

An Unnoticed Borrowing from the Treatise *Of Three Workings In Man's Soul* in the Gospel Meditation *Meditaciones* *domini nostri*

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This note identifies the only known borrowing from an unusual devotional tract from late medieval England, *Of Three Workings in Man's Soul*, by the equally understudied Middle English gospel meditation *Meditaciones domini nostri*. Quite possibly written by Richard Rolle, the section borrowed from *Of Three Workings*—a detailed description of Mary reading, meditating, and rapt in spiritual ecstasy just prior to Gabriel's arrival at the Annunciation—draws attention to the importance of the Annunciation scene as a model of contemplative practice crucial for readers of the lives of Christ genre.

Meditaciones domini nostri (hereafter *MDN*) is a neglected example of the many surviving vernacular gospel meditations produced in medieval England. The Latin title is taken from the incipit to the short Latin prologue before the Middle English text, as contained in one of its two manuscript witnesses, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 578. MS Bodley 578 contains only this text, and dates from the first half of the fifteenth century, with an unknown medieval provenance.¹ The other witness is a larger religious miscellany, Cambridge, Trinity College MS B.15.42 (fols. 5–42v), which also dates from the early to mid-fifteenth century.² Its medieval provenance is unknown beyond the ownership inscription of the brother (“frater”) William Caston dated 1468 on the back flyleaf; its combination of vernacular and Latin texts

supports a clerical origin, as well as a sophisticated interest in contemplative and visionary activity not unlike that demonstrated by the Carthusians or Bridgettines, for example. Here the *MDN* lacks some four folios in the middle and four folios at the end, but is otherwise the more careful copy.

The *MDN* has only been edited as a 1992 doctoral dissertation by Elisabeth Blom-Smith;³ before and after Blom-Smith's efforts, the text has received scant attention.⁴ This life of Christ sorely needs a new published critical edition so that scholars can analyze it properly. As is often typical for the genre, the text begins with Mary's genealogy; follows Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection; and continues on to cover the Pentecost and more on Mary's life. Thus, in its Latin explicit before the Middle English text, the Bodley witness claims only partially accurately that *MDN* is "a meditation on the life and passion and resurrection and ascension into heaven of Jesus Christ according to Bonaventure out of his third, and shortest—though best—edition."⁵ This somewhat academic comment identifies an authorizing source in the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes vitae christi*, one of the most widely read lives of Christ in medieval Europe, and well known in England by this time due to Nicholas Love's English translation, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, from around 1410. However, less than half of the *MDN* text is actually from the *Meditationes vitae christi*.

Rather, many other sources are woven into *MDN* by the compiler. Typical for vernacular lives of Christ, *MDN* incorporates Bible verses translated directly from the Vulgate and accompanied by careful explication, some apocryphal gospels, various patristic sources such as Jerome, excerpts from Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons, and small parts of Nicholas of Lyra's *Postilla*. In addition, the compiler drew extensive material from Bridget of Sweden's *Revelaciones* and her *Sermo Angelicus*, as well as Elizabeth of Hungary's *Revelations*, the *Legenda Aurea*, *The Pricking of Love*, and Mandeville's *Travels*.⁶ The compilation proudly announces its reliance on Bridget's *Revelaciones* through red underlining in the Bodley manuscript and the marginal apparatus in the Trinity manuscript. In Trinity, nine large rubricated notes contain some variation on "Birgitta" besides the main text, in the scribal hand (out of the twelve total marginal source attributions).

One of these other marginal attributions in *MDN* identifies the *auctor* "Ricardes de Sancta Victore." The Trinity manuscript uses its usual rubricated marginal script (fol. 8r), while Bodley identifies the source within the text body using its usual textura hand with red underline (fol. 5v). In Trinity the main body text marked by this note reads, "And as a gret clerk seith is called Richard of Seynt Victores in a boke that he made off contemplation. Thus glorious virgyn about the tyme of the comynge of the Angell" (fol. 8r-v). Previously unidentified, these words signal a long borrowing from

an anonymous Middle English tract known as *Of Three Workings of Man's Soul*, a late fourteenth-century devotional text featuring a translation of Richard of St. Victor's *Benjamin major*, and surviving in four manuscripts.⁷ It was first edited in 1896 by Carl Horstman, then more fully in 1995 by Stephen B. Hayes, and again in 2007 by Ralph Hanna, who supports Horstman's suggestion that the author may be Richard Rolle.⁸ Like the *MDN*, *Of Three Workings* has received barely any other scholarly attention, much less extended analysis.⁹ Of the four manuscript witnesses to *Of Three Workings*, the *MDN* borrowing most closely matches in text and orthography Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS Pepys 2125 (fols. 80v–82v), though several variants suggest it was not the exact copy text. While MS Pepys 2125 apparently comprises two manuscripts later bound together, the part containing *Of Three Workings* possibly connects to the Brigittines of Syon Abbey, or neighboring Carthusians: it includes a short treatise on the contemplative and active life translated from Bridget of Sweden's *Revelaciones*, and some texts seem to have been revised for a male readership.¹⁰

In total, nearly 40 percent of *Of Three Workings* has been included in *MDN*. Together, these lines constitute one of the largest sections of borrowed material outside the *Meditationes vitae Christi* itself. *Of Three Workings* dominates the Annunciation scene, which in turn comprises 15 percent of the entire *MDN* text—a very high proportion of the narrative compared to other lives of Christ (especially considering this scene does not even feature Christ himself, per se).

Though it is conspicuously marked as Richard of St. Victor's in the margins of *MDN*, nothing by "this worthi clerke" actually remains in this borrowing, which is only of the second half of the source text. Containing the sole moment where Richard is mentioned, the first few lines of *Of Three Workings* are closely retained as the opening of the borrowing in *MDN*; but *Of Three Workings* continues on to translate a large part of Richard of St. Victor's *Benjamin major* on the tripartite hierarchy of thought, meditation, and contemplation. Compare the opening of *Of Three Workings* to the beginning of the borrowing in *MDN* quoted above, with omitted text underlined: "A grett clerke þat men calles Richard of Saynt Victoures settes in a boke þat he made of contemplacyon thre wyrkynges of Crystyn man saoule, qwylike are þise: Thoght, Thynging and Contemplacyon."¹¹ The *MDN* does not borrow any of the translation of Richard's *Benjamin major* from *Of Three Workings* (about one-quarter of the treatise), and it also omits the second section, on the role of grace in contemplation (likewise about one-quarter of the treatise).¹² These omissions fit in with the compiler's general tendencies to focus on visual details and to avoid more meta-commentary on devotional process or experience.

MDN picks up again in its borrowing to include almost all of the second half of *Of Three Workings*, an extended meditation on the moments leading up to the Annunciation, when the Virgin Mary is reading and meditating on the prophecies foretelling the Incarnation (Isaiah 7:14) just before the angel Gabriel's arrival. The *MDN* compiler includes most of the text at this point, except for a somewhat long passage on the nature of the "bodely ymagynacyon" and its relation to the soul.¹³ Otherwise, the compiler switches the order of a few phrases, and omits brief moments where the narrative voice speaks directly to the reader—"And I schall tell thee," etc. Nonetheless, the compiler retains a few direct commands to the reader to "busily behold," a tone that is completely different from the rest of this compilation (he has carefully scrubbed most of that kind of language from the *Meditationes vitae Christi* passages). A comparison of the opening passage demonstrates the relationship between the source and the host. The text of *Of Three Workings* is taken from Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS Pepys 2125, the surviving version most closely related to the borrowing in *MDN*:

Of Three Workings

(MS Pepys 2125, fol. 81v; Hanna, l. 96–116; underlining indicates lines omitted in *MDN*)

Fyrst þu schall ymagyn in þi sowle a fayr chamber, and in þat chamber þu schall þen se sitting at a wyndowe redyng on a book owre lady Saynte Mare. And þu schall sette þiself in som corner of þat chamber bisily beholding hire þer she sytþe, and namly þe contenance and þe manere of hire havynge of hir body. Beholde howe deuotely she sytþe and hir book bifore hire liggyng on a dext and she a partye stowpyng toward þe boke and redyng pryualy withowte shewyng of voys. And what þu shalt þenke þat she radde y shal telle þe. Þu shalt þenke þat she radde wordes of þe prophecie [howe it was sayde] of Ysaye [þe prophete]¹⁴ þat

Meditaciones domini nostri

(Blom-Smith, p. 13, l. 13–p. 14, l. 6; bold indicates additions, extra spaces added to help comparison)

And as a gret clerke seith is called Richard of Seynt Victor us yn a boke that he made off contemplacion, **thus glorious virgyn about the tyme of the comynge of the angell** sche was in hure chambur sittinge at a wyndowe

and hure boke liggyng in a dexe and sche in a part stowpyng toward the boke and redyng preuely without schewyng of voys

of the profecie, how it was seide of Ysaie the profyt that a

a mayden sholde bere a childe, þe whytche sholde saue al mankynde. And how sche ymagyned desiryng þat hit myzt be in hire dayes, þat she myzte ones see oure blessid lord þat she hadde servyd in þe temple in þe schappe of owre kynde. And bihald bisily vnto hire, and þu shalt se hire in þis ymagynacyon in hir sowle sittyng vpryzt [in hyr body] lenyng þe lokyng of þe boke & lokyng vppe in to heuen. Bihold þen bisily þat blessid louely swete vysage of oure lady, howe deuoute hit is, þe swete mouth cloos and þe eyzen closed and þerwiþ no breþ passyng owt neyþer of hire mowþ ne nose. And [behalde þerwyth] se how paal she ys and no blood ne rode in hir vysage.

mayde schulde bere a child the whyche schulde saue mankynde. And scheo ymagined, desiryng that hit myzt be yn hure dayes, that scheo myzt see oones our blessid Lorde that scheo serued yn the tempull yn the schappe off our kynde. Byholde besyly vnto this blessid lady how that scheo settith hure vpryght yn body lenyng, lokyng yn the boke and lokyng vp to heuen. Byholde that blessid lowly visage of this lady how deuoute it is, the swete mowthe close and the hyen closid and therwith noone **euell** brethe passyng out of hure mouthe ne nose, and byholde therwith how pale scheo is, and no blood ne rode yn hure vysage.

The MDN compiler was likely drawn to the unusual way in which *Of Three Workings* focuses on Mary's precise meditation on the scriptural verse, her transition to reflective contemplation, and her physiological transformation into a trance-like state of rapture. Unlike *Of Three Workings'* first section translating Richard of St. Victor, the entire second half focusing on Mary at the Annunciation seems to be an original composition in Middle English and perhaps most suggestive of Rolle's devotional innovations. It is, as Hanna observes, "marked by considerable rhetorical cleverness,"¹⁵ and its extended description makes it stand out from other lives of Christ representations of Mary reading at the Annunciation, such as found in Aelred of Rievaulx's *De institutione inclararum*, Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, and *Speculum Devotorum*.

This compiler seems less concerned with educating his readers about the technical aspects of *how* imagination and meditation work, but rather focused on exercising that imagination through this visualization—through plot-driven narrative. However, he retains the unusually detailed physiological description of Mary's ravishment partially quoted above, and how that may demonstrate bodily the experience of desire for the love of God. This static moment of deep concentration on the body in stillness, with the text's long description enforcing the reader's slow contemplation of the ravished body, is a striking contrast to the continuous action of the rest of the life

of Christ—an unstoppably unfolding linear narrative. This last part of the text offers a visualization exercise in the tradition of guided meditations but also promotes an active emulation of the Virgin as a model contemplative. Readers witness her engaged reading of the Bible as an example that should be imitated in their own reading of either scripture or devotional texts such as *MDN* itself. Strategically placed towards the beginning of the story of Christ's life, the scene of Mary's reading becomes a necessary opportunity for learning and self-reflection to prepare the reader for imaginatively engaging with the rest of the narrative, culminating in Christ's passion and resurrection.

Mary's model of conceiving Christ, the *logos*, while reading the Word should be understood in the light of the compilation's frequent excerpting from Birgitta's *Revelaciones*: holy women channel God in powerful ways, this text emphasizes, and can facilitate the reader's own spiritual conception of Christ by means of text-based meditation. Identifying *Of Three Workings* as the source of this section of *Meditaciones domini nostri* helps to connect the gospel meditation to a new matrix of devotional texts, manuscripts, and known authors such as Richard Rolle. The strong presence of visionary holy women in both these works strengthens the possible Carthusian and Bridgettine inclinations of Trinity College MS B.15.42 and MS Pepys 2125, as these enclosed communities display a consistent interest in Mary, Bridget, and other Continental and insular visionaries. Hopefully further analysis of both texts will illuminate their importance to our understanding of late-medieval devotional culture and its holy women.

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NOTES

1. See the catalogue entry in Richard Hunt and Falconer Madan, *A summary catalogue of western manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford which have not hitherto been catalogued in the Quarto series* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1895–1953), 5:326–327.
2. On CUL MS B.xv.42, see M. R. James, *The Western Manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge: a Descriptive Catalogue* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1904), 510–513. The full dissertation can be viewed online at <http://trin-sites-pub.trin.cam.ac.uk/james/viewpage.php?index=244> (accessed 1 Dec 2016). CUL MS B.xv.42 manuscript also has an entry in Linne R. Mooney, *The Index of Middle English Prose Handlist 11: Manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 19–20.
3. Elisabeth Blom-Smith, "The Lyf of Oure Lord and the Virgyn Mary

- edited from MS Trinity College Cambridge B.15.42 and MS Bodley 578,” (PhD diss., King’s College, London, 1992); a full PDF can be found online at <https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/2926635/418745.pdf> (accessed 1 Dec 2016). She uses Trinity as the base text, supplementing with Bodley when gaps occur. Blom-Smith’s adopted title, *The Lyf of Oure Lord and the Virgyn Mary*, does not actually occur anywhere in the text; she apparently derived it from an expansion of the first line of the Latin prologue in the Bodley manuscript. I will use the Latin title from the prologue itself.
4. Elizabeth Salter includes this life of Christ in her work on *Love’s Mirror* and other translations of the *Meditationes vitae Christi*, where she grouped it with the *Speculum Devotorum*, a similar text; see chapter IV in *Nicholas Love’s “Myrrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ,” Analecta Cartusiana* 10 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1974), esp. 106, n. 188. Roger Ellis and Barry Windeatt both mention it in passing as part of their discussions of Birgitta’s revelations in medieval England; see Ellis, “Flores ad Fabricandum ... Coronam: An Investigation into the uses of the revelations of St. Bridget of Sweden in fifteenth-century England,” *Medium Aevum* 51 (1982), 163–186, esp. 180; and Windeatt, “1412–1534: Texts” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism*, ed. Samuel Fanous and Vincent Gillespie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 199. (In both Ellis and Windeatt, the mistaken shelfmark Trinity College MS B.v.42 should read B.xv.42).
 5. MS Bodley 578, f. 47v: “meditaciones de vita et passione et resurrectione et in celum ascensione Ihesu Christi secundum Bonaventuram ex tertia sua et brevissima licet fortisissima edicione.”
 6. For more on sources see Blom-Smith, vii–xiv.
 7. In Blom-Smith’s edition, the borrowing extends from p. 13, l. 12 to p. 16, l. 10; in Bodley, ff. 5r–v; Trinity, ff. 8r–9r. The final words are “Thus sythe Recharde de Sancto Victore.”
 8. Ralph Hanna edits the text from Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.8.26: *Richard Rolle: Uncollected Prose and Verse with Related Northern Texts*, EETS o.s. 329 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 84–88, and lxxviii–lxxix where he discusses its affinities with Rolle’s œuvre. Stephen B. Hayes also uses Trinity O.8.26 as a base text with same-page variants from Cambridge, Magdalene College, Pepys Library 2125 and Cambridge University Library MS Dd.5.64, and helpfully prints in parallel the shorter version found in BL, Sloane MS 1009; “Of Three Workings in Man’s Soul: A Middle English Prose Meditation on the Annunciation,” in *Vox Mystica: Essays for Valerie M. Lagorio*, ed. Anne Clark Bartlett, Janet Goebel, and William F. Pollard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 177–199 (Hanna did not appear to be aware of Hayes’

- edition; though Hanna's edition follows more careful editorial procedures, Hayes' parallel layout and commentary remains useful). The text was first edited from the shortest surviving version, CUL Dd.v.64, by Carl Horstmann, *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole, an English Father of the Church, and His Followers* (London: Sonnenschein, 1896), 1:82. The text is item M.5, O.15 in P.S. Joliffe, *A Check-list of Middle English Prose Writings of Spiritual Guidance* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974); and no. 5 in R.E. Lewis, N.F. Blake, and A.S.G. Edwards, *Index of Printed Middle English Prose* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1985).
9. For instance, Jennifer Bryan, *Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 55, fn. 72.
 10. For a full description of the manuscript, see Rosamund McKitterick and Richard Beadle, *Catalog of the Pepys Library at Magdalene College Cambridge. Volume 5. Manuscripts: Part 1: Medieval* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992), pp. 54–61, as well as Hanna, *Richard Rolle*, pp. xlv–xviii. Hayes also suggests a possible Bridgettine provenance for MS Pepys 2125 (“Of Three Workings in Man’s Soul,” p. 186).
 11. Hanna, p. 84, l. 1–4.
 12. In Hanna’s edition of *Of Three Workings*, these omissions correspond to l. 2–95 (out of a total of 180 lines), so almost exactly the first half.
 13. Hanna, *Of Three Workings*, l. 128–143.
 14. Bracketed variants are found in Trinity College, MS O.8.26 and CUL Dd.v.64, and omitted in MS Pepys 2125 (and MS Sloane 1009, a greatly abbreviated version). This suggests that the *Of Three Workings* copy text for the MDN compiler was a version related most closely to MS Pepys 2125, but also related to Trinity College, MS O.8.26 or CUL Dd.v.64.
 15. Hanna, *Richard Rolle*, lxix.