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Claire Siewert
Dr. Andrew Kraebel
December 8, 2019

Richard Rolle:
Revisions Made to Reflect the Spiritual Growth of a Specific Reader

Richard Rolle's "Þi ioy be ilke a dele" is preserved incompletely in Lincoln, Cathedral Library 91, lacking five stanzas owing to the loss of a leaf after fol. 222v. As with other Rolle lyrics, "Þi ioy" is written in monorhymed quatrains, with internal rhyme in each stanza at the caesura. In its complete form, the poem also appears in Cambridge, University Library MS Dd.5.64, part 3, and in Warminster, Marquess of Bath, Longleat MS 29. In Dd.5.64, the last ten stanzas, here lines 49-88, are written as a separate poem, while in the Lincoln and Longleat manuscripts the poem is written as a single continuous piece of verse.

The multiple presentations of this poem introduce the possibility of authorial revisions made in light of the author's knowledge of the audience. Stanzas three, five, and nine are omitted in Dd.5.64. The addition of these stanzas and the presentation as one continuous poem in the Lincoln and Longleat manuscripts suggest Rolle manipulated the poem for a specific readership. The possibility of authorial revisions done to present the poem for a specific audience expands the Rollean speaker's position as a teacher. With an intended reader in mind, Rolle could revise his poetry to best suit the needs of his student, adding personalizations to enhance the didactic effects of the poem for the specific student. This indicates as well that Rolle personally knew his reader, as he would need to have an intimate understanding of their spiritual state in order to tailor his poem to their needs.

Rolle's poem provides instruction for proper religious devotion. The speaker teaches readers to reject worldly pleasures and instead serve God, with the expectation of eventually gaining access to heavenly pleasures. The use of imperatives give the poem the feel of a sermon,

aiming to persuade the audience of the necessity of the actions which the speaker demands. Unlike a sermon, however, in this case readers can return to these instructions multiple times, analyze them, and eventually memorize them. Indeed, the simple rhyme scheme supports the poem's memorability and emphasizes its demand to "all vanytese forsake" preferring instead to focus on unembellished, uncomplicated religious devotion (l. 49; fol. 222v). This simplicity perhaps gestures toward the relationship between Rolle and his readers, as he writes plainly as if he were writing them a letter, wishing to make his religious instructions as understandable and effective as possible.

Beginning in line 13, the speaker presents himself as an example for readers to follow, instructing his audience to "do als I þe rede," and he then provides a short prayer, a distinct unit which could perhaps be more easily memorized and used (apart from the rest of the lyric) in private devotions (l. 13; fol. 222r). The Rollean speaker refers to the conditional nature of one's relationship with God, implying that one may only gain entrance to heaven if one follows the speaker's instructions, and the speaker thus positions the poem (and perhaps himself) as an intermediary between God and the reader, insisting upon his own authority and ability, even at a distance, to guide readers to heaven. This confidence in the poem's effectiveness is expressed most clearly in line 68: "When þou erte as I say, I pray þe thynke one mee," where the "when" gives no allowance for doubt or an alternate result, and the speaker reminds the reader that he is at least in part the reason for the reader's success in reaching heaven (l. 68; fol. 222v). Furthermore, the speaker's insistence on following his instructions necessarily demonstrates his belief that a person has influence on their own salvation, and that there is more to religious practice than asking God for mercy. Instead, one of the poem's foundational premises is that one

must “serue thi Godd,” (l. 1; fol. 222r) and the poem devotes itself to guiding readers through this service with the intention of the readers eventually gaining entrance to heaven.

Rolle’s authority stems from the reader’s belief that “he has already reached a goal to which he now beckons the reader,” positioning Rolle as an inspiring figure which readers would aspire to follow.¹ A personal connection to Rolle would enhance the reader’s understanding of his elevated and accomplished spiritual position, an intimate knowledge which likely would have been reciprocated by Rolle of the reader, as his English poems function essentially as spiritual lesson plans. Rolle needed a personal understanding of an individual’s spiritual state in order to tailor his lessons for them, to ensure the effectiveness of his poetry. As Watson argues, Rolle’s English poems were “expressions of intimacy” directed to the reader.² Margaret Kirkeby, commonly known to be a nun for whom Rolle acted as a spiritual guide, was likely this reader with whom Rolle shared an intimate connection.³ As a nun, Margaret had already achieved some spiritual growth, which explains why this poem, “Pi ioy be ilke a dele,” does not involve rudimentary lessons involving the crucifixion, but instead aims to guide readers (namely, Margaret) to an elevated spiritual position nearer to Rolle’s own through casting away worldly pleasures and serving God. For this specific poem, Rolle makes his didactic objective explicitly clear, stating that once the reader has followed his poetic spiritual instructions, “Our thoughts sall we sette togedire in heuene to duelle,” which positions heavenly reunion as Rolle’s ultimate aim (l. 69; fol. 222v). The assertion that Rolle himself and the reader would be together in heaven is a

¹ Nicholas Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 231.

² Watson. *Richard Rolle*, 224.

³ Ralph Hanna, “Rolle and Related Works,” in *A Companion to Middle English Prose*, ed. A. S. G. Edwards (Cambridge [Rochester, NY]: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 20.

clear expression of intimacy and evidence of the personal nature of his relationship with the reader.

Rolle's Latin works were primarily intended for a generalized audience, whereas the English works were much more individualized, often "composed for a specific situation or person," indicating Rolle's awareness of the needs of his intended readership⁴. As various readers would be at different levels spiritually and would respond differently to particular pedagogical methods, over time Rolle likely made revisions to his instructional poetry "in light of his changing understanding of the material or what he thought would better suit the new copy's intended reader," which indicates the possibility that each version of "Pi ioy" is unique due to personalized authorial revisions⁵. As Rolle copied his poems for new readers, he added stanzas and elaborated on his previous instructions. Dd.5.64. presents a historical perspective on the poem, with two versions preserved in the same manuscript. "All vanytese forsake" is placed as an independent poem, followed by a Rollean prose piece, and then "Pi ioy," with the note "Al vanites forsake if Þoy hys lufe wil fele, &c., ut supra."⁶ This note does not indicate that "Al vanites" was "misplaced" by the scribe, as Hanna argues,⁷ but instead the note likely refers to the existence of "Al vanites" in two forms: one as a free-standing poem, and one with "Pi ioy" added to the beginning. "Al vanites" likely first existed as an independent poem, with Rolle adding "Pi ioy" to it while copying the poem for a new reader, and subsequently adding three additional stanzas (St. 3, 5, 9), resulting in the version of "Pi ioy" found in Lincoln MS. As

⁴ Watson, *Richard Rolle*, 223.

⁵ Andrew Kraebel, "Modes of Authorship and the Making of Medieval English Literature," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Literary Authorship*, eds. Ingo Berensmeyer, Gert Buelens, and Marysa Demoor (Cambridge[England]: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 102.

⁶ Carl Horstman, ed., *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole, an English Father of the Church, and His Followers*, (London: S. Sonnenschein & Co.; New York: Macmillan & Co., 1895), 82.

⁷ Ralph Hanna, ed., "Introduction," in *Richard Rolle: Uncollected Prose and Verse with related Northern texts*, (Oxford[England]: Oxford University Press, 2007), lxi.

Kraebel argues, the presentation in Dd.5.64. preserves Rolle's process of revision, and shows that this "expansion was done in multiple stages,"⁸ resulting in the extended version of "Pi ioy" seen in the Lincoln MS.

Of course, there is the possibility that the scribe of the Lincoln MS, Robert Thornton, rearranged the poems, as he "was not just a robotic collector of religious lyric."⁹ Thornton carefully compiled the poetry in his manuscript, evidence of "a reader's reception of the form."¹⁰ Here Fein suggests that differences in presentation are due to revisions done by a reader/scribe rather than the author. However, the possibility of Thornton revising the poem becomes less likely as we consider the multi-phasal quality of the revisions, which can be traced in the manuscript records of "Pi ioy." As Kraebel states, the order of Rolle's lyrics is of great significance, as "rearrangement can blur into the remaking of texts,"¹¹ and who did this rearranging is of equal importance. In the case of "Pi ioy" close examination of the multiple surviving copies positions authorial revisions more favorably.

As shown above, Dd.5.64 acts as a historical record of the revisions done to "Pi ioy," especially when we consider the three stanzas added to the version in Lincoln MS. Rolle progressively modified the poem, beginning with the fifteen-stanza poem "Al vanites," and ending with the version of "Pi ioy" found in Lincoln MS. The Longleat MS solidifies this process, as the poem is also presented as one continuous piece of verse, like in Lincoln, which further suggests that there were at least two distinct versions of "Al vanites," one with "Pi ioy" and one without, in existence. This decreases the chance that Thornton placed the two poems

⁸ Kraebel, "Modes of Authorship," 109.

⁹ Susanna Fein, "Literary Scribes: the Harley Scribe and Robert Thornton as Case Studies," *Insular Books: Vernacular Manuscript Miscellanies in Late Medieval Britain* (2015): 76, https://tlearn.trinity.edu/pluginfile.php/510638/mod_resource/content/1/FEIN%20Literary%20Scribes.pdf

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹¹ Kraebel, "Modes of Authorship," 106.

together, as he likely was working with a copy of the later version of “*Pi ioy*,” and the Dd.5.64 scribe had access to two versions, an older one with just “*Al vanites*,” and a more developed one with “*Pi ioy*.” Thornton had an even later version of “*Pi ioy*” than the Dd.5.64 scribe, made evident by the three added stanzas which do not appear in Dd.5.64. Rolle created multiple versions (at least three) of the poem throughout his revisionary process, and these different versions were copied by scribes in their various manuscripts. The version of the poem that is preserved in a manuscript depends on what version the scribe had access to copy, or for the Dd.5.64 scribe, which versions.

Rolle revised his English poetry to suit the needs of a particular reader, as argued earlier. For this poem, “*Pi ioy*,” Rolle largely used expansion to further develop his meaning and give his instructions more detail. Taken alone, “*Al vanites*” includes all the primary aspects of Rolle’s argument, as it instructs the reader to “*All vanytese forsake*,” (l. 49; fol. 222v) and “*do Cristes byddyng and lufe him als he will*,” (l. 59; fol. 222v). Rolle’s aim for the poem is also found within the “*Al vanites*” section, with the speaker looking to the future when “*Our thoghtes sall we sette togedire in heuene*” (l. 69; fol. 222v). “*Al vanites*” clearly can stand alone, and the fact that the poem’s main argument occurs in this segment strongly indicates that “*Al vanites*” was the original poem, to which Rolle later added “*Pi ioy*,” rather than beginning with “*Pi ioy*” and adding “*Al vanites*” later.

The chronology of Rolle’s revisions suggests that there was a new reader, whom Rolle thought would benefit from an expanded version of the poem that has more instructions and continues to develop Rolle’s relationship with the reader. The twelve stanzas preceding “*Al vanites*” in the Lincoln MS are largely direct guidelines for the reader to follow, with the Rollean speaker relying on the imperative force of his directions to move the reader to apply them in her

life. The speaker appears to have a more intimate knowledge of the reader in “*Pi ioy*” than in “*Al vanites*,” as the instructions are more intellectual in these first twelve stanzas than in the following. “*Pi ioy*” includes instructions for the reader to “*caste thi thoghte*,” (l. 5; fol. 222r) “*couayte thi solace*,” (l. 21; fol. 222r) and “*thynke of his mekenes*,” (l. 29; fol. 222r) whereas the instructions in “*Al vanites*” are more corporal, including such like “*flee ay*,” (l. 53; fol. 222v) “*luke it noghte*,” (l. 54; fol. 222v) and “*fyghte*” (l. 85; fol. 222v). The reader for whom the revised edition of the poem was intended was possibly more spiritually advanced than the reader of the first edition, “*Al vanites*.”

Writing for readers on different spiritual levels would explain why the first edition encompasses basic religious principles like rejecting worldly pleasures and sin, and the revised edition moves toward more complex religious ideas, primarily of the love of God and serving God. Neither version of the poem is for beginners, which would likely involve meditation on the crucifixion, and the main premise for both is to cast away worldly pleasures. Still, the revised version of the poem involves instructions for a person who is further developed spiritually than does “*Al vanites*,” perhaps suggesting that rather than revising the poem for an entirely new reader, Rolle’s new readership was the same reader, after having achieved spiritual growth. This possibility strengthens the claim that Rolle had a personal connection to and intimate knowledge of his reader. Instead of revising the poem for three different readers, Rolle could have been working with one reader who, after following his instructions, had achieved spiritual growth and was ready to further work on her spiritual development, to which Rolle responded by revising the same poem to demonstrate the continued relevance of his prior instructions and to offer the reader new and more complicated instructions.

The expansion of the poem for a more advanced individual, whether that person was indeed the same as the intended reader for the first version or not, reinforces the didactic techniques of the poem. By weaving instructions to further elevate one's spiritual position with instructions which the reader had already followed, the speaker builds the reader's confidence by reminding them of the lessons they have already completed (and should continue to follow), which helps the reader continue their spiritual studies. As a spiritual counselor and guide, Rolle's ultimate objective was to lead his student to a spiritual level which would grant them entrance to heaven, and this poem demonstrates the cumulative nature of Rolle's lessons, each building upon the last, essentially forming a spiritual ladder to climb until heaven is reached. "Þi ioy" beckons the reader to continue their spiritual studies, with the allure of being joined with Rolle in heaven motivating the reader to follow Rolle's instructions. The speaker uses such pedagogical methods of motivation and progressive lessons to accomplish his purpose as a teacher and as someone personally invested in his student's life and salvation.

Stanzas three, five, and nine comprise the third revision Rolle made to the poem. Though less substantial than the composition of "Þi ioy," the addition of these three stanzas still enhances and expands the poem's instructions, while once again presenting the possibility that Rolle made the revisions for one reader who had achieved spiritual growth through following his instructions. Stanza three, lines nine to twelve, contrasts "Thay" (l. 9; fol. 222r) to "we" (l. 10; fol. 222r). This contrast closely associates the reader and the Rollean speaker, making the two a collective "we," which suggests that the reader has continued to grow spiritually, getting even closer to Rolle's own level of spirituality. The speaker says "Þay lose þe lande of lyghte," (l. 12; fol. 222r) implying that the reader and himself are excluded from this loss. Instead, he and the reader have retained the "lande of lyghte," or heaven, demonstrating the success of the reader's

religious studies, which encourages her to continue her work, with the possible consequence of becoming a part of “*Paȳ*” to further motivate her.

To continue this stage of revision, Rolle added stanza five, lines seventeen to twenty. This stanza expresses intimacy with the reader, as the speaker assumes a comforting and reassuring tone which fades in the rest of the poem. The speaker gestures toward understanding the reader’s struggle to cast away worldly pleasures, as he offers reassurance that rejecting such pleasures, though difficult, will ultimately be rewarded “*at þe laste*” (l. 20; fol. 222r). The speaker recommends that the reader “*Lere to lufe thi kyng*,” (l. 17; fol. 222r) and that this love will provide comfort to the reader in times of difficulty. In this stanza, Rolle reveals knowledge of the reader’s personal struggles.

The final addition which Rolle made during this revisionary phase was stanza nine, lines thirty-three to thirty-six, which conveys the speaker’s confidence in the reader’s success in reaching heaven. Addressing the reader, the speaker asserts that “*Þou salfe Ði saule sare*,” which expresses his certainty that the reader will surely save her soul by following Rolle’s religious teachings. Rolle restates this certainty even more forcefully in the last line of the stanza, when he looks to the future: “*His face Ðat Þou may see when Þou sall heÐene fare*” (l. 36; fol. 222r). This line encourages the reader to similarly look ahead to the possibility of seeing Christ himself “*when*” she dwells in heaven. The only uncertainty which Rolle has in this statement is whether the reader will see Christ’s face, not if she will reside in heaven. Instead, Rolle demonstrates a confidence in the reader’s spiritual development which simultaneously motivates her to continue her studies while it also reveals Rolle’s own sense of accomplishment as a teacher. The reader has clearly shown success in using Rolle’s poetry to grow spiritually, a testament to the effectiveness of Rolle’s pedagogy. This stanza also conveys the intimacy between Rolle and his

student, as Rolle would likely be in contact regularly with his student to monitor their spiritual development. Also, their relationship must have been an important aspect of Rolle's life as both a teacher and as a writer, for the student's changing spiritual needs prompted Rolle to revise this one poem, "Pi ioy," three times to reflect her spiritual growth and to grow with her, making updates to keep the poem useful and relevant to her spiritual state.

Richard Rolle's English poem "Pi ioy" evidently was revised at least three times in light of a new understanding of the reader's spiritual needs. These revisions were expansions, as the poem began as the fifteen-stanza poem "Al vanites," with twelve more stanzas added to the beginning of that poem in two stages, resulting in "Pi ioy" incompletely preserved (due to a torn-out leaf at the end) in Lincoln MS. Rolle's expansion of the poem "Pi ioy" mirrors the spiritual development of the intended reader, perhaps Margaret Kirkeby, but certainly someone whom Rolle knew personally and who had already achieved some level of spiritual growth prior to receiving "Al vanites." After considering the substantial impact the revisions have on the meaning of the poem and how the revisions reflect the relationship between the speaker and the reader, it is clear that Rolle himself made the revisions, rather than a scribe, like Thornton. Furthermore, Rolle's revisions were likely made for one reader over time, rather than multiple distinct readers, as the poem grows to encompass increasingly complex religious principles and the speaker becomes more confident in his reader's success in gaining entrance to heaven by following the poem's instructions.

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Claire Siewert

Middle English Lyric Research Narrative

Finding and analyzing miniscule details in manuscripts can be frustrating, next to impossible, and incredibly time-consuming, but each discovery is incredibly rewarding. Last fall I was in the Middle English Lyric class with Dr. Kraebel. We learned to transcribe and interpret Middle English characters in manuscripts and then format our transcriptions into lyric poems, which we subsequently analyzed. One manuscript on which we particularly focused was the Lincoln, Cathedral Library 91 manuscript, originally scribed by Robert Thornton, and containing lyric poems by Richard Rolle.

For my final research paper, I considered why one of these poems by Rolle was preserved in different forms in other manuscripts, and how each version impacted the overall meaning of the poem. This at first seems like an unanswerable question, as there are many possible explanations, from scribal errors, to scribes adding to the poem themselves, or Rolle simply developing the poem over time. As I began my research into Rolle's life and other works, I found that answering that question of editions could perhaps be possible, beyond speculation.

Dr. Kraebel directed me to a few leading experts on Rolle, and I began my work from there. I started with examining Rolle's life as a hermit, or spiritual leader, and found his mentorship of Margaret Kirkeby, to whom he frequently wrote to guide her to an elevated spiritual position. This discovery suggested Rolle wrote pedagogically, for at least one student. As I continued my research, I began to look at his Latin works, which were meant to be spiritual guides. Many of the didactic techniques Rolle employed in his Latin prose could be found in his English lyrics, further indicating that the poem I was analyzing, DIMEV 5940+401, could have been used to teach someone spiritual principles.

Scholars have found that unlike his Latin works, Rolle's English lyrics were individualized, often written in an epistolary fashion and meant for a specific reader, like Margaret Kirkeby. After reading this, I went back to the poem itself, placing all of the versions side-by-side, roughly in chronological order. Each version built upon the last, growing more complicated and lengthy. I did not think Rolle edited the poems arbitrarily, not after researching more about his position of spiritual teacher. Nor did I think it likely that scribes made the changes, as the meaning of the poem developed with such a distinct pattern that it was most likely one editor, rather than multiple scribes. Thus, I came to the conclusion that Rolle edited the poem over time, developing the spiritual guidance contained by the poem to mirror the spiritual development of one reader, likely someone like Margaret Kirkeby.

When I first looked at a Middle English manuscript at the beginning of the semester, I could barely pick out specific letters, much less analyze a poem written on the folio. By December, transcribing was second nature, and conducting research on a poem seemed much less daunting. As I researched Rolle and his poetry, I became increasingly familiar with the manuscript and early manuscripts in general, which allowed me to better appreciate and understand the value of working with manuscripts, as the work involved in transcribing and researching their contents is fascinating and unique.