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THE FIFTEENTH-CENTURY ROLLE: LATE MEDIEVAL  
TRANSLATIONS OF RICHARD ROLLE'S WRITINGS

Summary of Habilitation Thesis

Budapest

2016

## RAISING ISSUES

The habilitation thesis is at least so much about late medieval English mysticism as about theories and practices of translation in the transition from the Middle Ages into the early modern period. This study problematizes translation as a series of episodes in a long process of transforming cultural discourses and social mentalities. Initially, my aim was not to restore an authentic sense of medieval translation underlying the meaning of the translated texts, but to propose tentative answers to some broad questions concerning the shaping of the authority of Richard Rolle in late medieval religious literature: Why was Rolle an appropriate author to translate in the 15<sup>th</sup> century? Do copies and compilations of Rolle material (in its original language) on the one hand and translations of Rolle on the other shape his authority in the same ways, or do they create alternative portraits of the same author? Ultimately, is there a fifteenth-century Rolle emerging from the translations of his writings? The thesis investigates the transformations of Rolle as an authority and of the representation of his mystical experience between the original works and the fifteenth-century translations. The perceivable transformation of Rolle's authority and of the interpretation of the mystical experience permits us to consider his translated works, both Latin and English, as a corpus of related texts in which the translators' interventions and interpretations are manifest as individual but converging cases of "a communal and collective social practice which admits a multiplicity of languages and readers."<sup>1</sup>

The discussion of the fifteenth-century translations of Rolle, authority and the mystical discourse inevitably locates my study in the context of the late medieval censorship culture in England, as well as the medieval and modern scholarly reflections on the nature of "vernacular theology." A preliminary assumption of my research was that a fifteenth-century English translator's choice of an author and a source text predicated the translator's response to the contemporary politics and risks of translation, and as such, inherently interprets translation as a politically engaged and confrontational act of textual and cultural creation. However, Archbishop Thomas Arundel's Constitutions of 1407/9, prohibiting the vernacular translation of the Bible

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<sup>1</sup> This phrase is Rita Copeland's definition of "open text" as used by the General Prologue to the Wycliffite Bible: "Rhetoric and the Politics of the Literal Sense in Medieval Literary Theory: Aquinas, Wyclif, and the Lollards," in Piero Boitani and Anna Torti, eds., *Interpretation: Medieval and Modern*. (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), p. 20.

and banning theological discussions outside academia, did not provide the ultimate context of reference for many translators. Medieval translation discourse and theory was a constant negotiation of the stakes of the literal and spiritual senses in the rivalling interpretations of biblical hermeneutics.

While practically none of Rolle's late medieval translators display preoccupations with the risks of translation, many of them are concerned with the true intention of the original text and the concept of literal translation. They are in no perceivable way alarmed by the potential dangers of transgressing the Arundelian ban on vernacular theologizing, while the preface of Richard Misyn, *O. Carm.*, for example, illustrates that the discourse of the literal sense could justify the integrity of the translation as well. From the perspective of Arundel's Constitutions Rolle appears a safe, pre-Wycliffite author. But the contestation of the sensory nature of Richard Rolle's mysticism by the late fourteenth-century generation of mystics, such as Walter Hilton and the *Cloud*-author, did not qualify him for the ideal author to be promoted, translated and instituted as a master of the religious literary canon in the post-Arundelian era, even if we count with the leniency of the censorship measures. Nevertheless, the burgeoning translating activity crystallizing around Rolle contradicts commonsensical expectations of what was reasonable to translate and what not. Translations of Rolle confirm the image of the mystic as an originally and predominantly Latin author recycled to disseminate theology in the vernacular and to be used as a major inspiration for the "theological vernacular."<sup>2</sup>

## OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

The thesis investigates the shaping of Rolle's new fifteenth-century authority work by work. Chapter 1 discusses the legacy of Richard Rolle in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and the role and place of translations in Rolle's own career. Chapter 2 is devoted to the Latin translations of two of Rolle's English epistles, *Ego dormio* and the *Form of Living*. The bulk of the chapter is constituted by the analysis of the different layers in which the translator of *Ego dormio* imposed a different voice, a different theological discourse and a different reading context on the epistles. Both Latin translations survive in the same

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<sup>2</sup> Phrase borrowed from Ian Johnson, "Vernacular Theology / Theological Vernacular: A Game of Two Halves?" in Vincent Gillespie and Kantik Ghosh, eds., *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 73-88.

manuscript and form a sequence of texts, but the heavily interventionist translation strategies of the Latin *Ego dormio* are less apparent in the translation of the *Form of Living*. The fact that the theological discourse of the Latin *Ego dormio* has significant commonalities with the English translations of the *Emendatio* is used as strong evidence against the assumption of a Latin-vernacular competition and displacement.

Chapter 3 turns to the unique translation of Rolle's *Incendium amoris* into English by Richard Misyn, O. Carm. This translation deserves a separate chapter and analysis for various reasons. It is the only text whose translator is known by name (not counting Misyn's translation of the *Emendatio*). Moreover, Misyn prefaced this translation with an original statement of the translation's purpose and his own motivations. He also reflected on his methods and his anxieties about involuntary errors. Thus, Misyn's translation of the *Incendium* is the only translation of any writing by Rolle where the translator reflects on his own activity. Chapter 3 pursues Misyn's presence as translator and editor in the English *Incendium*. The last section of the chapter considers the dynamics of Misyn's interventions in the context of contemporary translation tendencies both within and outside the Carmelite Order with the proposition that Misyn elaborated a new devotional model for his intended readers.

Many of the partial conclusions and assumptions of Chapter 3 are carried on to the discussion of the English versions of the *Emendatio* in Chapter 4. By virtue of the number of the surviving translations (in seven independent versions, including that of Richard Misyn), this part constitutes the most complex analysis of Rolle's fifteenth-century reception in form of translations. First, the extant versions are placed in their manuscript contexts, which illustrates the numerous uses of the English text. Subsequently, the individual characteristics, translation strategies and the particular interests of the translators are discussed in each version. Two dominant themes emerge from the contrastive reading of all the seven versions: the converging motifs and emphases in the theological discourse of the *Emendatio* on the one hand, and the translators' interventions into the presentation and the interpretation of Rolle's mystical experience on the other. The analysis of the new sensitivities of Rolle's fifteenth-century translators recapitulate some of the concerns of the Latin translators of the English epistles and of Misyn.

The thesis was designed to serve the needs of those who wish to read it as a study in intellectual and cultural history focusing on the changes of devotional mentalities and

mystical discourse in the *longue durée*, as well as the needs of those who expect textually supported case studies from the history of late medieval translation. In order to keep both the broad sweep of the long processes and the minutiae of the philological method, I have decided to provide most of the textual support of my readings in appendices.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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3. Bodily Responses to Fervour (Tears, Weeping and Sighing)

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## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

(1) *Translating Rolle from English into Latin: The Case of Ego dormio*

The Latin translation of *Ego dormio* is remarkable for two individual tendencies that are not accidental consequences of its transposition into another language, but part of the strategy of its translator-author. This translator adapted Rolle's epistle for a new context and a new genre. The first conspicuous element of his revisions is the transformation of the speaker's intimacy and authority vis-à-vis his addressee, which I traced in the use of the personal pronouns, verb forms, the ways of identifying and labelling the addressee, as well as the changes of the images of intimacy. This transformation is partly indebted to the text's very probable use in a monastic community.

The second major change affecting the epistle is the translator's concern about the nature, avoidance and consequences of sins. The numerous minor and four longer interpolations of the Latin version result in a generic shift from the original personal epistle towards a tract. In the Latin *Ego dormio*, the Rollean argument is completed with the thread of the refutation of universal salvation, which was neither the explicit nor the implicit purpose of Rolle's writing. The Latin translation positions Rolle as a figure of canonized authority, who is declared an iconic master in the polemic against universal salvation. The Latin translation of *Ego dormio* is not the only Rolle-related testimony of the mystic's later use for anti-heterodox purposes. Similarly to the strategies of the Version A and C translators of Rolle's *Emendatio vite*, the translator of *Ego dormio* invests Rolle with the authority of speaking against certain currents of heterodoxy. The dissemination of translations of Rolle in both English and Latin, interpolated with reflections on universal salvation, loosens up perceived cultural and linguistic boundaries between Latin and the vernacular, and indicates that both registers could become forums of the on-going debate over alternative concepts of salvation.

*(2) Editing Rolle's Emendatio for a new contemplative model: The case of Richard Misyn*

The chapter on Richard Misyn's translation of Rolle's *Incendium amoris* pursues the traces of Misyn's editorial strategies in his translation through his original Prologue, his original colophons, his translating strategies and editorial interventions. The analysis uncovers a wide array of readers at whom Misyn had an eye when creating his own English version of the *Incendium*. Before any actual or implied reader, the *Fire* is a text to reflect on Misyn's vocation and interiority. The colophons reveal that one of the most appealing aspects of Rolle's work for Misyn is its call to live a true eremitic life and spirituality. While Misyn may have written a text for his own wilderness, this wilderness is immediately to be understood metaphorically as the controlled contemplative solitude of his dedicatee and actual reader Margaret Heslington. Misyn's editorial interventions into Rolle's *Incendium* not only reconsider the degree of the desired detachment of the devout from the world, but propose a revised guide of new mental and emotional structures establishing penitential discipline.

The provision of a reading for female devotional use and, as the Prologue envisions, for the wider and more general use of "Christian souls," tames not only the wilderness Misyn evokes in his translations of solitude, but also some of the affective

components of the contemplative experience, and even more latently some theological implications of the original work. Misyn's editorial interventions, as diverging as they may seem, have the overall purpose of tuning Rolle's devotional model and mystical discourse to lower intensity and affectivity. The analysis of Misyn's translations of the key concepts of the Rollean mystical experience—*calor* (warmth/heat), *dulcor* (sweetness) and *canor* (melody)—shows that Misyn preserves only the economy of warmth from Rolle's text, while he censors sensuous sweetness and the sonority of the mystical union. Misyn's deletions of sighs and groans, as affective and audible bodily responses to contemplation, portrays a more disciplined contemplative, inasmuch as (s)he displays fewer uncontrolled reactions. Also, the subtle incursions into Rolle's theological discourse revise claims, all in some relation with the idea of deification, that could be, and were indeed, used to empower lay (especially female) mystical aspirations with more control.

*(3) Changing mystical discourse: Reflections on the fourteenth-century criticism of Rolle's mysticism*

The late fourteenth-century critics of Rolle's sensory mysticism articulated their charges against the sensory nature of mystical heat and melody, as well as against Rolle's claim of the purging effect of interior heat. The reluctance of authenticating Rolle's sensory experience becomes attenuated in the fifteenth-century translations. The translators confidently preserve Rolle's phrases emphasising the reality of the interior and exterior sensations of heat and the duality of the angelic melody which comes from both above and inwards. Repercussions of the disbelief in the physical nature of these sensations may be detected only in two instances of the Version C and F translations of the *Emendatio*.

A more palpable legacy of the fourteenth-century theological suspicions surrounding Rolle continues in the translators' frequent glossing over references to the mystical fruition of God, i.e. the questions whether it is possible to have a full vision of God in life, and if so, whether one can live in a permanent state of fruition. In some discourses these concerns translate into questions whether perfection can be reached in human life, or whether the unlimited vision and knowing (i.e. experiencing) of God is possible before death. The English translations of the *Emendatio* contribute to this theological discourse much more intensively than to the one of the nature of sensory



mysticism. The theological implications of the Version B translation reveal the translator's doubts about Rolle's claims of the full vision of God. A theological concept related to fruition is deification (*theosis*), i.e. the transformation of the soul and the believer to the likeness of God. Anxieties over deification resonate not only in Misyn's translation of the *Incendium*, but also in the Version F translation of the *Emendatio*.

*(4) Theological speculations: The case of the English versions of the Emendatio vite*

Translators were engaged in Rolle's theological claims and implications to varying degrees. Some of the versions, as Version E, attest to no ostensible concern about the theological issues of the *Emendatio*, while some others, as Version F, turn with intense attention to theology. We can observe interests shared by several versions, which makes the theological discourse of the translations much more intriguing, since the overarching issues probably reflect broader intellectual debates that filtered into the individual versions.

The general pattern of the theological revisions by the translators is to recast some non-mainstream claims of Rolle into mainstream formulations. But while translators have a clear sense of orthodoxy in the issues of fruition and deification, they move like stray sheep in Rolle's contradictory discussions of the ultimate things, especially in the narratives of the Last Judgment. Rolle's presentation of the Last Judgement is certainly very idiomatic. He focuses on selected elements of the apocalyptic narrative and projects the ultimate division of humanity back to pre-apocalyptic history including his present. The idea of the co-power of certain people to judge with God at Doomsday emerges very early in Rolle's writing. The claim itself was not particularly strange, though not wide-spread, in later medieval biblical exegesis. References to the co-power of judgement invited the most animated "comments" from the translators, either explicitly advocating or undermining the idea of the human co-power of judgement. Whether the translators' concerted elaborations on Rolle's references to the co-power can be read as responses to contemporary contestations of the idea is not supported either by textual or extratextual evidence. The fact, however, that two versions (A and C) open up Rolle's text for polemical aims to refute alternative concepts of salvation does not exclude this possibility.

The Latin *Ego dormio* and the Version A and C translations of the *Emendatio* share anxieties over the belief in universal salvation. The interpolations of the Version A text

and its echoes in Version C empower Rolle with the authority of effectively countering heterodox claims of universal salvation. The interpolations of the Version A translator outline a coherent argument which evokes Walter Hilton's refutation of the heterodoxy of universal salvation, and subsequently elaborates on the nature of sins that demand the proactive defence of the individual. The Version A text (with echoes in the Version C translation) introduces yet another voice into the contemporary polemical discourse of universal salvation.

Just as the discussions of universal salvation were polyvocal, the translations of the *Emendatio* also reflect on a number of theological issues. Most revisions of the translators are concerned with Rolle's idiomatic presentations of eschatology and salvation schemes. The translators' interventions into the theological implication of Rolle outline a discursive tradition in transition: the "old" fourteenth-century criticism of Rolle's sensory mysticism and the doubts concerning the purging effect of the fire of love seem to have faded, while the translators' concerns about themes related to ultimate things, as well as the Version A and C translations' engagement with universal salvation mark newer aspects of the critical assessment of Rolle's theology. Although most of the translators' revisions of the theological layers of the *Emendatio* only explicitate Rolle's implications, they shape a more articulated authority of Rolle in certain aspects of theology.

*(5) Changing mystical discourse: The transformation of affects in the translations of Rolle's mystical experience*

The translations of the *Emendatio* witness transitory discourses in several respects. Besides the "turn" in the theological discourse, another less palpable transformation was taking place. The translators' revisions of the affective aspects of Rollean mysticism construct a new model of contemplation which conceives of the contemplative as member of an emotional community invested with characteristic emotional mentalities and affective responses.

The translators of the *Emendatio* were willy-nilly confronted with the affective components of Rolle's contemplative model. While their translations of emotives reflect individual responses which resist any attempt to generalize the underlying translation strategies, it is possible to identify overarching tendencies in overwriting the affective aspects of Rolle's contemplative model. Rolle not only created a text with a rich affective

texture and with claims on some affective excesses in the mystical experience, but also shaped a contemplative model by commenting on the desired affective states and responses that the contemplative ascent required. The emotives of the *Emendatio* both structure the thematic units of the tract and invest them with various affective characteristics. The major division between the preparation for the mystical experience and the fruition of this experience happens between the first ten chapters and the last two; the transition from one affectivity into another is clearly indicated by the distribution of the words and theme of *jubilus*. In most English versions the merging of *jubilus* with other kinds of mirth, as well as the suppression of its relation with *canor* in the Version A, C and F translations undermines the dramatic affective turn between Chapters 10 and 11. The treatment of *jubilus* and the sonorous aspects of Rolle's mysticism inherent in this term underpins the translators' preoccupation with the intensity of Rolle's *jubilus*. More often than not, translators also interfered in the affects of sighing and groaning. While a part of these interventions may belong to the category of the "accidentally deliberate," the overall trends in overwriting sighs ultimately indicates the shared endeavour of the translators to dampen audible affective responses accompanying the contemplative's journey.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people, institutions and scholarships contributed to the advancement of this research project and to my preparation for the habilitation. I owe especial thanks to:

- ☼ Halácsy Katalin, supervisor of my doctoral dissertation, former head of the Institute of English and American Studies of PPCU and a very helpful and inspiring colleague
- ☼ The late Kathleen Dubs, colleague and professor of Medieval English Literature at the Institute of English and American Studies of PPCU
- ☼ My colleagues of medieval English studies at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary and abroad
- ☼ My doctoral, graduate and undergraduate students
- ☼ The Hungarian Academy of Sciences for the Bolyai János Research Scholarship (2009-11)
- ☼ The Balassi Institute and the Government of Hungary for the Eötvös Scholarship (2012)
- ☼ The Nanovic Institute for European Studies at Notre Dame University, Indiana for their visiting scholarship (2013)
- ☼ The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) for their research scholarship (2015) and the Institute of English and American Studies of Ludwig Maximilian University for hosting my research
- ☼ Cambridge University Library, Gonville and Caius College Library, Cambridge, the British Library, the Library of Notre Dame University, The University Library of Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich, the Bavarian State Library, the Library of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of PPCU and Toshiyuki Takamiya for their availability
- ☼ My family for their patience.

