph Series 3 (New York: D.C. Heath and Co.; London: Oxford University Press, 1927); see also J.P.H. Clark, 'Richard Rolle as a Biblical Commentator', *Downside Review* 104 (1986), pp. 165-213.
7. Of related interest to this point, see Watson, *Richard Rolle*, pp. 226-32; see also my own discussion of the 'messenger' role in ch. 6 of my dissertation, 'The Moving of the Soul: the Functions of Metaphors of Love in the Writings of Richard Rolle and Antecedent Texts of the Medieval Mystical Tradition' (University of Oxford: DPhil, 1993).
 8. See Nicholas Watson, 'Translation and Self-Canonization in Richard Rolle's *Melos Amoris*' in Ellis (ed.) *Medieval Translator* (1989) pp. 167-180.
 9. All references to the Bible are to A.C. Fillion (ed.) *Biblia Sacra Juxta Vulgatae* (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1887).
 10. See Elizabeth Murray, 'Richard Rolle's Commentary on the Canticles Edited from MS. Trinity College, Dublin, 153' (Fordham Diss., 1958) (hereafter Rolle, *Super Cant.*); see also Yves Madon, 'Le Commentaire de Richard Rolle sur les premiers versets du *Cantique des Cantiques*', *Mélanges de Sciences Religieuses* 7 (1950) pp. 311-25; for a Modern English translation, see Richard Rolle, *Biblical Commentaries: Short Exposition of Psalm XX, Treatise on the Twentieth Psalm, Comment on the First Verses of the Canticle of Canticles, Commentary on the Apocalypse* trans. Robert Boenig, Salzburg Studies in English Literature: Elizabethan & Renaissance Studies 92:13 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1984) pp. 56-141.
 11. For a description of the manuscripts, see Allen, *Writings*, pp. 64-8.
 12. For a study of the Latin vocabulary of the spiritual experience, see Pierre Miquel, *Le Vocabulaire latin de l'expérience spirituelle dans la tradition monastique et canoniale de 1050 à 1250* *Théologie Historique* 79 (Paris: Aubier, 1989), esp. pp. 97-213.
 13. See Clark, 'Richard Rolle', *Downside Review* 104 (1986) pp. 168-73; see also his 'Richard Rolle: a Theological Re-Assessment', *Downside Review* 100 (1983) pp. 108-39.
 14. The copyist of MS Bodley 953, an early fifteenth-century manuscript, highlights the first letter of each Latin verse in blue. There is a paragraph marking in red ink at the beginning of both translation and exposition. The translation is underlined in red ink.
 15. H.R. Bramley (ed.) Richard Rolle, *The English Psalter* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1884) pp. 4-5.
 16. See Paul Theiner (ed.) Richard Rolle, *The Contra Amatores Mundi* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968); see also E.J.F. Arnould (ed.) Richard Rolle, *The Melos Amoris* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957); see also F. Vandenbroucke (ed.) Richard Rolle, *Le Chant d'Amour (Melos Amoris)*, 2 vols., Sources Chrétiennes 168-9 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1971).
 17. Rolle, *The English Psalter* p. 5.
 18. *Super Threnos, Super Apocalypsim, Six Old Testament Canticles* and the *English Magnificat* belong also to this category of commentaries built around the standard Gloss; see Clark, 'Richard Rolle', *Downside Review* 104 (1986) p. 165.
 19. See Watson, *Richard Rolle*, pp. 113-41; Watson describes *Incendium Amoris* as a new starting point in Rolle's writing career, marked by the firm proclamation of his status as Christian, a hermit and as a spiritual authority.

20. See Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs I*, trans. Kilian Walsh Cistercian Fathers Series 4 (Spencer, Mass.: Cistercian Publications, 1971) p. 6.
21. See William of St Thierry, *The Works of William of St Thierry ii: Exposition on the Song of Songs* trans. Mother Columba Hart Cistercian Fathers Series 6 (Spencer, Mass.: Cistercian Publications, 1970) p. 6.
22. For a fine study of Biblical imitatio in the writings of Rolle, see John A. Alford, 'Biblical Imitatio in the Writings of Richard Rolle' *English Literary History* 40 (1973) pp. 1-23, esp. p. 6. For a general study of the Bible as literature, see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981) and John B. Gabel and Charles B. Wheeler, *The Bible as Literature: An Introduction* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); see esp. pp. 16-41.
23. See Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved*, pp. 151-200.
24. See Richard of St Victor, *The Twelve Patriarchs: The Mystical Ark: Book Three of the Trinity* trans. Grover A. Zinn, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1979). The use of the Song of Songs' language and imagery pervades books four and five of *The Mystical Ark*; see also Robert Javelet, 'Thomas Gallus et Richard de St Victor Mystiques' *Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale* 29 (1962) pp. 206-33, 30 (1963) pp. 88-121, and Astell, *The Song of Songs*, pp. 33-5, 77-89.
25. See Copeland, *Rhetoric*, p. 65.
26. R. Freyhan, 'The Evolution of the Caritas Figure in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* vol. 11 (1948-9) pp. 68-86; for a definition of caritas as mother of all the virtues, see p. 68 n. 2; for a survey of the notion of caritas, see *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* ii, cols. 507-691.
27. See Clark, 'Richard Rolle', *Downside Review* 104 (1986) p. 187.
28. G. Dumeige (ed. and trans.) *Épître à Séverin sur la Charité: Richard de Saint-Victor, Les Quatre Degrés de la Violente Charité* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1955) p. 110 (used for all citations from the work in this paper).
29. Richard of St Victor *De IV Grad.* p. 143.
30. Richard of St Victor *De IV Grad.* p. 151.
31. Richard of St Victor *De IV Grad.* p. 153.
32. Richard of St Victor *De IV Grad.* p. 153.
33. Richard of St Victor *De IV Grad.* p. 157; see also Margaret Jennings, 'Richard Rolle and the Three Degrees of Love' *Downside Review* 93 (1975) pp. 193-200, esp. p. 195.
34. Richard of St Victor *De IV Grad.* p. 167; Allen, *Writings* pp. 66-8; see also Clark, 'Richard Rolle', *Downside Review* 104 (1986) pp. 185-6.
35. See Clark, 'Richard Rolle', *Downside Review* 104 (1986) pp. 124-6, who suggests that Rolle's degrees of love derive directly from the *De IV Grad.*; see also Jennings, 'Three Degrees', pp. 197-200.
36. Astell, *The Song of Songs* p. 108.
37. See Rolle, *Super Cant.*, p. 2. Unless indicated otherwise, translations are my own. For an alternative modern English translation, see Richard Rolle, *Biblical Commentaries*, trans. Boenig p. 57.
38. See also Watson, 'Translation and Self-Canonization', *The Medieval Translator* (1989) pp. 174-9.
39. See Wolfgang Riehle, *The Middle English Mystics* trans. Bernard Standring (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981) pp. 34-5.

40. For a case study of the conceptualization of feeling, see George Lakoff, *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987) pp. 377–415.
41. See Rolle, *Super Cant.* p. 10; Boenig, p. 66, translates: 'They have venerated the filling of their stomach rather than embraced Christ.' This translation is inaccurate, as the word *venerem* cannot stand for a third person plural in any of the tenses of the verb *venerare*. Madon, 'Le Commentaire de Richard Rolle', pp. 324–5, gives a correct French translation: 'Un ventre rassasié embrasse Venus beaucoup plus que le Christ.'
42. For autobiographical accounts showing Rolle dealing with secular ladies, see Rolle, *Super Cant.* pp. 47–8; see also Margaret Deanesly (ed.) *Richard Rolle, The Incendium Amoris* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1915) pp. 178–9; for a modern English translation, see Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love* trans. Clifton Wolters, 3rd edn. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1988) pp. 81–2; see also Watson, *Richard Rolle* pp. 129–30. For studies on the importance of the role of women in Rolle's writings, see Arnould (ed.) *Melos Amoris* pp. xl–lvii; see also Ann W. Astell, 'Feminine Figurae in the Writings of Richard Rolle: a Register of Growth' *Mystics Quarterly* 15 (1989) pp. 117–24.
43. See Rolle, *Super Cant.* p. 22; see also Rolle, *Biblical Commentaries* p. 78.
44. See Alford, 'Biblical Imitatio' pp. 8–9; Alford notices that Rolle is indebted to Apoc. 2:17 for his description of *canor*.
45. See Riehle, *The Middle English Mystics* pp. 110–113.
46. See Sara de Ford, 'Mystical Union in the Melos Amoris of Richard Rolle' in Marion Glasscoe (ed.) *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1980) pp. 173–201.
47. Eva Kittay, *Metaphor: Its Cognitive Force and Linguistic Structure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) p. 32. My debt to Eva Kittay concerning my own adaptation of a metaphorical cognitive theory for mystical and devotional texts will be apparent throughout the second part of this paper; see also Stephen H. Phillips, 'Mysticism and Metaphor' *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 23 (1988) pp. 17–41; see also Cyril Barrett, 'The Language of Ecstasy and the Ecstasy of Language' in Martin Warner (ed.) *The Bible as Rhetoric: Studies in Biblical Persuasion and Credibility* (London: Routledge, 1990) pp. 205–21.
48. See Copeland, *Rhetoric* p. 83.
49. For a survey of the meaning of the kiss in secular and religious literature, see Nicolas James Perella, *The Kiss Sacred and Profane: An Interpretative History of Kiss Symbolism and Related Religio-Erotic Themes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) p. 39. Perella considers Origen of Alexandria as the father of the doctrine of the spiritual senses. For a study of the kiss as a means of unitive expression for the mystic, see Riehle, *The Middle English Mystics* pp. 104–27.
50. See Rolle, *Super Cant.* p. 1; see also Rolle, *Biblical Commentaries* p. 56.
51. Rita Copeland, 'Richard Rolle and the Rhetorical Theory of the Levels of Style' in Marion Glasscoe (ed.) *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1984) pp. 55–80; see esp. p. 76.
52. See Rolle, *Super Cant.* pp. 20–1; see also Rolle, *Biblical Commentaries* pp. 76–7. *Laicus*, with *illiteratus*, *rusticus* and *idiota* were used to name the illiterate; see Stock, *The Implications of Literacy* p. 27.
53. Of related interest on this point, see Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers:*

- Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: Hambledon Press, 1984) pp. 101–33.
54. See Rolle, *Super Cant.* p. 31; see also Rolle, *Biblical Commentaries* p. 88.
 55. See Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1952, repr. 1983) esp. pp. 214–263.
 56. Copeland 'Rolle' p. 56.
 57. Gilbert of Hoyland gives an excellent description of *ruminatio* in his fifth sermon on the Song of Songs; see *The Works of Gilbert of Hoyland: Sermons on the Song of Songs* i, trans. L.C. Braceland, Cistercian Fathers Series 14 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1978) pp. 85–86.
 58. See Copeland, *Rhetoric* p. 43.
 59. See Minnis, *Medieval Theory* pp. 57–58.
 60. See Vincent Gillespie, 'Mystic's Foot: Rolle and Affectivity' in Marion Glasscoe (ed.) *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1982) pp. 199–230.
 61. See Rolle, *Super Cant.* p. 1; see also Rolle, *Biblical Commentaries* p. 56.
 62. See Rolle, *Super Cant.* p. 49; Boenig's translation (Rolle, *Biblical Commentaries* p. 107) wants a translation of the words 'flagrans . . . omnem modum excedens' and misreads 'ascendens' as 'ardens'.
 63. See Rolle, *Super Cant.* p. 67; see also Rolle, *Biblical Commentaries* p. 126.
 64. It is beyond the scope of this work to study the relations between metaphors and images. However, the reproduction and interpretation through images of the whole of the Song of Songs in *La Bible Moralisée* is revealing of the ways the vocabulary of love could be set into pictures; see *La Bible Moralisée Conservée à Oxford, Paris et Londres ii. Reproduction Intégrale du Manuscrit du XIII^e Siècle* (Paris, 1912), plates 290–317 (fols. 66–93^v in Paris, Bibl. Nat. lat. 11560).
 65. Admittedly, some authors fail to make or sustain the distinction between the semantic field of love and courtship and the content domain of Christ in his humanity. The writing of an author like Margery Kempe evidences this fact forcefully; see H.E. Allen and S.B. Meech (eds) *The Book of Margery Kempe* Early English Text Society O.S. 213 (London: Oxford University Press, 1941, repr. 1961) esp. pp. 70–1, 86–8; Margery's intense devotion to the humanity of Jesus prevents her from marrying God mystically; also, as a result of that, she is spiritually moved before the sight of children and young men.