

‘...but have you read this?’: Dialogicity in Robert Thornton’s Holy Name Devotions

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Abstract

This article examines a particular set of texts in an early fifteenth-century religious anthology composed by the Yorkshire gentleman Robert Thornton. Together with other religious prose and verse, Thornton copied a number of Middle English and Latin texts, on the subject of devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus, into the folios of what is now Lincoln Cathedral MS 91. The article demonstrates the uniqueness of this set of Holy Name texts in late medieval England, both in terms of individual items and the combination of material. Some of these texts, namely those written by the English mystic Richard Rolle, were controversial in their treatment of the Name of Jesus, and contained claims for which some of Rolle’s followers were criticised by the early fifteenth century. I argue that their controversial content does not easily accord with scholarly characterisations of Thornton’s collecting impulses as conservative and spiritually unambitious. The article also discusses how Thornton copied other, more conservative, statements, that aimed to control Rollean Holy Name enthusiasm; in this case by that other great English mystical writer, Walter Hilton. I argue that this juxtaposition of enthusiastic and cautious statements points to practices of compilation and religious reading that were profoundly dialogic, bringing contradictory material together for use by Thornton’s household in their daily devotions that opened up a range of possible practices. Examination of the other religious texts within Lincoln MS 91 suggests some likely responses to the Holy Name material that Thornton copied. The article finishes with discussion of Thornton’s literary networks and how the dialogic nature of his literary practices would have involved complex social relationships with a range of clerical and lay agents. It asks how Thornton’s own agency might have worked in collaboration with clerical advisers who sought to guide, but did not control, his reading.

Introduction: Robert Thornton and the Holy Name of Jesus

Robert Thornton was a member of the minor gentry family of East Newton, in the small North Yorkshire parish of Stonegrave, in the Wapentake of Ryedale, less than fifteen miles

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west of Pickering and twenty miles north of York. Thornton is famous for the two remarkable manuscript books which he produced in the first half of the fifteenth century. He was an assiduous copyist of Middle English prose and verse as well as some short Latin pieces, which, between around 1420 and 1450, he progressively and simultaneously gathered and distributed across what are now two discrete volumes: Lincoln Cathedral MS 91 and London, British Library, Additional MS 31042, commonly known as the Lincoln and London manuscripts.¹

Unusually, these volumes contain both religious and romance texts. I concentrate here on Lincoln, whose religious works are gathered together into what has become known as its third booklet, and on a unique set of texts within that booklet that deal with devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus. Thornton was both eclectic and discriminating in his copying of texts, organising them simultaneously over time into separate quires and groups of quires. The other parts of Lincoln were dedicated to Middle English verse romances (booklets 1 and 2) and medical texts (booklet 4). The contents of what would become Lincoln MS 91 probably existed in the form of unbound booklets for some time and perhaps even until after their compiler's death when, at some unknown point, they were bound together into a single volume.²

By the early fifteenth century, devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus in the West had a long history. From the early Church onwards Christian writers had promoted personal attachment to the name 'Jesus' through prayer, worship, and meditation as well as its benefits of healing, protection, and salvation. Up to the end of the thirteenth century, devotion to the Holy Name was confined largely to the religious orders and elements of the nobility but appears to have been promoted by the mendicants from the second half of the thirteenth

¹ On Thornton and his family see George R. Keiser, 'Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91: Life and Milieu of the Scribe', *Studies in Bibliography*, 32 (1979), 158–79 and idem, 'More Light on the Life and Milieu of Robert Thornton', *Studies in Bibliography*, 36 (1983), 111–119 and Rosalind Field with Dav Smith, 'Afterword. Robert Thornton Country' in *Robert Thornton and his Books. Essays on the Lincoln and London Thornton Manuscripts*, ed. by Susanna Fein and Michael Johnston (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2014), pp. 257–72 (pp. 257–58).

² Lincoln is available in a full facsimile: *The Thornton Manuscript (Lincoln Cathedral MS. 91)*, intr. D. S. Brewer and A. E. B. Owen (London: The Scolar Press, 1975). For descriptions of both manuscripts see Susanna Fein, 'The Contents of Robert Thornton's Manuscripts', in *Robert Thornton and his Books*, ed. by Fein and Johnston, pp. 13–65 and on the process of their production see, in the same volume, George R. Keiser, 'Robert Thornton: Gentleman, Reader and Scribe', pp. 67–108 and Ralph Hanna, 'The Growth of Robert Thornton's Books', *Studies in Bibliography*, 40 (1987), 51–61.

century, and received papal backing in 1274. From the fourteenth century, earlier statements about the Name were reworked, translated into vernacular languages and disseminated to the broader populace. Distinctive cults of the Holy Name developed in different territories, gained significant popular followings and, in time, official sanction, although not without controversy.³ In England, the fourteenth-century popularisation of the devotion was largely due to the Yorkshire hermit and mystic, Richard Rolle, who, up to his death in 1349, was a strong advocate of the Name of Jesus in the ascent to contemplation in his Latin and English works. By the time Thornton began to copy the contents of his two volumes, numerous statements on the subject by Rolle and other writers were in circulation.⁴

Questions of Dialogicity in Lincoln MS 91

The Holy Name texts that Thornton brought together in Lincoln provide an especially rich case-study of the intensely dialogic nature of processes and practices of compilation and devotional reading in fifteenth-century England. I address several different aspects of this dialogicity in this article. To begin with, I explore the ways in which the different Holy Name items in Thornton's book might have been in dialogue with one another and the implications

³ A. Cabassut, 'La devotion au nom de Jésus dans l'église d'occident', *La Vie Spirituelle*, 86 (1952), 46–69; Peter R. Biasiotto, *History of the Development of Devotion to the Holy Name* (St Bonaventure, NY: St Bonaventure College and Seminary, 1943); Rob Lutton, 'Devotion to the Holy Name in the Medieval West', in *Illuminating Jesus in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Jane Beal (Leiden–Boston: Brill, forthcoming).

⁴ On Rolle's contribution see Hope Emily Allen, *Writings Ascribed to Richard Rolle Hermit of Hampole and Materials for his Biography*, Modern Language Association of America Monograph Series, 3 (New York: D. C. Heath & Co., 1927) with key statements at pp. 4, 72–77 and 100–101 and see index for multiple other references. See also Nicholas Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 18–19, 55, 237, 243, 247, 302 n. 7, 302–303 n. 9 and *Richard Rolle's Expositio super novem lectiones mortuorum: an introduction and contribution towards a critical edition*, ed. by Malcolm Moyes, 2 vols (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1988), I, 25–67, 83–86. On both Rolle and the wider literature of the Holy Name in England see, for example, Renevey, "'Name Above Names': The Devotion to the Name of Jesus from Richard Rolle to Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection I*," in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England, Ireland and Wales: Exeter Symposium VI*, ed. by Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), pp. 103–21; Catherine A. Carsley, 'Devotion to the Holy Name: Late Medieval Piety in England', *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 53 (1992), 156–72; Rob Lutton, "'Love this Name that is IHC": Vernacular Prayers, Hymns and Lyrics to the Holy Name of Jesus in Pre-Reformation England', in *Vernacularity in England and Wales c. 1350–1550*, ed. by Elisabeth Salter and Helen Wicker, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 115–41. My forthcoming monograph on the Holy Name will provide a comprehensive study of the devotion in medieval England.

of this for his apprehension of devotion to the Holy Name. Scholars have long drawn attention to the ways in which compilers combined different texts in devotional miscellanies and anthologies and how these combinations shaped the ways in which these texts were read, understood and used.⁵ One aspect of this is the juxtaposition of material in both English and Latin. The Holy Name texts in Lincoln include a unique Latin extract as well as items in English. Given its members' likely limited comprehension of Latin, what does this suggest about the nature of religious reading, prayer and contemplation within the Thornton household?

Beyond the ways in which texts 'spoke' to one another, Lincoln raises important questions about the dialogic nature of processes of compilation themselves. These processes were complex and involved the interplay between the intentions of the compiler and the random and fitful availability of desirable material.⁶ Often groups of texts we find in one manuscript book were copied, ready-made, from another, making compilation a derivative process but one always subject to adaptation and re-combination with new material.⁷ Thornton's Holy-Name material poses particularly pertinent questions in this regard.

The dialogicity of compilation also rested in its social interactions, between the compiler and a range of agents, networks and institutions. In Thornton's case these combined the local and more distant and may have been institutionally and culturally diverse. One

⁵ See, for example, Jill C. Havens, 'A Narrative of Faith: Middle English Devotional Anthologies and Religious Practice', *Journal of the Early Book Society*, 7 (2004), 67–84 and, on Thornton, Ruth Kennedy, 'The Evangelist in Robert Thornton's Devotional Book: Organising Principles at the Level of the Quire', *Journal of the Early Book Society*, 8 (2005), 71–95.

⁶ See, for example, on the significance of the 'booklet' and 'exemplar poverty' in the compilation of religious manuscript books: Pamela R. Robinson, "'The Booklet': A Self-Contained Unit in Composite Manuscripts", *Codicologica*, 3 (1980), 46–69 and Ralph Hanna, 'Booklets in Medieval Manuscripts: Further Considerations', in idem, *Pursuing History: Middle English Manuscripts and Their Texts* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 21–34, 284–87.

⁷ See, for example, Margaret Connolly, 'Books for the "helpe of euery persooone þat þenkiþ to be saued": Six Devotional Anthologies from Fifteenth-Century London', *Yearbook of English Studies*, 33, *Medieval and Early Modern Miscellanies and Anthologies* (2003), 170–81 and Vincent Gillespie, 'Vernacular Books of Religion', in idem, *Looking in Holy Books: Essays on Late Medieval Religious Writing in England* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 145–73 and see also 'Introduction' and Derek A. Pearsall, 'The Whole Book: Late Medieval English Manuscript Miscellanies and their Modern Interpreters' (pp. 17–29) and Ralph Hanna, 'Miscellaneity and Vernacularity: Conditions of Literary Production in late Medieval England' (pp. 37–51) in *The Whole Book: Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany*, ed. by Stephen G. Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

aspect of these interactions, that had a particularly important bearing on Thornton's practices of compilation and the texts that ended up in his books, was his relations with clerical advisers, both members of the religious orders and secular clergy. It is likely that at least one member of the clergy acted as spiritual and literary advisor to Thornton, and even wrote in the Lincoln manuscript. This in turn raises questions about the degree of control such clerical advisors and helpers would have exercised over Thornton's access to, and selection of, his textual material and where the initiative came from for the acquisition of works on particular subjects or themes such as the Name of Jesus. This is particularly pertinent to the Holy Name material in Lincoln, because some of the items Thornton acquired contain surprisingly controversial content, whereas others are overtly conservative. How did devotional enthusiasm and doctrinal conservatism interact to produce such a striking combination of texts that encompassed both the heterodox and orthodox aspects of the cult, and what does such a heterogeneous collection of material suggest about Thornton's religious reading and spiritual aspirations? I argue here that it suggests such practices were profoundly dialogic in and of themselves.⁸

A final consideration is Thornton's audience. Beyond his own individual interests, he compiled his books for use by and within his household, including for female family members, both in the context of the liturgy as well as more private reading and devotion. Here too notions of dialogue are helpful. How might his own particular interests and aspirations have interacted with the spiritual needs of his family? One might imagine that such responsibilities would have produced a more conservative and conventional approach to compilation, but although one can see this at work, the Holy Name material is evidence of a more overtly dialogic process, not altogether resolved or coherent but representative of different aspirations and interests. The different elements of the cult are all present: the more

⁸ For parallel discussion of the implications of manuscript books containing both orthodox and lollard texts see, for example, Amanda Moss, 'Context and Construction: The Nature of Vernacular Piety in a Fifteenth-Century Devotional Anthology', in *Vernacularity*, ed. by Salter and Wicker, pp. 41–64 and Ryan Perry and Stephen Kelly, 'Devotional Cosmopolitanism in Fifteenth-Century England', in *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. by Vincent Gillespie and Kantik Ghosh, *Medieval Church Studies* 21 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), pp. 363–80; Elisabeth Salter, 'Evidence for Religious Reading Practice and Experience in Times of Change: Some Models Provided by Late Medieval Texts of the Ten Commandments' in *Discovering the Riches of the Word: Religious Reading in Late Medieval and early Modern Europe*, ed. by Sabrina Corbellini, Margriet Hoogvliet and Bart Ramakers, *Intersections* 38 (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2015), pp. 88–110.

mystical and ecstatic, the more routinized use of the Name in prayer and the liturgy, and its talismanic power against spiritual enemies.

Robert Thornton's Holy Name Texts and Dialogic Reading Practices

I am not the first to observe that the Lincoln manuscript contains a unique collection of texts that address the Holy Name.⁹ Thornton returned to the subject more than once in his endeavours, and the items he copied include some unique excerpts. The first text that he acquired was probably the Middle English translation of Rolle's *Oleum effusum*, the fourth section of his *Super Canticum Cantorum*, his commentary on the Song of Songs.¹⁰ This was on the half-verse 'Oleum effusum nomen tuum' (your name is oil poured out) and it circulated independently in Latin and English, often with the title *Encomium Nominis Ihesu*.¹¹ A variant version formed the ninth tract of the popular late fourteenth-century English compilation the *Pore Caitif*.¹² *Oleum effusum* was therefore one of the most widespread Rollean statements on the Name and the most sustained although, at around 1,500 words, relatively short.

In Lincoln it is given the title, unique among its English copies: 'Of the vertu3 of the haly name of Ihesu', which, whether derived from Thornton's exemplar or added by his own hand, leaves no doubt as to what he thought he was copying. In addition, like all the various Rollean pieces that Thornton acquired, it is clearly identified as being by the Yorkshire

⁹ For example, among others, George R. Keiser, "'To Knawe God Almyghtyn": Robert Thornton's Devotional Book', *Analecta Cartusiana*, 106 (1984), 103–29 (p. 120).

¹⁰ For an edition and modern English translation see Ralph Hanna, *Editing Medieval Texts. An Introduction, Using Exemplary Materials Derived from Richard Rolle, 'Super Canticum' 4* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015).

¹¹ Allen, *Writings*, pp. 63, 66–68, 406; *Richard Rolle. Uncollected Prose and Verse with related Northern texts*, ed. by Ralph Hanna, EETS o.s. 329 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), liv–lvii; A. I. Doyle, 'A survey of the origins and circulation of theological writings in English in the 14th, 15th, and early 16th centuries with special consideration of the part of the clergy therein', 2 vols (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1953), II, 118–20.

¹² Allen, *Writings*, pp. 63, 406; *Uncollected*, ed. by Hanna, lii, lvi–lvii. On the *Pore Caitif* see *The Pore Caitif: edited from Ms. Harley 2336 with introduction and notes*, ed. by Sister Mary Teresa Brady, Unpublished Dissertation (Fordham University, 1954); idem, 'The *Pore Caitif*. An introductory study', *Traditio*, 10 (1954), 529–48 (pp. 531–2, 541); idem, 'Rolle's *Form of Living* and *The Pore Caitif*', *Traditio*, 36 (1980), 426–35; idem, 'Rolle and the pattern of tracts in *The Pore Caitif*', *Traditio*, 39 (1983), 456–65.

hermit with the rubric: ‘Ricardus heremita super versiculo Oleum effusum nomen tuum in cantica etc.’¹³

What would Thornton have learned about the Holy Name from Rolle’s *Oleum effusum* and how might it have fuelled his interest and shaped his devotional practices? The first thing to note is that *Oleum effusum* is full of Rolle’s sensory language of ecstatic mystical experience and that it associates meditation on the Name of Jesus with that experience. This language references Rolle’s three categories of heat (*fervor*), sweetness (*dulcor*), and song (*canor*) that permeate his writings and describe his ascent to mystical contemplation.¹⁴ *Oleum effusum* urges constant meditation on the name of Jesus:

This name es in myn ere heuenly sowne, in my mouthe honyfull swetnes. Wharefore na wondire, I luf þat name, the whylke gyffes comforth to me in all angwys. I can noghte pray, I cane noght hafe mynde [think/meditate] bot sownnande [without resounding] the name of Ihesu. I sauyre noghte ioye that with Ihesu es noght mengede [mixed]. Whareso I be, whareso I sytt, whatso I doo, the mynd [memory] of the sauoyre of the name Ihesu departis noghte fra my mynde [thought].¹⁵

The *Oleum* goes on to describe how this devotion to the name of Jesus leads to a longing and love for the person of Jesus that brings a ‘delycouseste swettnes’ into the mind, and ravishes with joy and inflames the heart and mind with the heat and fire of love.¹⁶

Oleum effusum is not just about the delicious ecstasies that are to be had through the use of the Name but also its moral and salvific power. It goes on to list the many benefits of holding the name in the mind and of coveting unceasingly to love it:

Sothely nathynge slokynns sa [so extinguishes] fell flawmes, dystroyes ill thoghtes, puttes owte venemous affeccyons, dos awaye coryous [unduly fastidious] and vayne ocupacyons fra vs. This name Ihesu lelely [unfailingly] haldyn in mynde drawes by þe rote vyces, settys vertus,

¹³ Lincoln, MS 91, fols 192r–194r. The Lincoln *Oleum effusum* text is edited in *Uncollected*, ed. by Hanna, pp. 3, 5, 7, 9, 11. Subsequent references to the text give page and line numbers from this edition.

¹⁴ See, for example, Watson, *Rolle*, pp. 68–72, and *Emendatio Vitae; Orationes ad honorem nominis Ihesu edited from Cambridge University Library MSS Dd.v.64 and Kk.vi.20*, ed. by Nicholas Watson, Centre for Medieval Studies (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1995), p. 14. The most famous statement is in Rolle’s *Incendium Amoris*, ed. by Margaret Deanesly (Manchester: Longmans, Green & Co., 1915), p. 190.

¹⁵ p. 3. 12–21.

¹⁶ p. 3. 31–p. 5. 47.

insawes [infuses] charytee, inzettis sauoire [pleasure] of heuenly thynges, wastys discorde, reformes pese, gyffes inlastande [inwardly persisting] ryste, dose awaye greuosnes of fleschely desyris, turnes all erthely thyng to noye, fyllys þe luffande [lover, lit. ‘the inclining’] of gastely ioye [...]¹⁷

More than once *Oleum* emphasises that righteousness and salvation can be attained only by those who truly love the Name, for example: ‘He couaytes wele hys saluacyone þat kepis besyly in hym þe name of Ihesu.’¹⁸ Moreover, the joy that springs from love of the name in this life will continue and be fulfilled in the next, where the righteous will join with the angels in forever beholding Jesus; inward joy by grace will reach its apogee in sight of joy. Here the text returns to a familiar theme in Rolle’s works: that different degrees of eternal joy – and so glorification – will be bestowed according to different degrees of attainment of love in this life.¹⁹ As we will see, Thornton copied another Rollean text a little further on in Lincoln that addresses this theme even more explicitly.

The third theme of *Oleum effusum* is the Name’s apotropaic qualities: its effectiveness against temptation and, explicitly, the assaults of demons. It identifies mental meditation and repeated speaking of the name with the mouth as effective defences against such attacks. These less mystical but no less supernatural powers are exemplified in the narration that forms the conclusion to the *Oleum*. This was an important text in the development of the Rolle cult and in the connection that developed between him as a holy figure and his devotion to the Name.²⁰ It was included in the *Officium*, the liturgical compilation prepared in the hope of Rolle’s canonization by his Yorkshire followers.²¹ In the *Oleum* it normally forms an integral part of the work, whereas in Thornton it is copied immediately after but as a separate item with the title: ‘Narracio. A tale þat Richarde hermet’, which suggests that Thornton’s

¹⁷ p. 5. 59–65.

¹⁸ p. 9. 124–25.

¹⁹ p. 7. 78–103.

²⁰ *Richard Rolle’s Expositio*, ed. by Moyes, I, 85–86.

²¹ Allen, *Writings*, pp. 58, 75; *Emendatio Vitae*, ed. by Watson, pp. 23–4. For the passage in the *Officium* see *The Officium and Miracula of Richard Rolle of Hampole*, ed. by Reginald Maxwell Woolley (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1919), pp. 36–37 and for a modern English translation see Frances M. M. Comper, *The Life of Richard Rolle, Together with an Edition of his English Lyrics* (London: J. M. Dent, 1928 this edn 1933), p. 305. For a recent discussion of the *Officium* see Elizabeth Freeman, ‘The Priory of Hampole and its Literary Culture: English Religious Women and Books in the Age of Richard Rolle’, *Parergon*, 29 (2012), 1–25 (pp. 12–19).

source also presented it separately, perhaps indicating a particularly Northern approach shaped by Rolle's personal cult.²²

The *narracio* tells how Rolle, on adopting the solitary life, was tempted by the devil in the guise of a beautiful young woman, previously known to the hermit, who came and lay down beside him at night. Fearing he might be tempted he tried to rise to bless them both by making the sign of the cross in the name of the Holy Trinity, but he found that he was unable to speak or raise a hand. Realising his nocturnal visitor was the devil in disguise, Rolle turned to God and with his mind said 'A ihesu, how precyous es thi blude' making the sign of the cross with his finger in his breast. At this his assailant grew weak 'and sodanly all was awaye and I thankked Gode þat delyuerd me.'²³ Rolle recounts how from that day onwards he dedicated himself to loving the Name of Jesus and the more he grew in that love the sweeter the Name became. The result was Rolle's continual contemplation of the Holy Name: 'and to þis daye it went noghte fra my mynde',²⁴ perhaps the most important message of the *Oleum effusum*: to make the Name of Jesus an object of continual meditation.²⁵

Reading Thornton's copy of *Oleum effusum* in isolation it is difficult to know how he might he have appropriated its message. One can imagine how its more mystical elements might have gone over his head or seemed impractical for a member of the minor gentry with the daily concerns of estates, household and business. It begs the question: how might he have put the text into action? An obvious place to begin to try to answer these questions is to consider the other Holy Name texts in Lincoln, as well as the other religious works which he gathered. This is because he would almost certainly have read the *Oleum* in dialogue with these other works. Indeed, he is likely to have acquired some of these other items precisely because they offered opportunities for dialogue with the *Oleum* and facilitated practices of devotional reading which explored the interconnections between texts.

²² For a similar suggestion of Thornton's interest in Rolle as a local religious figure see Mary Michele Poellinger, "'The rosseld spere to his herte rynnes": Religious Violence in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* and the Lincoln Thornton Manuscript', in *Robert Thornton*, ed. by Fein and Johnston, pp. 157–75 esp. p. 160 and on the likely continuing local interest in Rolle see, for example, Thompson, 'Another Look', pp. 185–86. On the development of Rolle's cult and its association with the nunnery of Hampole further south near Doncaster see Freeman, 'Priory of Hampole', 13–18.

²³ p. 9. 144–46.

²⁴ p. 9. 148–p. 11. 149.

²⁵ p. 9. 131–p. 11. 153.

The *Oleum effusum* is the first of a series of short items, nearly all attributed to Rolle, apparently purposively copied together in booklet 3 of Lincoln from folios 192r to 196v. These include four Middle English moral exempla on true contrition and the demands of the Christian life, the *Commentary on the Decalogue*, *Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit* and *Desire and Delight*.²⁶ While some of these address contemplation, none are especially mystical or mention the Name of Jesus. Before these though, and immediately following the *Oleum effusum*, is a short Latin prayer for deliverance from enemies, attributed to Rolle: ‘Deus noster refugium’ (God is our refuge), whose themes naturally follow the narration of Rolle’s temptation that precedes it.²⁷ Following this is the short Latin hymn ‘Ihesu nostra redempcio’, attributed to St Ambrose, which celebrates Christ’s defeat of the powers of sin and death.²⁸ We might speculate how these two Latin items would have lent themselves to use in or during the liturgy in the Thornton family chapel, licenced in 1398.²⁹ They reinforce the *Oleum*’s message of the salvific and protective qualities of the Name of Jesus. Moreover, other material in the Lincoln manuscript suggests that Thornton had a keen interest in the Name’s apotropaic properties and collected such items intentionally. These comprise a cluster of medical and protective charms, prayers and textual amulets that head the series of short items that Thornton copied into the final three folios of the second booklet of Lincoln after the romance texts.³⁰ It is this sort of material that caused John Thompson to observe that Thornton adhered to a ‘particular brand of simple — some would say naïve — piety’³¹ but Lincoln also contains much more advanced items, in addition to *Oleum effusum*, that have

²⁶ Items 49–60 in Susanna Fein, ‘Contents’, *Robert Thornton*, ed. by Fein and Johnston, pp. 36–39.

²⁷ *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole and English Father of the Church and His Followers*, ed. by Carl Horstmann, 2 vols (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1895–6) I, 192 and see discussion in Allen, *Writings*, p. 324.

²⁸ *Yorkshire Writers*, ed. by Horstmann, I, 192–93.

²⁹ For the chapel see Keiser, ‘More Light’, pp. 111–12. On other para-liturgical items in the Lincoln MS that position its contents within the context of regular household religious performance see John J. Thompson, ‘Another Look at the Religious Texts in Lincoln, Cathedral Library, MS 91’, in *Late-Medieval Religious Texts and their Transmission: Essays in Honour of A. I. Doyle*, ed. by A. J. Minnis (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994), pp. 169–87 (pp. 174–77).

³⁰ These comprise three (two English and one Latin) toothache charms, a Latin charm invoking the cross for protection, and a Latin textual amulet to be worn for deliverance and protection: items 22–28 in Fein, ‘Contents’, pp. 29–31 all but one of which are printed in *Yorkshire Writers*, ed. by Horstmann, I, 375–77.

³¹ Thompson, ‘Another Look’, p. 173.

hitherto largely escaped scholarly attention. These address controversies to do with mystical ascent and Rollean advocacy of the Holy Name.

Between the exempla and the *Commentary on the Decalogue*, Thornton copied two Latin meditations both attributed to Rolle. The first is from the second section of Rolle's *Super Canticum Canticorum* and begins 'Meliora sunt ubera tua vino' (Your breasts are better than wine). The second echoes the more overtly ecstatic elements of the Middle English *Oleum*. This is a short Latin excerpt from chapter five of Rolle's *Liber de amore Dei contra amatores mundi* that is found only in Lincoln.³² Identified as being by 'idem Richardus' it is a meditation on mystical love, and an exuberant expression of Rolle's categories of mystical experience, namely heat, sweetness and song, and his controversial claim to have achieved continuous contemplation and a measure of the vision of heaven, only to be fully realised after death.³³

O quam delectabile gaudium et delicatum solacium, amare dei filium. O quam suaue et iocundum, set istud non est modicum. Manet autem mecum. Non transit a me fervor mellifluus, canor celicus, dulcor divinus. Apperiendo &³⁴ o bone Ihesu es mecum³⁵ attrahendo spiritum, tantum³⁶ gaudium de te scio quantum exprimere non sufficio. Dulcissimum ascolto canticum et canens ascendo usque in domum dei. Cor meum increata repletur dulcedine, os meum divine laudis sonora iubilatione, & aures mee sauuitate celestis melodie. Gloria igitur qua in amore fruor, non est divisa, set continua, non transiens, set permanens, non momentanea, set eterna. Quid enim ultra istud quis desideret, & si hic in eternum vivere posset? Adhuc quippe desidero, suspiro, amore languio, quia non vidi faciem dei mei. Verumtamen tale gaudium opto in celo quale in carne sedens gustavi & sentivi, nec volo ut alia gloria michi detur, set ut aliter michi detur, videlicet clare & perspicue videndo deum meum in decore suo. Et volo ut amoris gaudium quod in hac vita in me incipitur, in regno dei mei plene perficiatur. Alioquin si amor me hic non afficit, nec quero ut ibi in me sit: Quia nichil in presenti desidero quod me in eternum habere non confido etc

³² The sources of these quotations were identified by Hope Emily Allen: *Writings*, p. 403 and are noted in Thompson, 'Another Look' p. 180. They are printed in *Yorkshire Writers*, ed. by Horstmann, I, 186–97.

³³ I have compared the text in the facsimile edition *The Thornton Manuscript*, intr. by Brewer and Owen, fol. 195r with Horstmann's and have silently corrected the latter. Thornton's scribal mis-readings are detailed in footnotes below based on *The Contra Amatores Mundi of Richard Rolle of Hampole*, ed. and trans. by Paul F. Theiner (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 92. 361–93. 374.

³⁴ Thornton appears to have misread 'tibi' as 'et' here.

³⁵ 'es mecum' is a misreading of 'os meum'.

³⁶ Lacks 'quoque' here.

(Oh, what delicious joy and delightful pleasure, to love the Son of God. Oh, how sweet and pleasant, how abundant. Moreover it remains with me. It does not pass from me, this sweet heat, this heavenly song, this divine sweetness. When I open [my mouth to you] O good Jesus I pant. I know such great joy in you that I am not able to express it. I hear the sweetest song and singing I ascend all the way into the house of God. My heart is filled with uncreated sweetness, my mouth with the resounding shout of divine praise, and my ears with the sweetness of heavenly melody. The glory therefore which I enjoy in my beloved, is not intermittent, but continuous; not fleeting, but permanent; not momentary, but eternal. What truly beyond that may a man desire, even if he is able to live forever? Still I sigh with desire, I languish with love, because I have not seen the face of my God. Nonetheless I look forward to such a joy in heaven while still in the flesh I have tasted and felt it, nor do I want another glory to be given to me, but that this be given in a different way, namely that I may see my God in all his beauty, brightly and clearly. I wish that the joy of love which began in me in this life, to be fully perfected in the kingdom of my God. For the rest, if my love for God does not affect me here, I seek not that it be in me there: because I desire nothing in the present life which I do not trust to have in eternity etc.)³⁷

Contra amatores mundi as a whole sets out to evangelistically justify Rolle's personal mystical experiences as a model for spiritual advancement, the authority for which rests wholly on that personal experience. The excerpt is the ecstatic culmination of a longer passage, which mounts an extended defence of the sweetness of contemplation and the attainment of vision of heaven.³⁸ It is perhaps the most ecstatic expression of Rolle's experiences in the whole work. It also invokes the name of Jesus in its use of the 'O bone Ihesu' phrase. There are only five such uses of the Name in the whole of *Contra amatores mundi* and this is the only one in the context of describing mystical experience.³⁹ Its selection and inclusion in Lincoln seems to have been intended to place it in dialogue with *Oleum*: it is another statement by Rolle that associates the Name of Jesus with ecstatic mystical experience, makes claims to continual contemplation and glorification, and draws a connection between the joy experienced in this life and the perfected sight of God in heaven.

³⁷ Translation based on *Contra Amatores Mundi*, ed. by Theiner, p. 177. 420–433.

³⁸ *Contra Amatores Mundi*, ed. by Theiner, pp. 6–28 and Watson, *Rolle*, pp. 159–70.

³⁹ The other four are at *Contra Amatores Mundi*, ed. by Theiner, pp. 69, 113, 79, 69, 87, 143, 88, 199. Allen quotes from this same excerpted passage: Allen, *Writings*, p. 207.

In fact it is even more audacious than *Oleum* on what were controversial subjects for which Rolle attracted criticism after his death.⁴⁰

How would Thornton have acquired such an excerpt? It is possible that he copied it from an exemplar which contained a ready-made compilation of all the Rollean items in Lincoln.⁴¹ This would accord with John Thompson's suggestion that the contents of Thornton's books might have less to do with his own agency and choice, than with the already edited and excerpted second- and third-hand nature of the material he was given access to. This must have been true to some extent, but Thompson associates the second-hand nature of Thornton's gathering of materials with what he sees as their relatively conservative nature. So he writes of 'clerical collectors with similar interests in gathering up clusters of Rolle-related devotional writings' who are 'likely to have played their part in filtering particular versions of writings by Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, and broadly related material on similarly uncontroversial instructional and contemplative themes to the heterogeneous audience of female and male readers that also included the fifteenth-century Yorkshire copyist.'⁴² The collection of Rollean items in Lincoln is both controversial and conservative and remarkably unusual. The Middle English texts, aside from the *Oleum effusum*, survive in only one or two other copies (and in one case are unique), and the *Contra amatores mundi* had a very different circulation to Rolle's English oeuvre, tending to be found in manuscripts with various combinations of his Latin works that circulated in solely clerical and religious contexts. Lincoln is the only instance, of which I am aware, of any part of *Contra amatores mundi* being copied together with any of Rolle's English works.⁴³

It is unlikely that Thornton would have been sufficiently proficient in Latin to have been able to identify the passage from a complete copy of *Contra amatores mundi* on the basis of its subject matter. He may, however, have indicated his interest in the Holy Name,

⁴⁰ Michael G. Sargent, 'Contemporary Criticism of Richard Rolle', *Kartäusermystik und -mystiker*, Analecta Cartusiana, 55:1, ed. by James Hogg (Salzburg: Universität Salzburg Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1981), pp. 160–205; Watson, *Rolle*, pp. 261–64, 333 n. 12

⁴¹ As suggested by Keiser, "'To Knawe God Almyghtyn'", 105–106.

⁴² Thompson, 'Another Look', p. 186. For adaptations of forms of address to include women in Thornton's copies of Hilton's *Mixed Life*, *Abbey of the Holy Ghost* and *Oleum effusum* that suggest a mixed audience see *ibid.*, pp. 179–82, nn. 37 and 38; Doyle, 'A Survey', I, 199 and Keiser, 'More Light', p. 116.

⁴³ For discussion of the unique and rare Rollean items in Lincoln MS 91 see Allen, *Writings*, pp. 34–37 and *Uncollected*, ed. by Hanna, pp. xi–xii, liv–lxi. There are at least 19 complete or partial copies of *Contra amatores mundi* and extracts were included in the Rollean compilation *De Excellentia Contemplationis*: Allen, *Writings*, pp. 203–209, 320–23.

and the mystical themes of *Oleum effusum*, to a more Latinate collaborator who had access to a copy of the work or to the excerpt. This is where the question of language becomes important. Would Thornton have understood the passage's advanced subject matter and been able to see its close connections with the *Oleum*? He almost certainly knew some Latin. He wrote a number of short prayer tags, which incorporated his own name, throughout Lincoln, and copied a total of twenty-nine Latin items into its quires. Most of the Lincoln items are short, but an abridged version of the Psalter of St Jerome fills around twenty folios.⁴⁴ He appears to have made a couple of small scribal errors in copying the *Contra amatores mundi* passage, but these might have been in his exemplar, and despite these, it still makes sense. This suggests he had at least some understanding of its content. Significantly, almost all the Latin in Lincoln is liturgical or para-liturgical: prayers, collects, hymns and psalms; or magical, in the form of charms. There is very little Latin prose. Thornton collected these items for use by his household in daily prayer and devotion; he had 'the collecting instincts of a person who is preoccupied by how one ought to pray'.⁴⁵ Even without understanding all the words they were reading, Thornton's household would have appreciated them as spiritually efficacious.⁴⁶

John Thompson observes that Thornton's collecting impulses were 'voracious' and 'eclectic' but also display 'the urge to be conservative, to limit and control the range of instructional and devotional material being made available to other listeners and readers'.⁴⁷ The unusual nature of the Holy Name texts seems to defy this characterisation of Thornton's instincts, or at least it suggests that his literary and pious appetites sometimes got the better of his conservatism.⁴⁸ This conservatism is, nevertheless, apparent, most obviously in the absence of other, more overtly mystical, works by Rolle or other writers. It is also observable

⁴⁴ Booklet 2: items 24–6, 28, 31–2, 34–6; Booklet 3: items 37, 49–50, 55–6, 62, 66–8, 82–4, 88–94, 96 in Fein, 'Contents', pp. 30–47. The London manuscript contains three short Latin aphorisms: items 14–16 in John J. Thompson, *Robert Thornton and The London Thornton Manuscript. British Library MS Additional 31042* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987), p. 14

⁴⁵ Thompson, 'Another Look', p. 178 and see, more recently, idem, 'Reading Miscellaneously In and Around the English Pseudo-Bonaventuran Tradition', in *The Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ: Exploring the Middle English Tradition*, ed. by Ian Johnson and Alan F. Westphall (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 127–50 (pp. 140–45).

⁴⁶ On phonetic literacy see Paul Saenger, 'Books of Hours and Reading Habits in the Later Middle Ages', *Scrittura e civiltà*, 9 (1985), 239–69 (pp. 240–41).

⁴⁷ Thompson, 'Another Look', p. 177.

⁴⁸ A position which Thompson himself seems to take in his more recent 'Reading Miscellaneously', pp. 135–46.

in the other Holy Name material Thornton acquired. However, rather than always suppressing controversial or challenging material, this conservative instinct resulted in the juxtaposition of more cautious statements with more enthusiastic texts so as to set up a dialogue between them, which could be performed and explored through practices of pious reading.

What then of the absence of other more advanced mystical works? The highest reaches of spiritual advancement were considered inaccessible to all but the most ascetically rigorous who pursued the solitary life; this was not, as far as we can tell, something that Robert Thornton himself was able or prepared to undertake. He may have sought to emulate the model of the mixed life found in the work of the same title by Walter Hilton which he copied later in booklet 3 of Lincoln.⁴⁹ In addition to the *Mixed Life*, Thornton gathered a number of longer religious treatises including the Middle English *Mirror of St Edmund*, large parts of *þe holy book Gratia Dei* and the *Abbey of the Holy Ghost*. These contain a good deal of basic instructional and moral material and also address subjects such as prayer and contemplation. Vincent Gillespie characterizes the *Mirror of St Edmund* as ‘para-mystical’.⁵⁰ It briefly touches on reflection on the nature of God, but hardly encourages the highest forms of contemplation. Moreover Hilton’s *Mixed Life* explicitly restricts more advanced contemplation to professional religious whilst sanctioning a lower, and safer, form for lay people which, in it, as well as the *Mirror* and the *Abbey*, is strongly focused on meditation on Christ’s passion as a route to God.⁵¹ I shall return below to the importance of the Passion in Lincoln.

Thornton copied two further prose texts that address the subject of the Holy Name in booklet 3. They provide further evidence of Thornton’s interest in the subject of Holy Name contemplation and, moreover, the particular controversies surrounding Rolle’s advocacy of

⁴⁹ Walter Hilton, *Epistle on the Mixed Life* (Shorter Version) *IPMEP* 147 listed as item 76 in Fein, ‘Contents’, pp. 42–43. The gathering of texts suited to the pursuit of the mixed life is considered to be the driving force of Thornton’s collecting activities in George R. Keiser, ‘þe Holy Book Gratia Dei’, *Viator*, 12 (1981), 289–317 (pp. 306–8) and idem, “‘To Knawe God Almyghtyn’”, but for more skeptical opinions see Vincent Gillespie, ‘Lukyng in Haly Bukes: *Lectio* in Some Late Medieval English Miscellanies’, in idem, *Looking in Holy Books*, pp. 113–14 and Thompson, ‘Another Look’.

⁵⁰ Vincent Gillespie, ‘1412–1534: culture and history’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism*, ed. by Samuel Fanous and Vincent Gillespie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 163–93 (p. 175).

⁵¹ Nicholas Watson, ‘Introduction’, in *Medieval English Mysticism*, ed. by Fanous and Gillespie, pp. 1–27 (p. 14); Roger Ellis and Samuel Fanous, ‘1349–1412: texts’, in *Medieval English Mysticism*, ed. by Fanous and Gillespie, pp. 133–61 (pp. 140, 146–47). See also Keiser, “‘To Knawe God Almyghtyn’”, 114–22.

the Name of Jesus to achieve it. They are *Of Angels' Song*, generally attributed to Walter Hilton and Chapter 44 of Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* Book I, which Thornton copied into quires M and N of booklet 3, respectively. He copied the *Scale* extract immediately after Hilton's *Epistle on the Mixed Life* but, unlike the Rolle, these texts lack titles or attribution.⁵² The common preoccupation of these two short texts is to offer cautionary advice on the subject of certain types of mystical experience and practice which were clearly derived from Rolle's writings, not least the *Oleum* and *Contra amatores mundi*.⁵³

Of Angels' Song counsels against an overly simplistic and carnal understanding and experience of heavenly song: the title's 'angels' song', almost certainly a reference to Rolle's highest mystical category of *canor*. In its final section the work discusses Holy Name meditation, noting that 'Some mane settis þe thoghte of his herte anely in þe name of Ihesu and steadfastly haldis it þare-too [...]'. It endorses such practice of the 'sannge of þe saule be vertu of þe name' as leading to comfort and sweetness, but distinguishes this from angels' song itself. It also cautions meekness in such practices and extols the virtue of other established devotions apart from the Name of Jesus, namely 'psalmes and ympnes and antym's of haly kyrke, þat þe herte synges þame sweetly, deuotly and frely, with-owttene any trauelle of þe saule, or bitternes, in þe same tyme and noteþ þat haly kyrke vses', a clear reference to the liturgy. It closes with its most cautionary statements, noting that it is when the affection and sweetness generated by use of the Name subsides that vainglory enters in and the devotee is deceived. The temptation is for him to strain 'hys herte myztly to þat name, and by a costome he hase it nerehande alway in his mynde' with the result that he feels neither sweetness in his affections nor light of knowing in his reason but has 'anely a naked mynde of godde, or of Ihesu, or of Mary, or of any oþer gude worde.' It is not bad in itself to hold the Name of Jesus in mind but without such affection and understanding 'it is bot a blyndenes, & a way to disceyte.'⁵⁴

⁵² Items 73 (fols 219v–221v), 77 (fols 229v–230v) and 76 (fols 223r–229r), respectively, in Fein, 'Contents', pp. 41–43 and printed in *Yorkshire Writers*, ed. by Horstmann, I, 175–82, 293–95, and 270–92.

⁵³ For further discussion of these controversies see Rob Lutton, 'The Name of Jesus, Nicholas Love's *Mirror*, and Christocentric Devotion in Late Medieval England', in *Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ*, ed. by Johnson and Westphall, pp. 19–53 (pp. 39–43) and Renevey, "'Name Above Names'". And see also Sargent, 'Contemporary Criticism'.

⁵⁴ *Yorkshire Writers*, ed. by Horstmann, I, 180–82. See also, 'Of Angels' Song' in *English Mystics of the Middle Ages*, ed. by Barry Windeatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 131–36.

What of the second piece of Hilton? The version of chapter 44 of *Scale I* that Thornton copied contains an additional passage that addresses claims, implicitly Rollean, that a certain type of experiential love of the Name of Jesus was a condition for salvation. The Holy Name passage is not found in all copies of the work and it appears that Hilton himself added it to *Scale I* after an earlier version of the work had begun to circulate.⁵⁵ Thornton's is the only stand-alone copy of the adapted version of chapter 44, but he may have encountered it in this form.⁵⁶ This is suggested by its adapted opening and the absence of the normal chapter heading.⁵⁷ Like *Of Angels' Song*, its presence in Lincoln is explicable because it offers an explicit response to the claims of the Rollean items.

The passage addresses what Hilton understands to be 'wretyne in sum haly mens saghes [...] þat he þat cane noghte lufe þis blyssed name Ihesu, ne fynde ne fele in it gastely Ioye and delitabilite with wondirfull swetnes in þis lyfe here, ffra þe soverayne Ioy and gastely swetnes in þe blysse of hevene he sall be aliene, and never sall he come þar-to.'⁵⁸ Hilton's answer to such teaching — about which he says he is stunned and greatly afraid — is that many who repent their former sins and keep God's commandments will be saved without ever feeling 'gastely swetnes ne inly savour in þe name of Ihesu or in the lufe of Ihesu.' Hilton rejects the exclusive claims of Holy Name enthusiasm through exposition of the meaning of the name 'Jesus' as 'gastely heler' or healing, in other words salvation. So, to love Jesus and his Name is to love one's salvation by living a Christian life. Even those who live and die in the lowest degree of charity 'sall be safe and hafe full mede in þe syghte of god [...]' provided they keep his commandments,⁵⁹ a clear riposte to the Rollean statements on sight of heaven and hierarchical glorification.

What are the implications of Thornton's copying of what amount to the two most explicitly conservative statements on Rollean Holy Name enthusiasm to have circulated in late medieval England within the same group of quires as two of the most extravagant

⁵⁵ Helen L. Gardner, 'The Text of The Scale of Perfection', *Medium Aevum*, 5 (1936), 11–30; Michael G. Sargent, 'Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*: The London Manuscript Group Reconsidered', *Medium Aevum*, 52 (1983), 189–216.

⁵⁶ As argued by Thompson, 'Another Look', pp. 179–84. Keiser, alternatively, suggests that Thornton purposively selected chapter 44 of *Scale I* for copying: "To Knawe God Almyghtyn", 106–107.

⁵⁷ Compare *Yorkshire Writers*, ed. by Horstmann, I, 293 with *Walter Hilton, The Scale of Perfection*, ed. by Thomas H. Bestul (Kalamazoo, Michigan: TEAMS, Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), p. 79. 1188–1192.

⁵⁸ *Yorkshire Writers*, ed. by Horstmann, I, 293. The whole passage is *Scale*, ed. by Bestul, p. 80. 1213–76.

⁵⁹ *Yorkshire Writers*, ed. by Horstmann, I, 294.

statements on the same subject?⁶⁰ Another way of putting this question is to ask how a dialogic reading of this group of texts might have worked?

The first thing to note is that Lincoln is not the only juxtaposition of Rollean and Hiltonian statements on the Holy Name but, because of the *Contra amatores mundi* and *Scale* I excerpts, it may be one of the most pointed. Other fifteenth-century miscellanies, some of them Northern, combine Rolle's *Form of Living* and other of his works too, such as the Middle English *Oleum*, with *Scale* I, *Mixed Life*, and *Of Angels' Song*.⁶¹ What this shows is that Thornton's juxtapositions of texts were part of a wider Rollean–Hiltonian dialogue on Holy Name enthusiasm, ecstatic devotion, and related subjects including sight of heaven and mystical contemplation. Hanna comments that Hilton's *Scale* was 'often seen as a useful counterweight to (or outright replacement of) Rolle's frequent ebullience' and asks how texts such as the *Oleum* would have 'interfaced with' and 'influenced' readings of the *Scale*, either 'conditioning and/or extending Hilton's very different injunctions on the spiritual life'.⁶² The very different positions of Rolle and Hilton on the Holy Name could not but have been apparent to Thornton, but should we necessarily conclude that he resolved these contradictions by adopting either a Rollean or a Hiltonian position? The Hilton potentially

⁶⁰ Ralph Hanna has noted that the Rolle is all in quires L–M which formed a continuous whole, whereas the *Scale* passage and Hilton's *Mixed Life* are in N, which may have originally formed a separate booklet. *Of Angels' Song*, on the other hand, is among the Rolle (but after the *Oleum* and *Contra* passage) towards the end of quire M: Ralph Hanna, 'The History of a Book: Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson C.285', in idem, *Introducing English Medieval Book History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 59–95 (p. 85). However, somewhat contradictorily Hanna has also pointed out that the Hilton (*Of Angels' Song*, *Mixed Life* and *Scale* extract) traverses the boundary of quires M and N, implying they were once continuous: 'The Growth', 58–60. Whatever their codicological history, we can be sure Thornton copied *Of Angels' Song* after the Rolle Holy Name texts, but he could have acquired the *Scale* passage before the Rolle. The possible dispersal of these materials across two separate booklets does not undermine the likelihood of comparison between them, indeed this organisation may actually have heightened the possibilities of juxtaposition and have been the result of an awareness of their different perspectives on the spiritual life.

⁶¹ For example Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson C.285; Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Dd.v.55 and MS Ff.v.40; London, British Library, MS Harley 1022 and MS Additional 11748; Warminster (Wilts.), Longleat House, Marguess of Bath MS 29. The Middle English *Disce Mori*, which relied heavily on the Latin compilation *Speculum Spiritualium*, combines excerpts from the *Scale* and the *Oleum* in its chapter on the Holy Name: E. A. Jones, 'A Chapter from Richard Rolle in Two Fifteenth-Century Compilations', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s., 27 (1996), 139–62 (pp. 142–46); *The 'Exhortacion' from Disce Mori*, ed. by E. A. Jones, Middle English Texts 36 (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2006), pp. ix–xxx.

⁶² Hanna, 'History of a Book', pp. 75, 84–85.

works to control the Rolle by routinizing charismatic Holy Name devotion in the Weberian sense, bringing it back down to earth, to the realities of everyday devotion within the institutionalised structures and practices of the late medieval church. Thornton may have sought out, or indeed have been supplied with, the more moderate statements because of his or other's anxieties about the dangerous implications of Rolle's charismatic claims, or he may have copied the Hilton in order to legitimise his possession of the Rolle by providing a conservative counterpoint to its more extravagant claims. Either possibility suggests that his growing booklets of religious writings represented an expanding dialogue, which left open a range of possible interpretations and devotional practices for the pious reader.

Dialogic Processes of Collection and Use

Thornton must have been reliant on clerical networks and institutions for the supply of many of the religious works in Lincoln, but the controversial subject matter of the Rolle and Hilton suggests that his clerical suppliers, copyists and advisers were either not in a position entirely to filter or control his religious reading, or that any conservative influence they did exert worked less to suppress, than to steer and guide by bringing together different statements on controversial topics to facilitate practices of dialogic reading. If you like: 'well that's what Rolle has to say on the subject, but have you read this?' This begs the question: where and how did Thornton acquire his material and how much agency did he exercise?

Thornton's North Yorkshire milieu explains his access to some of the more unusual Rollean items. Some of the lyrics, for example, are also found in another important Yorkshire collection of the hermit's works.⁶³ Evidence of dialect in Thornton's books suggests that his materials were overwhelmingly either compiled or copied locally in Yorkshire; he appears to have 'participated in a lively local literary culture'.⁶⁴ George Keiser speculates that Thornton visited local monasteries and households in order to consult and copy from other manuscripts. East Newton was close to Mount Grace Charterhouse, which certainly possessed copies of Rolle and Hilton, and also to York, an important centre of book production by the late fourteenth century. Thornton had a close association with Sir Richard Pikeryng of

⁶³ Cambridge, University Library, MS Dd.v.64 and see the discussion in *Uncollected*, ed. by Hanna, pp. lxi–lxiii.

⁶⁴ Angus McIntosh, 'The Textual Transmission of the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*,' in *English and Medieval Studies Presented to J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. by Norman Davis and C. L. Wrenn (London: Allen & Unwin, 1962), pp. 231–40; Hanna, 'The Growth', p. 61.

neighbouring Oswaldkirk. Sir Richard's sister Joan was a nun at the Benedictine priory of Nun Monkton, just north of York, at the same time that Thornton was compiling his books. We know from will bequests that this house was being left devotional texts by York clergy and local gentry.⁶⁵

Despite the liveliness of Thornton's literary milieu, scholarly opinion is divided as to the extent to which he was able to exercise choice at any one point in time as to what he copied.⁶⁶ Whatever the limitations, he must have worked hard to overcome them and we need not limit his opportunities to individual religious houses, or indeed to Yorkshire. Patrick J. Murphy and Fred Porcheddu make a convincing case for Thornton's presence in Bishop's Lynn in the early 1440s, where he lodged with a merchant and burgess named John Salus, and from where he had sent his copy of the alliterative *Morte Arthure* home to Rydedale in the hands of a priest named Sir William Cuke, of Bilsby, Lincolnshire. We knew as long ago as 1962, thanks to Angus McIntosh, that the *Morte Arthure* was copied from a South West Lincolnshire exemplar and that his source text of the *Privity of the Passion*, the first item in booklet 3 of Lincoln, was written by the same Lincolnshire scribe. What we did not know is that Thornton got his hands on these texts by travelling outside of Yorkshire. As Murphy and Porcheddu point out 'a mobile Thornton has a much better chance at encountering copy texts and building an anthology than does a stationary Thornton waiting in the North Riding to be sent exemplars from friends and correspondents [...]'⁶⁷ This geographic mobility notwithstanding, what is equally important about these new findings is that they suggest a more active Thornton, who exercised greater agency and initiative in compiling his books than we might have previously thought. This suggests a more dialogic and collaborative

⁶⁵ Keiser, 'Life and Milieu', pp. 161–74 and idem, 'Gentleman, Reader and Scribe', p. 85; Joel Fredell, 'The Thornton Manuscripts and Book Production in York', in *Robert Thornton*, ed. by Fein and Johnston, pp. 109–29.

⁶⁶ Keiser is of the opinion that although 'he acquired his material on a piecemeal basis' the degree to which he divided it by genre from an early stage in the process of compilation indicates that 'he must have supposed that he would have regular access to a variety of materials for copying': 'Life and Milieu', 177, whereas John Thompson emphasises how his materials became available to him 'only gradually and uncertainly': 'Textual Instability and the Late Medieval Reputation of Some Middle English Religious Literature', *TEXT: Transactions of the Society for Textual Scholarship*, 5 (1991), 175–94 (p. 182).

⁶⁷ Patrick J. Murphy and Fred Porcheddu, 'Robert Thornton, the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, and Cambridge University Library MS Dd.11.45', *Modern Philology*, 114 (2016), 130–47 (p. 140); McIntosh, 'Transmission', *passim*.

process of demand and supply, rather than a one-way clerical–lay transmission with all its implications of filtering and control.

Evidence of one such clerical collaborator can be found within Lincoln itself and perhaps also of the influence of his guiding hand on Thornton’s labours. This unidentified scribe supplied the explicit of the *Privy of the Passion* in a ‘practiced and experienced’ formal hand, after which he wrote the short lyric: ‘Of all thyng it is the best / Ihesu in herte fast to fest / And lufe hym ower all thyng’.⁶⁸ Keiser suggests that this scribe supplied Thornton with the source text of the *Privy* as well as many of the items that follow it, including the Rolle.⁶⁹ Notwithstanding the scribe’s precise input, the Christocentrism of the lyric certainly foreshadows much of what was to follow, which demonstrates an enduring interest in the Name and Passion of Jesus. Following the gruesome descriptions of Christ’s suffering in *The Privy of the Passion*,⁷⁰ the prose texts are interspersed with more than twenty lyrics and prayers in both Middle English and Latin that focus on the sufferings of Christ, including meditations on his wounds and the *arma Christi* (implements of the Passion).⁷¹ Some of these lyrics repeatedly invoke the Name of Jesus, and they suggest one way in which Thornton may have put into practice Rollean injunctions to adore the Holy Name on a daily basis. Some are accompanied by prose antiphons and collects, as if designed for use in the liturgy. A good example is the verse meditation on the cross, *O crux frutex*, which repeats the name of Jesus no less than forty-eight times.⁷² These para-liturgical items might tell us all we need to know about how Thornton interpreted and sought to put into practice Rolle’s *Oleum effusum* and the ecstatic heights of the *Contra amatores mundi* excerpt. They perhaps point to a relatively conservative routinization of Rollean Holy Name ecstasy, that took heed of Hilton’s cautious warnings about the dangers of enthusiasm, but they might equally be evidence of Thornton’s striving after more intense experiences of the divine, of his pursuit of ghostly joy and wonderful sweetness.

Conclusion

⁶⁸ This hand then wrote the beginning of the subsequent text on fol. 189r and also supplied the explicit to the alliterative *Morte Arthure* on fol. 98: Fein, ‘Contents’, pp. 33, 23–24.

⁶⁹ Keiser, ‘Gentleman, Reader and Scribe’, pp. 77–79 and Murphy and Porcheddu, ‘Thornton’, 143–47.

⁷⁰ At fols 179r–189r and item 38 in Fein’s description: Fein, ‘Contents’, p. 33.

⁷¹ On this material and Thornton’s interest in the Passion see Poellinger, ‘Religious Violence’, pp. 161–65.

⁷² Fols 212vb–213r and item 67 in Fein, ‘Contents’, p. 40 and printed in *Yorkshire Writers*, ed. by Horstmann, I, 381–83. Other examples include items 63 and 66 in Fein, ‘Contents’, pp. 39, 40.

This article presents a single case study of a group of texts that are linked by shared subject matter in an early fifteenth-century religious anthology, in order to explore the dialogic nature of practices of late medieval manuscript compilation and devotional reading. The unique juxtaposition of Holy Name material in Thornton's Lincoln manuscript raises a number of interesting questions about the sorts of processes that underpinned the production of religious books by and for lay readers in the later Middle Ages. Thornton's gathering of both controversial and conservative texts, some of which were very unusual, suggests a more open process of acquisition than we might previously have imagined, in which lay-clerical agents collaborated in bringing together divergent statements on the same subject to create the potential for practices of dialogic pious reading from devotional miscellanies and anthologies within the household, that spanned English and Latin, prose and verse. Such assemblages of texts might prompt diverse and changing responses on the part of readers in their pious practices over time. The dialogicity of Thornton's Holy Name devotions suggests that his collecting instincts were not as conservative or as naïve as some scholars have suggested. It has implications also for other clusters and juxtapositions of Holy Name texts in other late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century religious miscellanies and anthologies, and poses interesting questions about discourses of orthodoxy and heterodoxy in late medieval religious culture.

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