"Speke to me be thowt": Affectivity, Incendium Amoris, and the Book of Margery Kempe
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“Speke to me be thou’t”:
Affectivity, Incendium Amoris,
and the Book of Margery Kempe

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Þan schalt þow ly stylle & speke to me be thowt, & I schal þe heyl medytacyon and very contemplacyon.
—Book of Margery Kempe

I.

Many critics have commented on the mimetic quality of Margery’s mysticism. To quote Barbara Newman:

Although Kempe’s life and her Book are both works of stunning originality, her piety is pure imitation. In addition to her visual meditations, she seems self-consciously to have experimented with every spiritual practice she encountered in every book she could persuade her clerical friends to read to her. Under the influence of her beloved “St. Bride” (Birgitta of Sweden), she began to prophesy more harshly concerning divine judgment. Learning of St. Catherine of Siena’s experiences in Rome, she underwent a mystical marriage to the Godhead. Inspired by Richard Rolle, she perceived sweet smells, celestial melodies, and ardent fires of love in her breast.

No wonder, then, that Margery’s attachment to these spiritual precursors has been so well documented, or that her account has often been situated within familiar paradigms of affective devotion. But perhaps our

1. The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. S. B. Meech and H. E. Allen, EETS, o.s. 212 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1940), p. 17, ll. 29–31; cited parenthetically by page and line number and abbreviated Book throughout. I would like to thank Theresa Tinkle and Karla Taylor for their perceptive comments on earlier versions of this article. I am also grateful to the editors and anonymous reviewers at JEGP for their astute criticisms and suggestions.


literary-historical typologies are less suited to the task of reading the Book when we remember that accounts of late medieval holy women “marked disjunctures, discontinuities, tensions in textual exchanges.” In the Book of Margery Kempe, I will suggest, these tensions emerge most sharply in relation to Richard Rolle and the devotional economy defined by Incendium Amoris.

Rolle’s work was important in consolidating an ideal of affective spirituality in the period and in some significant respects anticipates Margery’s assumptions about the role of the body and the emotions in devotion. Although his Meditation B was at least as influential as Incendium Amoris, only the latter is explicitly cited in the Book, where it functions as a frequent reference point for the priest-scribe to whom Margery narrates her account. In crucial moments, however, the Book adopts a surprisingly resistant attitude toward Rolle’s paradigm of inspired physical and emotional intimacy with God, elevating Margery’s visionary experience over the model for spiritual discernment provided by Incendium Amoris; this is particularly true with respect to Margery’s extended colloquies with God. Rarely found in the hagiographic and didactic literature upon which the Book so often draws, these “sacred conversations,” to use Gail Gibson’s

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6. Barry Windeatt points out that Margery’s description in chapter 28 of Christ’s suffering body as a dovecote full of holes echoes Rolle’s Meditation B. Windeatt, ed., The Book of Margery Kempe (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), p. 11. It is Rolle’s account of “sensuous longing” and “mystical rapture” in Incendium Amoris, however, that seems to have “lodged in Kempe’s memory,” according to Windeatt (p. 11).
description, deserve more extended consideration, especially because they register unease about the somatic experience which characterizes so many other aspects of Margery’s spiritual life which links her to Rolle.7 Her account therefore disrupts the Book’s place within Rolle’s textual community and, in doing so, traces the discursive boundaries between historically specific modes of devotion.

II.

The first mention of Rolle occurs in the context of Margery’s visit to Richard Caister, vicar of St. Stephen’s Church in Norwich. Explaining her revelations, Margery describes

...how sum-tyme þe Fadyr of Hevyn dalyd to hir sowle as pleynly and as verly as o frend spekyth to a-noþer be bodyly spech; sum-tyme þe Secunde Persone in Trinyte; sumtyme alle thre Personys in Trinuty & o substawns in Godhede dalyd to hir sowle & informyd hir in hir feyth & in hys lofe how sche xuld lofe lofe hym, worshypyn hym, & dreadyn hym, so excellently þat sche herd neuyr boke, neyþyr Hyltons boke, ne Bridis boke, ne Stimulus Amoris, ne Incendium Amoris, ne non oper þat euyr sche herd redyn þat spak so hly of lofe of God but þat sche felt as hly in werkyng in hir sowle yf sche cowd or ellys mygth a schewyd as sche felt. (39.16–28)

God later assures Margery that “it is trewe euery word þat is wretyn in Brides boke” (47.33–34).8 However, her rhetorical displacement of Rolle in this key passage is never similarly countered, a fact rarely noticed by critics, who more often read Margery’s invocation of Incendium Amoris as an attempt to secure her place within Rolle’s literate milieu.9 The representation of the hermit here is perplexing not only because Rolle’s particular

7. Gibson, Theater of Devotion, p. 49. Catherine Sanok, noting that “St. Margaret or St. Katherine’s private devotions are rarely the focus of vernacular legends,” cites Karen Winstead’s work to argue that late medieval saints’ legends “frequently eliminate whatever prayers and meditations are found in earlier sources.” Sanok, Her Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints’ Lives in Late Medieval England (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p. 124.

8. Not only this, but God also assures her that he spoke to St. Bridget in the same way he now speaks to Margery. The Revelationes are very likely an important source for Margery’s conversational set-pieces. However, I am primarily concerned with how this passage implicates Rolle and Hilton; precisely because St. Bridget is undoubtedly a kind of model for Kempe, her Revelationes stand apart from the complex negotiations of gender and spiritual authority that attend the Book’s relationship to Incendium Amoris and The Scale of Perfection.

kind of sensory devotion had gained vocal defenders in Norwich, but also because Margery's own beliefs and practices appear closely aligned with the model he sets forth in his book.\(^{10}\) Whereas “Hylton’s boke” was addressed to female anchorites, with whom she had little in common, Rolle’s spiritual concerns and prerogatives apply to Margery in meaningful ways. Both, for instance, share an appreciation for the intensely physical nature of religious experience.\(^{11}\) On this issue, Rolle’s account was influential


\(^{11}\) This being true, it is nonetheless important to acknowledge John Clark’s assertion that we need to see Rolle’s attachment to the sensible in nuanced terms: “Rolle,” he argues, “never lost his attachment to sensible feelings in religion, but the fierce misogynist became the valued spiritual director of the nuns of Hampole, and in his later writings, such as *The Mending of Life (Emendatio Vitae)* and *The Form of Living*, he speaks in terms that are not far from Hilton of the purifying effect of trial and suffering and the supreme value of humility and charity.” Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, ed. and trans. John Clark and Rosemary Dorward (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), p. 31 (citing John Clark, “Richard Rolle: A Theological Re-assessment,” *Downside Review*, 101 [1985], 129–31). Critical arguments about the physicality of Rolle’s religious experience also distinguish canor from calor and dulcor. See, for instance, Katherine Zieman, “The Perils of *Canor*: Mystical Authority, Alliteration, and Extragrammatical Meaning in Rolle, the *Cloud*-Author, and Hilton,” in *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 22 (2008), 133–66. Denis Renevey also dwells on the “special status” of *canor* in *Contra
enough, it seems, that Hilton felt compelled to answer him in *The Scale of Perfection*. The true “fier of love,” Hilton writes, is

. . . neither bodili, ne it is bodili feelid. A soule mai fele it in praiere or in devocioun, whiche soule is in the bodi, but he felith it not bi no bodili witt. For though it be so, that yif it wirke in a soule the bodi mai turne into an heete as it were chafid for likynge travaile of the spirit, nevertheless the fier of love is not bodili, for it is oonly in the goostli desire of the soule.\(^\text{12}\)

Hilton’s criticism amplifies, perhaps unduly so, the importance of sensory phenomena to Rolle, whose mysticism was not limited to the bodily experience of sounds and heat so ebulliently detailed in *Incendium Amoris*.\(^\text{13}\) But he is also delimiting contemplation vis-à-vis a set of perceived Rollean alternatives. Maintaining that true contemplation is spiritual in nature, Hilton implicates affective meditation of the kind represented in the *Book*. He asks his readers to “undirstonde that visiones or revelaciouns…or ony-thinge that mai be feelyd bi bodili wit, though it be never so comfortable and lykande, aren not verili contemplacion.”\(^\text{14}\) Margery’s desire, in other words, for ever greater intimacy with God—in ritual, in visions, and in her imitation of Christ’s own suffering—is not easily exempted from Hilton’s implied critique of Rolle, a critique that became normative with the popularity of Hilton’s text.\(^\text{15}\) *The Scale of Perfection* thus provided the criteria necessary for dismissing Margery’s own experience as merely affective, in

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*Amatores Mundi*, where it is Rolle’s “most sophisticated way of translating the ineffable,” and “depends on conditions only the eremitic life can provide: silence is necessary for hearing and singing *canor*.” Renevey goes on to say that “[t]he invention of the concept of *canor* gives Rolle the means to transfer and condense written discourse into musical language,” whereby “the heavenly sounds descend into the mind, to be then voiced through the mouth and be heard as physical sound.” Renevey, *Language, Self and Love: Hermeneutics in the Writings of Richard Rolle and the Commentaries on the Song of Songs* (Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 2001), pp. 108–q. 112. While *canor* is not easily assimilated to the schema I sketch out in the first section of this essay, neither is it entirely removed from the realm of embodiment.

\(^\text{12.}\) Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, ed. T. Bestul (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), p. 59, ll. 670–75. Bestul comments in the introduction to his edition of Hilton’s text that “[i]n very general terms, his understanding of contemplation is less material, less dependent on imagery and sensation, than that of Richard Rolle, whose approach he seems to counter directly in *The Scale*” (p. 2). As Jessica Brantley notes, however, this characterization of Rolle’s devotion—that is, as one centered on “the material effects of mystical theology”—“originates with his detractors, and so should be treated with caution.” Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 137 (and p. 364, n. 54). See, as well, Sargent, “Contemporary Criticism of Richard Rolle,” 160–205.


contradistinction to what Hilton imagines are the intellectual and spiritual disciplines inherent in *contemplatio*.

Like the anonymous Carthusian who later added “R. hampall” in red ink where the manuscript mentions *Incendium Amoris*, Margery’s amanuensis—if not Margery herself—was obviously familiar with Rolle’s text. References to “þe fyer of lofe” that “qwenchith alle synnes” strongly suggest that she or her scribe had encountered English versions of *Incendium Amoris*, which had become available through the inclusion of Rolle’s Latin writings in vernacular devotional compilations of the period (89.1–2). Another source may have been a translation made by the Carmelite Richard Misyn in 1435, one year before Margery’s second scribe began recording her account in its current form. And although Margery’s actual familiarity with *Incendium Amoris* is a matter of some speculation, the text was frequently excerpted, becoming available to those who may otherwise have had little direct exposure to Rolle’s Latin writings.

It is not especially surprising, then, to find that Margery’s own revelations often follow the pattern established by Rolle in his well-known account of *calor*, *canor*, and *dulcor*, or the manifestation of God’s love in warmth, song, and sweetness.

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16. See, for instance, 39.25 and 88.33, and accompanying marginal notes. Lynn Staley notes that the glosses, especially those concerning *Incendium Amoris*, locate Margery’s account “within the contexts and concerns of works of contemporary piety” and that “most of the comments in red ink are directed toward elucidating the ‘affective’ emphasis of the text, as his care to distinguish key texts of late medieval piety, such as the *Incendium Amoris* and *The Prichie of Love*, suggests.” Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 5.

17. See, as well, 70.21, 98.32, 147.18.

18. Jonathan Hughes records that Misyn also translated *Incendium Amoris* in 1433 for Margaret Heslington, a recluse and member of the York Corpus Christi guild. Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries: Religion and Secular Life in Late Medieval Yorkshire* (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1988), p. 110. H. E. Allen noted that passages from *Incendium Amoris* and *Emendatio Vitae* (both translated by Misyn in 1434–35) were incorporated into English lyrics of the period. Allen, “On Richard Rolle’s Lyrics,” *Modern Language Review*, 14 (1919), 320–21 (cited in A. Knowlton, *The Influence of Richard Rolle and of Julian of Norwich on the Middle English Lyric* [The Hague: Mouton, 1973], pp. 12–13). This diffusion of English material attributed to Rolle, especially in the case of *Incendium Amoris*, is the reason why I have chosen to cite passages from the vernacular version of the text rather than the original Latin, the former representing Rolle’s work as it had most likely been appropriated by Margery and her English speaking contemporaries. As Rita Copeland has observed, Misyn’s text “makes no apparent distinction between the rhetorical impact that can be achieved in an English text and that which is desirable in a Latin text. There is nothing about Misyn’s version that suggests a simplification of Rolle’s style and fervour.” She adds that “the deliberate diction of the English attests to Misyn’s concern with the affective tone of Rolle’s Latin.” Copeland, “Richard Rolle and the Rhetorical Theory of the Levels of Style,” in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Papers Read at Dartington Hall, July 1984*, ed. M. Glasscoe (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1984), pp. 74–75.


Dormio, Form of Living, Super Cantica Canticorum and Melos Amoris all dilate upon the calor/canor/dulcor sequence). Within Rolle’s corpus, however, Incendium Amoris places the most emphasis on the specifically affective qualities of calor, canor, and dulcor, and the way sensory perception functions as both the means to, and evidence of, the proper love of God. Rolle begins the Prologue, for instance, by recounting “when I felt first my heart wax warme, and treuly, not ymagynyngly, but als it wer with sensiblyll fyer, byrned.” He goes on, reassuring the reader that calor is no mere spiritual experience: “Bot als it wer if þi fynger wer putt in fyer, it suld be cled wyth feleyng byrnyn: So þe saule with lufe (als before sayde) sett o-fyer, treuly felys moste vrray heete.”

Rolle incorporates into his vision of the contemplative life a strong disposition toward the sensible. Such a disposition, he later emphasizes, is incompatible with the prerogatives of learned divinity. Dedicating Incendium Amoris to the “boystus [rude, ignorant] & vntaght” who forsake any attempt to approach theology as a science, he situates himself in the wake of thirteenth-century exegetes, such as Giles of Rome, who had maintained that the true end of theology is the appreciation of God’s love. The affectus is superior to the rational faculties, emotional discernment superior to “those speculative and practical questions which concern the intellect.” And while this tradition encouraged a more sympathetic appreciation for the way the Bible worked as poetry, as A. J. Minnis has shown, it also set up a schema for describing the soul’s participation in the divine as a concrete physical process, the effects of which reassure the contemplative or solitary that she is on the right path. Rolle describes this dynamic in the following terms:

When alsso it [i.e., the soul] vnceseyng & byrnyngly lufys þat, as before it is sayd, in þe selfe it felis happiest heet & itt knawes þe selfe solly byrnyn with fyre of lufe endles, feland his moste belouyd in swetnes desyrd, in to songe of ioy meditacion is turnyd, and kynde enuwid in heuynly mirth is vnbelappyd.

Moments such as these map a transformation from the spiritual to the material, from “meditacion” to that which is embodied in the medium of a “songe.” In much the same way, Margery herself is heartened by
“bodily mevyngys for þe fyer of lofe þat brent so feruently in hir sowle” as she meditates on the passion (70.21–22). Although there is a difference between passion meditation and the experience Rolle elaborates in the passage above, the Book of Margery Kempe extracts Rolle’s idiom of spiritual desire and longing almost word for word; in both cases, the “fyer of lofe” (the phrase appears throughout the text) is a heuristic for comprehending not only the intensity of devotion itself but also the ideal of a God who is sensible and perceptible as substance.

Margery’s affectivity therefore invites comparison to Rolle. I have already suggested that the Book draws closely on the spiritual metaphors of canor, calor, and dulcor elaborated in Incendium Amoris, the many obvious differences between Rolle’s celebration of the solitary life and Margery’s own overtly public mode of devotion notwithstanding. Rolle had associated these terms with one “parfitely turnyd” to Christ, and the representation of Margery’s own conversion early in the Book draws explicitly on the process Rolle mapped out by which one learns to love God. Lying in bed with her husband, Margery hears “a sownd of melodye so swet & delectable” that it seemed as if she “had ben in Paradyse” (11.13–14). Desiring “no- thing so mech as Heuyn,” she soon abandons worldly things and attempts to undertake a life of solitary penance and chastity much like the one Rolle had envisaged for the successful contemplative (13.11–12). It may be problematic to impute the intentions of a solitary to Margery, whom God reminds is still part of the world (“My seruawntys desyryn gretly to se þe,” he tells her) (22.33). But her initial conversion implicates Rolle in the intensity of her devotion and the way that it prefigures both a loss of everyday life and the imposition of spiritual labors like none she had ever known. Most important, as she tells her husband, “þe lofe of myn hert & myn affeccyon is drawyn fro alle erdly creaturys & sett only in God” (12.4–6). Rolle strikes a similar note when he writes that whoever truly


29. Later, when Margery is on pilgrimage in Rome, it becomes clear how important these melodies are: “Des sowndys & melodijs had sche herd ny-hand every day þe term of xxv þere whan þis boke was wretn, & specialy whan sche was in deuowt prayer, also many tymes whil sche was at Rome & in Inglond bope” (88.2–6).

30. The story of Rolle’s own conversion provides an interesting parallel; it is recorded in the hermit’s biographical office. The Officium et Miracula of Richard Rolle of Hampole, ed. R. M. Woolley (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1919).
loves God “al þing passand he despisis, & hym-self in only desire of hys makar in-moueabily” until he feels “swettist heet, als wer byrnynge fyre.”

Although Rolle’s image of a divine “makar” departs somewhat from Margery’s frequent emphasis on God the Son, his paradigm of spiritual desire implicitly legitimizes the Book’s investment in affective forms of devotion.

Even when the Book does not explicitly reference the key terms and categories of Rolle’s text, Margery’s revelations often acquire a kind of material presence in her life, as when Christ himself appears at her bedside “clad in a mantyl of purpyl sylke . . . lokyng vpon hir wyth so blyssyd a chere þat sche was strengthyd in alle hir spyritys” (8.17–19). Later, while meditating on the passion, Margery conjures up an image of Christ so vivid and real that she can feel “hys toos in her hand” as if they were “very flesch & bon” (208.23–24). Exemplifying the “interlocking” pattern of image, word, and object that Margaret Aston has described as a staple feature of devotional literacy in the period, Margery’s revelations powerfully reenact the drama of God assuming human form. Rolle resisted visualizing Christ in such human terms, speaking more often of the Trinity, yet he makes clear that the presence of the sacred is most immediately felt as a set of physical effects in which God is substantially present. Just as Rolle’s ideal contemplative is literally seized by the love of Christ—“Þi tru & besy lufar is rauisched in-to gostly songe of mynde”—so Margery herself is often overcome by an intense somatic intimacy with the sacred. Her tendency to embody and reenact sacred history, to move from the verisimilar to the experiential, and to figure this process in terms Rolle himself provided, foregrounds the context for affective spirituality and devotion promoted by Incendium Amoris.

III.

If Margery’s conversation with the vicar in St. Stephen’s reinforces the Book’s place within a textual community, the scene also figures her relation to other members of this community in such a way that it becomes impossible to ignore what is distinctive about her visionary experience.

34. The Fire of Love, ed. Harvey, 103.33–34.
35. Taking this argument one step further, the episode challenges readers to recognize the constructed nature of all such communities. In a survey of research on female reading communities, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne reflects on the contested status of the term “community” within medieval studies, noting its “inbuilt nostalgia” and its power to occlude or idealize
Margery’s most meticulously “real” recollections emerge as she meditates on the life and death of Christ. Her longest account of the Passion, near the end of Book I, lingers on the human details of Christ’s ordeal, in the fashion of popular devotional texts such as Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*. As the Jews in her vision prepare to nail Christ to the cross, they rend from his body a cloth of silk that has hardened into place with dried blood, so “pat it drow a-vey al þe hyde & al þe skyn of hys blissyd body & renewyd hys preciows wowndys & mad þe blod to renne down al a-bowtyn on every syde” (192.2–5). Margery’s visionary participation in this and other scenes suggests how affective meditation on the life of Christ had the capacity to defuse contemplation of “nonmaterial concepts,” thus inhibiting, in Michelle Karnes’s words, “the progression to spiritual contemplation that had made Gospel meditations so useful to various of their earlier and later authors.”

Indeed, the texts and traditions from which Margery’s narrative most often draws—Middle English Lives of Christ, passion narratives, episodes from cycle drama, and of course hagiographic legends—were all variously invested in constructing a cultural norm for affective piety in which devotion to the humanity of Christ came before contemplation of his divinity; there was a risk, then, that the former could crowd out the latter, and with it the spiritual inwardness writers such as Walter Hilton had associated with the contemplative life. The *Book*’s pattern of borrowing from this archive, it is true, often seems committed to resisting spiritual interpretation, thereby delimiting contemplation to eschatology, to the mercy and forgiveness that Christ’s historically specific relations among different constituencies. Wogan-Browne, “Analytical Survey 5: ‘Reading is Good Prayer’: Recent Research on Female Reading Communities,” in *New Medieval Literatures*, vol. 5, ed. Rita Copeland, David Lawton, Wendy Scase (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), p. 230. John Guillory similarly questions whether “community” can accurately describe “any form of association which does not entail the assumption of cultural unity.” Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 34.

36. Michelle Karnes, “Nicholas Love and Medieval Meditations on Christ,” *Speculum*, 82 (2007), 387. The stunning portrait of human agony that makes up Margery’s vision of the Passion indicates how reified images of Christ’s humanity had become in a culture that cultivated the visual imagination through paintings and other vivid depictions of key gospel episodes. David Wallace, however, offers a different interpretation of this problematic, arguing that because Margery was illiterate, her primary mode of identification with spiritual reality was visual, and thus that “paintings assumed a special significance as the only texts that could be read without direct clerical intervention.” Wallace, “Mystics and Followers in Siena and East Anglia: A Study in Taxonomy, Class, and Cultural Mediation,” in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, ed. M. Glasscoe (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1984), p. 184.

earthly suffering promises for the faithful. Margery’s vision of the Passion, to take just one example, ends decisively with Mary Magdalene greeting the incarnate Jesus (196–97).

Viewed from this angle, Margery’s aspiration to visualize and feel Christ’s earthly suffering appears highly derivative, a mimetic rehearsal of hagiographic and dramatic motifs. Yet the many long passages interpolating what “owr blisful Lord seyde vn-to hir mende” challenge the authority of late medieval discourses linking female spirituality to the public veneration of Christ’s human body (138.35–36). There is a crucial distinction to be made between imaginatively reconstructing key gospel scenes, even with the verisimilar force characteristic of Margery in the Book, and claiming direct spiritual communication with God or the saints. Affective meditation on the life of Christ encouraged the laity to imagine gospel episodes as if they themselves were present, moving through a sequence of prayer and instruction in which Christ’s humanity would be ever more vividly disclosed. 38 But this process did not aim to elicit the divine intersubjectivity Margery details at great length in the Book. Despite the powerful appeal of affective topoi to Margery (and her scribe), what God communicates to her “minde” or “sowle” often has a fuller reality, disrupting the presumed analogy between the corporeal and the spiritual on which both passion meditation and Incendium Amoris are predicated. Margery’s religious sensibilities are not limited to, or entirely defined by, the characteristically East Anglian goal of exteriorizing deeper spiritual truths, or the characteristically Rollean concern for the ways in which the allegorical level is open to direct and vivid sensory apprehension among the elect.

The inward rapport Margery has with God would be easier to place if it extended from her fundamental devotion to the humanity of Christ. Although she likens her sacred conversations to “bodyly spech” in her exchange with Richard Caister, Margery’s thoughts only serve to highlight her radical alienation from those who seek to explain her special grace in corporeal terms. After Caister dies, for example, Margery goes to Norwich and weeps by his grave, where she has “so holy thowys & so holy mendys þat sche myth not mesuryn hir wepyng ne hir crying” (147.30–32). Her fellow mourners, however, are troubled by Margery’s behavior, and assume that she “wept for sum fleschly er erdly affeccyon,” asking her “What ey-lith þe woman? Why faryst þus wyth þi-self? We knew hym as wel as þu”

Here it is precisely the preoccupation with Margery’s body, with its supposed “affeccyon,” that abstracts the public from the truth of her spiritual experience.

Margery’s dialogues with God also open up a less familiar spiritual register in detaching the sacred from external representations. In a crucial passage, God directs Margery, who is praying in a chapel at Saint Margaret’s church in Norwich, to “leue þi byddyng of many bedys and thynk swych thowtys as I wyl putt in þi mend,” telling her to “ly stylle & speke to me be thowt, & I schal þefe to þe hey medytacyon and very contemplacyon” (17.26–31). This highly charged and emotive vision—“clepe me Ihe-sus,” God says to Margery, “for I am þi loue & schal be þi loue wyth-owyn ende”—becomes an appeal to cast off objective forms of spiritual mediation and commune instead on the level of the mind or soul (17.4–6). Accordingly, the text envisions its subject suspending her “byddyng of many bedys,” a phrase that denotes not only frequent supplication but also the widespread practice in lay circles of using beads or similar objects to offer prayers to God and the Virgin. Such practices were a conventional starting point for devotional reflection. The sentiment is repeated later when God tells Margery, who is on pilgrimage in Rome, that “contemplacyon is þe best lyfe in erthe,” better than whatever “meryte” can be attained by “preyng wyth þi mowth,” despite Margery’s inclination to “byddyn many bedys” (89.37–90.3).

And when, near the end of Book I, Margery expresses concern about feeling that “hir hert was drawyn a-vey fro þe seying [of Matins and other devotions],” God responds that “whan þu preyist be thowt, þu vndir-stondist þi-selfe what þu askyst of me, & þu vndirstondest also what I sey to þe, & þu vndirstondest what I behote þe to þe & to þin & to alle þi gostly fadyrs” (216.9–10, 23–26). Although it is Christ who speaks here, the same Christ who suffers on the cross in Margery’s vision of the Passion, affectivity of this kind is not the highest spiritual ideal in these passages; the material objects and ritual actions so central to her devotional life compete with the “gostly vndirstondyng” by which Margery learns to interpret and understand the sacred speech that permeates her consciousness (209.28).

Sarah Beckwith also reads this passage as evidence that Christ later in the Book becomes “more outspoken in his validation of inner thought and contemplation over other forms of worship,” but she sees this shift as a crucial step towards Margery’s constructing her vita. Beckwith, Christ’s Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 92.

Incidentally, a Wycliffite sermon on Matthew 15 incorporates criticism of those who “bidden many bedis” into Christ’s rejoinder to the Pharisees in verse 8: “Þis puple worshipiþ me wiþ þer lippes, for þei bidden many bedis, but þeir herte is fer fro me.” The sermon is discussed and cited in Peggy Knapp, The Style of John Wyclif’s English Sermons (The Hague: Mouton, 1977), p. 90.
At times, Margery’s colloquies with God shade into revelations that threaten to transcend the physical and supplant it with a different form of spiritual apprehension altogether. This dynamic imperils the mediating schema at the heart of affective devotion, including images associated with the Passion. For most of chapter 14, for instance, Christ almost pleads with her to remember “þe peynes þat I haue sufferyd for þe” (30.13–14). No sooner does he do so, however, than the narrative focuses on the tropological implications of this image, God’s assurances that “my grace is neuyr þe lesse in þe” (31.21–22). In later chapters, Margery’s sacred conversations drift even further away from the devotional reference point of the Passion, becoming increasingly dialogic and moving instead into areas that have little to do with the humanity of Christ, and which resist any exact identification between herself and the incarnate body of Jesus. We learn, for example, that “[o]wr Lord of hys hy mercy visityd hir so mech & so plenteuowsly wyth hys holy spechys & hys holy dalyawnce pat sche wist not many tymys how þe day went,” and that these conversations are “so swet & so devowt þat it ferd as sche had ben in an Heuyn” (215.20–26). Although the Passion was seen to function as a kind of blueprint, ideally delimiting and directing meditative attention to the implications of Christ’s earthly suffering, the dialogic plenitude of God’s speech in Margery’s mind frustrates and exceeds the structures of mediation upon which such a process was premised. This more disembodied and ambiguous aspect of her devotion is difficult to reconcile with the archive of authoritative texts invoked by the Book to justify Margery’s highly affective response—her religious tears and other conventional signs of female piety—to the holy.41 As spaces for a different kind of mystical discernment “mende” or “thowt” escape the scrutiny of critical paradigms that focus on the reciprocal relationship between flesh and spirit.42 More is open here to spiritual and intellectual apprehension than to affect, which limits the perception of God’s love to its material corollaries.

Although the preceding discussion has concerned itself with the contours of Margery’s passion meditation, the features that distinguish her


42. In foregrounding references to Margery’s “mende,” I do not mean to suggest that the term somehow excludes the body, or that criticism of the Book can proceed as if there were a strict distinction between the two in the period. As the MED copiously documents, often citing the Book, “mende” encompasses a wide range of meanings, many of which speak to the ambiguously physiological nature of human consciousness and perception (e.g., mind(e), n., 3a–3e). In considering the question of Margery’s affectivity, however, the self-conscious deployment of “mende” throughout the Book deserves closer attention.
visionary experience from the broader context of late medieval affective piety also allow us to differentiate her spiritual concerns from Rolle’s in *Incendium Amoris*. I would like to return once more, then, to the scene mentioned earlier, Margery’s conversation with the vicar in St. Stephen’s Church in Norwich. In narrating this scene, the *Book* makes a point of informing the reader (note, again, the emphatically negative construction of the sentence) that Margery ultimately found *Incendium Amoris* wanting in relation to her own devotional life—that “sche herd neuyr boke, neyþyr Hyltons boke, ne Bridis boke, ne Stimulus Amoris, ne Incendium Amoris, ne non oþer þat euyr sche herd redyn þat spak so hyly of lofe of God but þat sche felt as hyly in werkyng in her sowle yf sche cowd or ellys myght a schewyd as sche felt” (39.23–28).

The vicar is impressed by Margery, concluding that she must be “in-dued wyth grace of þe Holy Gost, to whom it longyth to enspyr wher he wyl” (40.17–18). What else but inspiration could explain her revelations? Applied to Margery, however, the discourse of inspiration is problematic, for it authorizes her male interlocutors to focus exclusively on her body as a medium of revelatory experience. The vicar assimilates Margery to a religious paradigm that understood inspiration as the experience of being moved by the impulse of the Holy Spirit, as Gregory famously wrote in the preface to the *Moralia in Job*:

\[
\text{Vnde et beatus Iob sancto Spiritu afflatus, potuit sua gesta, quae erantuide-licet supernae aspirationis dona, quasi non sua scribere, quia eo alterius er-ant quae loquebatur quo homo loquebatur quae Dei sunt. Et eo alter quae erant illius loquebatur, quo Spiritus sanctus loquebatur quae hominis sunt.}\]

Inspiration denotes a privileged access to the sacred. Yet Job himself merely bears witness; he speaks through—assumes—the authority of another. Similarly, the vicar makes sense of Margery’s inspiration through his use of the verb *induen*, which the *MED* defines as “to clothe” or “to assume or take on (a shape or appearance).”

43. Gregory, *Moralia in Job*, Libri I-X, ed. M. Adriaen, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, CXLIII (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979), 1.10.68–73. The translation is as follows: “In this way, Blessed Job also, being under the influence of the Holy Spirit, might have written his own acts, which were, for that matter, gifts of inspiration from above, *as though they were not his own*; for in so far as it was a human being, who spoke things which were of God, all that he spake belonged to Another, and in so far as the Holy Spirit spake of what is proper to a human being, it was Another that gave utterance to the things that belonged to him.” Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job*, trans. by Members of the English Church, *Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1844), p.16.

44. *induen*, v., *MED*: “To clothe (sb.); ~ with, dress (sb., oneself) in (clothing of a certain kind); (b) to assume or take on (a shape or appearance).”
material instantiations. There is a strong precedent, in this context, for an inspired subject to realize her revelatory experience in external forms. For Margery, this register is the Book itself, but for the many figures of male religious authority populating her narrative, it is Margery’s body. To link inspiration to induen as explicitly as the vicar does here calls attention to Margery’s bodily devotions as evidence of a grace that fundamentally eludes her intellect and her will.\textsuperscript{45} Perhaps that is one reason why Margery is embraced on similar grounds by the likes of Philip Repinglon, the Wycliffite preacher turned bishop of Lincoln, and the anchor of the Friar Preachers at Lynn, both of whom call her inspired (34.6, 37.33).\textsuperscript{46}

Such views also draw Margery closer to the sensory prerogatives of Incendium Amoris, with its connotation of grace as something bestowed bodily upon the believer. According to Rolle, the grace that God brings about in the true lover of Christ is manifested in intensely physical and emotional ways; such effects, in turn, are “tokyns” of inspiration.\textsuperscript{47} His thinking on such matters does not dramatically depart from established models. But Rolle does emphasize that the heights of devout contemplation lie elsewhere than in fasting, abstinence, spiritual advice, or other earthly conventions, for the successful contemplative is one “whos saule also with-in to A-noþer Ioy and a-noþer forme now is turnyd; he lyvis now not hym-self, crist treuly in hym lyvis, wharfore in his lufe he meltis, in hym-self he longis & nerhand he faylis for swetnes, vnneth he is for lufe.”\textsuperscript{48} Therefore, “He þat þis ioy has & in þis lyfe þus is gladdynd, of þe holy goste he is inspiryd.”\textsuperscript{49} In suggesting that God literally inhabits such a person, Rolle links inspiration firmly to embodiment.

Margery’s scribe later cites Incendium Amoris to justify her weeping after a local friar criticizes her for excessive emotion. Although initially irritated by Margery’s behavior, he “trustyd mor to hir wepyng & hir crying” after reading about the life of Mary d’Oignies and the “teerys þat sche wept” (152.36, 153.5). The scribe then notes that he “red also of Richard Hampol, hermyte, in Incendio Amoris leche mater þat meuyd hym to 3euyn credens to þe sayd creatur” (154.11–13). Rolle actually says little on religious tears in comparison to what is found in the lives of Mary d’Oignies

\textsuperscript{45} Compare this understanding of inspiration to the much more radical kind that was sometimes attributed to the apostles, whom God “enspired,” in the words of a Wycliffite commentary on the decalogue, with “heuenli lore.” The Lanterne of Liȝt, ed. L. M. Swinburn, EETS, o.s. 151 (London: Kegan Paul, 1917), p. 5, ll. 17–18.

\textsuperscript{46} See, as well, the opening discussion of “worthy & worshepful clerkys” who admit to themselves that Margery is “inspyred wyth þe Holy Gost” and that she should therefore “wryten & makyn a booke of hir felyngys & hir reuelacyons” (3.21–25).

\textsuperscript{47} The Fire of Love, ed. Harvey, 33.20.

\textsuperscript{48} The Fire of Love, ed. Harvey, 26.19–23.

\textsuperscript{49} The Fire of Love, ed. Harvey, 26.29–30.
and Elizabeth of Hungary, or *Stimulus Amoris*, all cited by the scribe. The inclusion of *Incendium Amoris* in this canon of highly affective devotional writing is another indication of how the text was invoked to explain, defend, and confer legitimacy upon some of the most conspicuous aspects of female lay piety in the period. The scribe calls upon Rolle to assist in the larger cultural project of consolidating a standard of religious observance for devout women, one centered on weeping and other tropes of the body. Yet Margery’s spiritual aspirations also resist the context created for them by the scribe’s use of *Incendium Amoris*, not the least because the *Book* and Rolle’s text disagree on how divine inspiration signifies. In contrast to figurations of female piety that emphasized the virtue of penitential weeping, Rolle, writing later in *Incendium Amoris*, elaborates his concept of divine inspiration through *calor*. He remarks that the church fathers and the saints were also the recipients of God’s warmth, describing this as a crucial element of their inspiration and lamenting how much his own time suffers by comparison: “In old tyme, if the holy goste enspiryd many, qwhy suld he not now his lufars take to behald Ioy of his godhed?”

Rolle’s fervent desire for his imagined acolyte to “ behald” the Godhead just as Rolle himself does stands in striking contrast to Margery’s experience at the Church of the Holy Apostles in Rome, where she goes on pilgrimage in 1414. As she is celebrating the Feast of St. John Lateran, God discloses to her that he would have her “‘weddyd to my Godhede, for I schal schewyn þe my preuyteys & my cownselys, for þu xalt wonyn wyth me wyth-owtyn ende’” (86.16–18). Margery, however, is anything but enthusiastic:

Pan þe creatur [as the *Book* often calls her] kept sylens in hir sowle & answeryd not þerto, for sche was ful sor aferd of þe Godhed & sche cowde no skyle of þe dalwyns of þe Godhede, for al hir lofe & al hir affeccyon was set in þe manhode of Crist & þerof cowde sche good skyle & sche wolde for no-thyng a partyd þerfro. Sche was so meche affectyd to þe manhode of Crist þat whan sche sey women in Rome beryn children in her armys, 3yf sche myth wetyn þat þei wer ony men children, sche schuld þan cryin, roryn, & wepyn as þei sche had seyn Crist in hys childhood (86.19–28).

Nicholas Watson characterizes this episode as yet another example of Margery’s preference for “union with Jesus” over “spiritual marriage to God,” evidence, he believes, of her behaving “as a good lay woman should.” However “affectyd to the manhode of Crist” Margery may be at first, the episode in the Church of the Holy Apostles does not end in simple affective reconciliation with Jesus. Nor does it reside complacently on the level

of the literal.\textsuperscript{52} The unproblematic relationship between inward grace and outward form ultimately gives way to a revelation in which God assures Margery that the holy life consists not so much in fasting or saying an abundance of prayers—“byddyn many bedys,” in the text’s familiar locution—but rather in God’s promise to speak in her soul:

\begin{quote}
Þerfor, dowtyr, þu hast as gret cawse to be mery as any lady in þis werld, &, 3yf þu knew, dowtyr, how meche þu plesyst me whan þu suffyrst me wilfully to spekyn in þe, þu schuldist neuyr do ōperwyse, for þis is an holy lyfe & þe tyme is ryth wel spent. For, dowtyr, þis lyfe plesyth me mor þan weryng of þe haburion or of þe hayr or fastyng of bred & watyr, for, 3yf þu seydest every day a thousands Pater Noster, þu xuldist not plesyn me so wel as þu dost whan þu art in silens & sufferyst me to speke in thy sowle (90.3, 89.15–25).
\end{quote}

Recalling this episode later in the \textit{Book}, the scribe remarks that it was during Margery’s travels in Rome and Jerusalem that “owr Lord of hys hy mercy drow hir affeccyon in-to hys Godhed, & þat was mor feruent in lofe & desyr & mor sotyl in vndirstondyng þan was þe Manhood” (209.5–7). This retrospective narration reframes the scene, lending a different valence to Margery’s experience at Christian holy sites. While in some respects her experience in the Church of the Holy Apostles encapsulates the affective devotion that criticism has come to associate with Margery—not only in terms of her emotional and physical attachment to the infant Jesus but also the many “gostly comfortys & bodily comfortys” she has experienced over the past twenty-five years, including the moment when she “felt fyrst þe fyer of loue brennyng in her brest”—it also refuses to affirm a spiritual life grounded solely in the literal solidity of God’s love, as Rolle would have it (87.30–31, 88.33–34).\textsuperscript{53} And if the impassioned manner in which Margery narrates how she “felt fyrst the fyer of love brennyng in her brest”—it also refuses to affirm a spiritual life grounded solely in the literal solidity of God’s love, as Rolle would have it (87.30–31, 88.33–34).\textsuperscript{53} And if the impassioned manner in which Margery narrates how she “felt fyrst the fyer of love brennyng in her brest” recalls \textit{Incendium Amoris}, God’s description of the holy life in this passage also lays emphasis on the faculty of thought and the intellectual contemplation of God over \textit{calor} and its associations with divine heat and inspiration.

IV.

By employing Rolle’s most important spiritual terms, the \textit{Book} imputes to Margery the intensely affective qualities of one inspired by the grace of the

\textsuperscript{52} Watson, “Middle English Mystics,” p. 563.

\textsuperscript{53} Susan Dickman, to name one such critic, comments that this episode is “typically” feminine in its insistence on the “concrete, sensuous meaning” of spiritual marriage. Dickman, “Margery Kempe and the Continental Tradition of the Pious Woman,” in \textit{The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England}, ed. Glasscoe, p. 161. Compare this reading to Karnes, “Nicholas Love and Medieval Meditations on Christ,” pp. 407–8. The editors note that the annotator of the manuscript wrote “R. hampell” in the outer margin beside the word “felt” at 88.33.
Lord, thereby occluding representations of the sacred that do not revolve around the physical and sensory imperatives of Rolle’s text. How, then, do we explain Margery’s own use of the word “dalyawns” to describe the experience of God’s divine speech in her soul? Her account of a kindly and sympathetic persona who “dallys” with her soul mirrors Rolle’s description of divine heat and love in its appeal to the senses and in its self-consciously erotic vocabulary; in this context, the very application of the term embodies the experience. As a metaphor for Margery’s relationship to the sacred, moreover, “dalyawns” seems to entail exactly the orthodox spiritual values—the fervent, even childlike celebration of a loving and compassionate Jesus—that Archbishop Arundel affirms in his favorable reaction to her request to take communion on a weekly basis. Describing “te maner of dalyawns pat owyr Lord dalyd to hyr sowle,” Margery is met with a surprisingly sympathetic response from the feared archbishop: “And he fond no defawt þerin but a-prevyd hir maner of leuyng & was ryght glad þat owyr mercyful Lord Cryst Ihesu schewyd swch grace in owyr days, byssed mot he be” (36.34–37.4). However radical a request this may have been—and it was radical—the encounter at Lambeth Palace celebrates “dalyawns” as a state of figurative betrothal to the incarnate Jesus, exactly the kind of spiritual commitment that Arundel and his clerical allies, seeking to consolidate an anti-Wycliffite orthodoxy in England, would have welcomed in an ambitious lay woman.

In these respects, the discourse of “dalyawns” in the Book acquires a certain legibility alongside Rolle’s own highly affective embrace of the Godhead. Yet here, as before, we must consider *Incendium Amoris* in light of Margery’s conversation with Richard Caister. Her account of “how sum-tyme þe Fadyr of Hevyn dalyd to hir sowle as pleynly and as veryly as o frend spekyth to a-noþer be bodyly spech” precipitates her comments on Rolle and the disclosure that her own visionary experiences do not conform to what she has “herd redyn” from *Incendium Amoris* (39.16–25). It is, in other words, Margery’s own attitude toward God’s “dalyawns” that most challenges the kind of affectivity championed by Rolle, for what Margery means by the term is predicated on suspending the constitutive mediation of the body and even of language itself: Christ’s “dalyawns” is

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54. On questions concerning the validity and authenticity of Margery’s visionary experience, see G. W. Adams, *Visions in Late Medieval England: Lay Spirituality and Sacred Glimpses of the Hidden Worlds of Faith* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 184–89. According to Barbara Newman, “Kempe’s scripted visions would have been invaluable to anyone wishing to make a case for her orthodoxy, since the normative piety of these meditations formed a reassuring contrast with the strangeness of her behavior.” Newman, “What Did It Mean to Say ‘I Saw?’,” p. 33.

with Margery’s soul and, more often, her “mende” or “thowt.” By contrast, Rolle’s spiritual project, and his authority as a devotional writer, hinge on his capacity to describe in vivid sensory terms how “the breathing Spirit” directed his intentions and actions. The terms he employs to articulate the experience of God’s love do not merely have their physical corollaries but are themselves “the essence of love, and the means by which love is experienced and understood,” as Rita Copeland has argued. In her discussion of Rolle’s rhetorical practices, Copeland identifies a “shift in focus from meaning signified and registered by the common conventions of language to language itself as affective tool and as sensual medium which can produce intimations of spiritual experience.” What inspires the contemplative is not the consciousness of God’s love or what God speaks to one’s “mende” or “thowt” but rather the physical effects of God in the form of heat, song, and sweetness, and the intensely emotional identification with the sacred that these reinforce in the faithful.

Margery invariably reveals the discursive limits of the affective in using much of her narrative to report what cannot be known through sensory perception; her persistent reference to a divine mental language—abstracted, even radically disconnected, from the familiar domain of parish devotion—prompts epistemological questions only implicit in Rolle. Margery’s privileged access to this divine inner language, and her continual return to it as a source of authority and spiritual power, cast the material and physical supplements of late medieval affective piety into doubt. Again and again, she reminds us that Christ does not merely appear to her in her revelations, or fire her mind with love, but also that he speaks with her at length in her consciousness, reassuring and edifying her in her devotion. God is not only in her thoughts; “hir mende & hir thowt” are instead “so ioyynyd to God þat sche neuyr forgâte hym but contynualy had mende of hym & behelde hym in alle creaturys” (172.11–14). What Rolle sees as a sign of the elect, the privileged experience of God’s grace, Kempe generalizes into an entire epistemology. “Dalyawns,” in the Book’s usage, is thus the basis for a spiritual alternative to Rolle’s notion that faith is validated by the physical experience of God’s love, a process that cannot occur apart from the body.

56. For further discussion of this passage, see Watson, Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority, p. 131.
60. It is worth noting that the Book sometimes refers to “sterynggys” to denote a process...
One might expect the *Book* to highlight the body as a medium for the knowledge of God given how impassioned and physically demanding Margery’s devotions often were. The same can be said of Margery’s “il-literacy,” which, it is often assumed, made her inclined to seek spiritual meaning through sensory perception, and from there to literalize and embody the sacred. Yet she also has reason to resist this model because it makes salvation the exclusive province of the priests and clerics who managed the spiritual resources—most significantly, the sacraments—through which God was made manifest to the body and to the senses, or what Margery refers to as her “bodily eyne” and “bodily heryng” (88.7, 90.35). Her colloquies with God offer modes of piety dependent upon the material practices of an economic and social world controlled “at all social levels” by men. As a religious experience that transcends the boundaries of sacerdotal practice, “dalyawns” also departs from Rolle’s vision of the contemplative, who knows divine truth because it is physically manifest.

The dynamic of identity and difference evident in Margery’s relationship to Rolle extends to Hilton as well, whose hybrid spirituality—informed as it was by writings as diverse as Gilbert of Hoyland’s *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, William Flete’s *De Remediis contra Temptaciones*, and M. N.’s glosses from the English translation of Marguerite Porete’s *Mirror of Simple Souls*—surfaces with Margery’s invocation of him during her conversation with the vicar at St. Stephen’s. In the scene, Margery groups “Hyltons boke” with *Incendium Amoris* and other authoritative models of the spiritual life very close to what Rolle meant by the term (e.g., 3.19 and 8.1): “the physical symptoms of his passionate spiritual ecstasy,” according to Staley. Staley, the *Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 236 (note on l. 160). I would stress, however, that the term “dalyawns” is a much more frequent and important one for Margery.


nevertheless superseded by God’s own “werkyng in hir sowle” (39.26–27). As I have suggested, this moment underscores the specificity of Margery’s spiritual experience even as it holds other members of the same textual community securely in view. But whereas Rolle’s authority is tied to a specific text and its circulation among vernacular readers who deploy its terms, *The Scale of Perfection* receives no explicit mention, remaining merely an inert material object whose horizon of reception is limited to its own author: “Hyltons boke.” This distinction in how Margery represents her spiritual contemporaries suggests that Hilton’s authority is more circumscribed than Rolle’s, or at least that *The Scale of Perfection* presents itself to her account in quite different ways than does *Incendium Amoris*, the more obvious late medieval analogue. To be sure, the one figure excluded from Newman’s outline of Margery’s “mimetic mysticism,” to recall the passage quoted at the outset of this essay, is Walter Hilton.64

Hilton’s marginal position, both in Margery’s conversation with the vicar and in the *Book* itself, can no more be taken for granted than can her many references to other spiritual writers whom she nonetheless seeks to transcend. She is free to draw from “Hyltons boke” precisely because it already stands apart from the discourses thought to motivate and explain so much of her piety. Having criticized the bodily devotion particular to Margery’s more obvious spiritual influences, *The Scale of Perfection* opens up enough of a distance between itself and the *Book* that for Margery to appropriate not only its concepts but its very locutions becomes, paradoxically, an act of spiritual self-fashioning. To imitate Hilton, then, is to subvert the mimetic mysticism legible elsewhere in her account, and so belongs to the same process of differentiating her spiritual concerns from those of *Incendium Amoris*.

In the remaining pages, I want to suggest that this is indeed the case concerning Margery’s use of the term “dalyawns”: Hilton brings forward an understanding of “dalyawns” that allows Margery’s colloquies with God to stand for something from beyond the boundaries of Rolle’s affective devotion.65 Hilton devotes much of the last chapter of his book to describing what it means to be God’s “trewe spouse,” citing the “loveli daliaunces of privei speche atwixe Jhesu and a soule” from Job 4:12.66 Although at first a very conventional excursus on spiritual marriage, this section actually

65. Sanford Meech and Hope Emily Allen, the *Book*’s first editors, long ago drew attention to Margery’s more “specialized” use of the term “dalyaws.” They noted that the word “was not used for mystical experience by Rolle, but appears, in Margery’s sense, in the elevated last chapter of the *Scale of Perfection* of Walter Hilton” (p. 256, note on 2.32, 39). To the best of my knowledge, the implications of this insight have not been pursued in criticism on either author.
concludes a larger discussion that provides a context for the discursive revaluation of “dalyawns” later evident in the *Book*. Hilton begins by distinguishing between “bodili fervours” and “gosti affeccions,” the latter of which are “stired inward thorugh grace of the Hooli Gost.” This follows logically from his criticism of Rolle—and, specifically, of calor, dulcor, and canor as elaborated in *Incendium Amoris*—earlier in the *Scale of Perfection*, where Hilton concedes that while there is a place for affectivity in the contemplative life (since there are souls that “aren not sotel in kynde, ne are not yit maad goostli thorugh grace”), nevertheless “heeryng of delitable songe, or feelynge of comfortable heete in the bodi, or seynge of light, or swettenesse of bodili savour…aren not goosteli feelynge,” which are, by contrast, only “felt in the myghtis of the soule.” He goes on to illustrate spiritual inwardness through the figure of what he calls the “vois of grace,” which assures true contemplatives that they are “not disseyved bi ther owen feynynge, or bi the myddai fend”—fears harbored by Margery herself.

Hilton’s account suggests that such disquiet is unnecessary for someone like Margery, whose inward mental apprehension of spiritual truth is not dependent upon external forms and images, or the response they elicit in the faithful. When Margery seeks advice from Julian of Norwich about whether she is deceived by the “many holy spechys & dalyawns þat owyr Lord spak to hir sowle,” the anchoress responds by citing Paul, who taught that the Holy Spirit “makyth vs to askyn & preyn wyth mornyngys & wepyngys so plentyvowsly þat þe terys may not be nowmeryd” (42.12–13, 43.4–6). She adds that no evil spirit would ever grant such “tokenys” (43.6). Julian’s response not only validates the most affective elements of Margery’s devotion but also reinforces the importance of what can be observed or perceived: weeping or tears are “tokenys” offering visible evidence of true faith. Hilton, however, stresses that the spiritual in fact precedes and gives meaning to images and objects, the outward forms to which one’s affective devotion is drawn; he argues that when God’s voice

sowneth in a soule it is of so greet myght sumtyme, that the soule sodenly leith of hande al that there is—praiynge, spekynge, redynge, or thenkynge in manere bifoire seid, and al maner bodili werk—and lestetheneth therfo fulli, herende, perceyvande in reste and in love the swete stevene of this goostli vois, as it were ravesched fro the mynde of alle ertheli thynges.

In foregrounding the spiritual significance of “this goostli vois,” the passage compares closely to the moment in the *Book*, discussed earlier, when

God instructs Margery to set aside her fervent prayer (“byddyng of many bedys”) and instead “speke to me be thowt.”⁷¹ There is, however, an even deeper congruence between Kempe and Hilton here, an even more significant way in which Hilton carves out a discursive context for Kempe. After commenting on the “privei vois of Jhesu,” Hilton proceeds to argue that devotional images of Jesus, the homely persona of Christ so familiar to the world Margery documents in her narrative, are not where spiritual truth resides most fully; instead, such images refer back to the subjectivity that the successful contemplative already shares with God. “And thanne sumtyme in this pees,” Hilton writes, “scheweth Jhesu Him, sumtyme as an eighful maister, and sumtyme as a reverent fadir, and sumtyme as a loveli spouse.”⁷² The most homely and accessible images of Christ are but inferences, the function of a deeper knowledge set within the soul of the true contemplative.

By the time Hilton finally describes God’s “curtais daliaunce” at the end of the chapter, he has already invested the topos of spiritual marriage with a wide range of associations.⁷³ Thus for Hilton, “daliaunce” represents a synthesis of what he sees as the “cognitive character of contemplation” with his teachings about the active love of God.⁷⁴ With this set of associations in place, The Scale of Perfection revises our understanding of how “dalyawns” signifies in Margery’s narrative, suggesting that a discourse other than Rolle’s was available to her (and to her scribe) as she sorted out how to express and conceptualize her relationship to the sacred. One would not want to deny the important ways in which the Book cites Rolle, who was as authoritative a figure as Hilton when it came to providing the structures within which a spiritual writer such as Margery might seek to metaphorize religious experience. But her concerns find a compelling parallel in Hilton’s use of the same figure, “daliaunce,” to articulate the spiritual priorities of the contemplative life and to cultivate a knowledge of Christ’s divinity that moves beyond one’s relationship to externals.

⁷⁴. According to Clark, “Hilton insists on the cognitive character of contemplation, while maintaining that it is through God’s gift of love that we are brought to this knowledge.” Hilton, The Scale of Perfection, ed. Clark and Dorward, p. 50. See, too, Clark’s assertion that Hilton “was watchful against antinomian quietism of the type known on the Continent,” and that this “gives added point to his careful exposition in Scale 2 on the nature of ‘perfect love of God’, ‘contemplation’, or ‘reforming in feeling.’” Clark, “Liberty of Spirit,” p. 68.
This pattern bears, too, on our understanding of gender and devotion as refracted through the *Book*. As discussed earlier, Rolle’s distinctive spiritual attunements gave men such as the vicar (or Margery’s scribe or Arundel or any one of the male figures who describe her as inspired) a framework for reading the physical and the emotional in pious lay women, one that occludes the more internalized form of sacred communication that the text actually documents. The *Book*’s various internal audiences creates the impression that Margery is only incidentally concerned with whatever cannot be embodied in ritual or outward forms. Yet her more “specialized” (to quote H. E. Allen) use of the term “dalyawns,” and its pronounced difference from the sort of divine inspiration Rolle fetishizes—with its presuppositions about the undeniable physicality of God’s love—challenges models that position Margery’s account in determinate relation to the fervent affective piety of *Incendium Amoris*.

VI.

An earlier critical tradition tended to argue that Rolle’s importance “lies mainly in his influence on later mystics and on subsequent religious thought.” While literary history is now more often figured in terms of discontinuity and rupture, there is still a sense that “Rolle’s career as a self-declared saint and divinely inspired writer . . . set key parts of the agenda for the vernacular theology of the late fourteenth century,” a typology that implicitly but inevitably extends to Margery herself. How scholarship accounts for fifteenth-century spirituality and devotion, that is, has long depended on seeing Rolle and Kempe as part of the same paradigm. It is with this version of literary history in mind that the disjunctures between them, though often overlooked, become significant. Without denying that the *Book* derives much from Rolle, I also hope to have shown that Margery’s colloquies with God posit the insubstantiality


of the sacred and a devotional mode not always enacted on the level of the body itself. Aspiring to an unmediated intensely inter-subjected relationship with divinity, she departs from the model of affective piety derived from *Incendium Amoris*, with its emphasis on the specific physical and material forms grace might assume in the successful contemplative. To that extent, Margery’s “mimetic mysticism” encounters its discursive limit in Rolle even while inscribing within it a different but no less significant spiritual lineage.