RICHARD METHLEY AND THE TRANSLATION OF VERNACULAR RELIGIOUS WRITING INTO LATIN

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When we think about religious writing in fifteenth-century England, our focus as modern scholars has rightly been the debates surrounding translation from Latin into Middle English. For this essay I would like to swim upstream, as it were, and consider some of the motives behind translation from a vernacular into Latin, and the case of one particularly interesting translator. Although medieval Latin had become a vernacular of its own compared to Classical Latin, taking on regional flavours, it was unquestionably the *lingua franca* of Europe in the Middle Ages; to be *litteratus* meant to be literate in Latin. Latin could function as the major 'vehicular language' which enabled literary and historical texts to move from vernacular to vernacular.[1] For example, *The Seven Sages of Rome*, a medieval collection of stories about wise counsellors and wicked women, was translated in the early fourteenth century from the original French into the influential *Historia septem sapientum*, from which almost all the European versions were to derive — it immigrated into German, Italian, Greek, English, Swedish, Polish, and, yes, back into French.[2] Latin could preserve vernacular works from 'the ravages wrought by time': in the seventeenth century, Sir Francis Kynaston

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[1] In linguistics, a vehicular language (*langue véhiculaire*) is 'used in communication between members of societies whose own languages are different'; see P. H. Matthews, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 200. Cf. *lingua franca*, 'any language used for communication between groups who have no other language in common' (p. 209).

[2] Hans R. Runte, 'From the Vernacular to Latin and Back: The Case of *The Seven Sages of Rome*', in *Medieval Translators and Their Craft*, ed. by Jeannette Beer (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989), pp. 93–133 (p. 94).

translated Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* into Latin because he was worried for the poem's survival, as Chaucerian English was already difficult for his contemporaries to read.[3] As Chaucer himself admits, 'Ye knowe eek, that in forme of speche is chaunge / With-inne a thousand yeer'.[4] Kynaston also hoped his Latin translation would make Chaucer's genius accessible to foreigners who could not read English.[5] Desire for an international audience surely drove much of vernacular–Latin translations throughout the medieval period and beyond. 'Latyn is iused and understode a this half Grece in alle the naciouns and londes of Europa', insists the Cleric in John Trevisa's *Dialogue between the Lord and the Clerk on Translation*; 'Latyn, that is so wide iused and iknowe' should be preferred over 'Englisshe that is nought iused and iknowe but of Englisshe men al oon'.[6] A text brought into Latin not only gained a potential readership without geographical borders (bounded only by education), but also gained the prestige and authority associated with the language of the educated. Latin, of course, reigned as the language of the Holy Roman Church: it was the language of theology, in all its rhetorical definition and profundity; the language of scripture, proper to the Word of God; the language of sanctity, necessary for canonization; and the language of inquisition, precise enough to kill.[7]

With the rise of the European vernaculars, this hegemony began to weaken, and the slipping stability of the Latin language often came to parallel slips in orthodoxy. The dramatically shifting value of the English vernacular from the early fourteenth century to the late fifteenth century, defined by the Oxford translation debates of 1401 to 1407 and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409, makes the translation of insular religious writing into Latin just as problematic as its translation into English.

There is a handful of instances in which medieval English readers felt compelled to Latinize Middle English religious works. Sermons delivered in the vernacular

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[3] Richard Beadle, 'A Virtuoso's *Troilus*', in *Chaucer Traditions: Studies in Honour of Derek Brewer*, ed. by R. Morse and B. Windeatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 213–33 (p. 213).

[4] *Troilus and Criseyde*, II, ll. 22–23.

[5] As stated in his preface to the *Amoren Troili et Creseidae*, 1635; quoted by Beadle, 'A Virtuoso's *Troilus*', p. 219.

[6] Excerpted in *The Idea of the Vernacular*, ed. by Wogan-Browne and others, p. 132.

[7] Jeannette Beer offers a comprehensive discussion of vernacular–Latin translation in 'Medieval Translations: Latin and the Vernacular Languages', in *Medieval Latin: An Introduction and Bibliographical Guide*, ed. by F. A. C. Mantello and A. G. Rigg (Notre Dame: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), pp. 728–32 (p. 731).

were often recorded in Latin, either by the preacher himself or a listener.[8] The survival in Bohemia of Latin versions of several originally English Wycliffite texts, such as William Thorpe's *Testimony*, demonstrates the necessity of translation for an international readership as well as the 'amazing mobility of scholars throughout the late medieval period'.[9] Around 1400, Carmelite Thomas Fishlake translated Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* into Latin, enabling it to make the leap across the Channel and reach a continental audience. Fourteen manuscripts of the *Scala perfectionis* survive, and at least three copies reached Europe through monastic networks of manuscript exchange.[10] As S. S. Hussey, an editor of the *Scale*, writes, 'Fishlake is conferring on *The Scale of Perfection* the ultimate medieval accolade: early translation into Latin'.[11] About five decades after Fishlake's Latin *Scala*, an anonymous translator brought the *Cloud of Unknowing* into Latin. *Nubes ignorandi* survives in only one mid-fifteenth century manuscript, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 856, which reveals little about the translator, scribe, provenance, or readership.[12]

What I would like to explore here, however, are the late fifteenth-century Latin translations of the *Cloud of Unknowing* and of Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of*

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[8] See, for example, Siegfried Wenzel, *Latin Sermon Collections from Later Medieval England*, p. 172.

[9] See Anne Hudson, 'From Oxford to Prague: The Writings of John Wyclif and his English Followers in Bohemia', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 75 (1997), 642–57 (pp. 645, 654); reprinted in Hudson, *Studies in the Transmission of Wyclif's Writings*.

[10] Two copies of the *Scala* now held in Uppsala, Sweden, were once read at the Birgittine house at Vadstena, and at least one of those was acquired from Syon Abbey in England. Another Latin manuscript was copied in a Carthusian house at Villeneuve-lès-Avignon in France. In England, two manuscripts explicitly show Carthusian provenance. S. S. Hussey, 'Latin and English in the *Scale of Perfection*', *Mediaeval Studies*, 35 (1973), 456–76 (p. 457).

[11] Hussey, 'Latin and English in the *Scale of Perfection*', p. 476.

[12] MS Bodley 856 is edited by J. P. H. Clark, *The Latin Versions of the Cloud of Unknowing*, Analecta Cartusiana, 119, 2 vols (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1989), I. We do not possess the vernacular version from which it was translated, although it does follow closely the Middle English *Cloud* in London, British Library, MS Harley 959 (ed. by Clark, *The Latin Versions*, II). See J. P. H. Clark, 'Editing the Latin Versions of the *Cloud of Unknowing* — A Progress Report', in *Die Ausbreitung kartäusischen Lebens und Geistes im Mittelalter*, ed. by James Hogg, Analecta Cartusiana, 63 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1991), pp. 191–211. While I was preparing this article for publication, Clark issued the final volume in his series of editions (*The Latin Versions*, III): *Richard Methley: Divina Caligo Ignorancie: A Latin Glossed Version of the Cloud of Unknowing*, Analecta Cartusiana, 119: 3 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 2009).

Simple Souls by the Carthusian monk Richard Methley, and how his motives for translation might complicate our understanding of this 'ultimate medieval accolade'. Compared to the earlier anonymous translator of the Latin *Cloud* in MS Bodley 856, things are less murky with Richard Methley of Mount Grace Charterhouse, whose translations of the *Cloud* and Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls* survive in a single manuscript, Cambridge, Pembroke College, MS 221. This manuscript was copied by William Darker, a Carthusian scribe at Sheen, and carefully read by several others; it may have also made its way to Syon.[13] Both texts are accompanied by translator's prologues and extensive glosses to many chapters. We know a fair amount, relatively speaking, about Methley: he was born around 1451, did not go to university, became a Carthusian monk around the age of 25, was vicar of Mount Grace, and died in 1528.[14] He was a prolific writer. His surviving works include three autobiographical Latin treatises documenting his own visionary experiences, as well as an acephalous treatise on the discernment of spirits. These texts are available in modern editions published by James Hogg and Michael Sargent respectively.[15] An edition by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh of Methley's Latin *Cloud* and *Mirror* has been at press since the 1960s, and survives only in uncorrected proofs; its future publication will enable further much-needed study.[16]

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[13] The original leather binding on Pembroke College, MS 221 bears a distinctive 'tb' monogram tooled into the leather within a grid pattern, possibly linking the book to Syon Abbey librarian Thomas Betson.

[14] Methley's various autobiographical writings yield these facts, and his obituary for May 1528 can be found in the Carthusian General Chapter *carta*. '*The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Mirror of Simple Souls* in the Latin Glossed Translations by Richard Methley of Mount Grace Charterhouse', ed. by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà* (Roma, unpublished: proofs prepared but never brought to press), pp. 9–10. My thanks to Michael Sargent for providing me with a copy of Colledge's and Walsh's edition manuscript.

[15] As edited by James Hogg in *Kartäusermystik und -mystiker: dritter internationaler Kongress über die Kartäusergeschichte und -spiritualität*, ed. by James Hogg, Analecta Cartusiana 55, 5 vols (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1981): 'A Mystical Diary: The *Refectorium Salutis* of Richard Methley of Mount Grace Charterhouse', I, 208–38; 'The *Scola Amoris Languidi* of Richard Methley of Mount Grace Charterhouse transcribed from Cambridge, Trinity College MS 0.2.56', II, 138–65; 'The *Dormitorium Dilecti* of Richard Methley of Mount Grace Charterhouse transcribed from Cambridge, Trinity College MS 0.2.56', V, pp. 79–103; and 'The Self-Verification of Visionary Phenomena: Richard Methley's *Experimentatum Veritatis*', ed. by Michael Sargent, II, 121–37.

[16] At this point it would be helpful to distinguish Methley's Latin translation of Porete's *Mirror* from the continental Latin translation of the *Mirror* found whole or partially in five manuscripts and edited by Romana Guarnieri and Paul Verdeyen, *Margaratae Porete: Speculum simplicium*

As Methley explains in a note preserved at the end of the *Cloud*, he completed his translation in 1491 for God and for his fellow monk Thurston Watson, 'o frater mi Thurstine' (fol. 39ʳ). Thurston Watson was at Mount Grace before he was transferred to Hull where he died in 1505. Why did Watson desire a Latin *Cloud*? Methley offers no clues. Was the translation project Methley's idea entirely? And why did Methley continue on to translate Porete's *Mirror*, apparently unsolicited? From Methley's prologues, we learn only that he generally regarded the texts as worth reading, for both man's sake and God's. Perhaps Methley hoped for the same results the Latin *Scale* enjoyed: transmission to mainland Europe by means of the Latin-speaking network of charterhouses or other monastic foundations which would offer an appropriate audience for these sophisticated mystical works. Yet again, like the earlier anonymous translation of the *Cloud*, only one manuscript exists, and there is no proof it left England. Perhaps Methley or Watson thought the two works deserved to be promoted to the ranks of Pseudo-Dionysius, Hugh of Balma, and Bonaventure, to be read with the same meticulousness those authors received, and subjected to the 'rigorous theological analysis' facilitated by translation into Latin, and transmission to continental Carthusians.[17] Latin remained the linguistic 'gold standard' in matters of advanced theology — as both sides of the Oxford translation debate agreed.[18] In the *determinatio* about translation written *c*. 1400–1407 and attributed to William Palmer, English is described as a barbarous tongue, with its 'small vocabulary, its lexigraphical oddities, tendency toward monosyllable, and lack of inflection, which make it grammatically and rhetorically

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animarum, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis, 69 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1986). It is this continental Latin translation (and Verdeyen's edition) which Colledge discusses in his article 'The Latin *Mirror of Simple Souls*: Margaret of Porete's "ultimate accolade"?', in *Langland, the Mystics, and the Medieval English Religious Tradition: Essays in Honour of S. S. Hussey*, ed. by Helen Philips (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990), pp. 177–83; there Colledge rejects the editors' assumption that the full-length Latin translation would have been made for the purposes of the Inquisition's trial of Porete, and suggests (without further elaboration) that 'the existence of this Latin translation testifies rather to the vitality of Margaret's book, and shows that even after it had been condemned, twice, other clerics — for the Latin translator was surely such — could be convinced that it was a work of edification' (p. 183). Further work is needed comparing the texts and contexts of the two Latin translations.

[17] Vincent Gillespie, 'Dial M for Mystic: Mystical Texts in the Library of Syon Abbey and the Spirituality of the Syon Brethren', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England, VI*, ed. by Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 241–68 (p. 244); see also James Hogg, 'The Latin *Cloud*' in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England, III: Dartington Hall 1984*, ed. by Marian Glasscoe (Cambridge: Brewer, 1984), pp. 104–15 (p. 110).

[18] Gillespie, 'Religious Writing', p. 236.

inadequate as a vehicle for truth'.[19] Conversely, Richard Ullerston's *determinatio* of *c.* 1401 reveals his support for the vernacular at least for the Bible, and concludes with nine propositions in favour of translation.[20] For that matter, in the case of monks such as the Carthusians, with such a 'high standard of Latinity',[21] Latin *was* their vernacular — they might have spent more years of their life communicating and thinking in Latin than in their 'mother tongue'. English Carthusians regarded themselves as part of a cohesive family of charterhouses scattered across Europe, united as much by their compulsory silence as by their frequent Latin communications.

Though all these possible motives for translation might be involved, I would like to focus on four complicating factors which make Methley's case much more revealing than the cases of the *Scale* and the anonymous *Cloud*. First, there is the issue of the *Cloud* and vernacularity. What are the ramifications of Latinization for the *Cloud*'s intended audience and its so-called 'vernacular theology'? Second, there is the questionable orthodoxy of Porete's *Mirror*. How does Methley's Latin translation acknowledge and negotiate this potentially (or actually) heretical text? Third, there is Methley's Carthusian environment to consider. In what ways do these Latin translations fit into a specifically Carthusian monastic textual tradition? Fourth and finally, there is the striking combination of Methley's own visionary experience and his connection to the *Book of Margery Kempe*, as well as his authorship of a Middle English devotional work for a lay reader. Does Methley use Latin to distance the *Cloud* and the *Mirror* from a broadly vernacular brand of lay and/or female spirituality?

These large questions deserve a more extended study than this short paper can offer, but for the present purposes I hope to raise some starting points for debate. With reference to Methley's own words, I suggest that he represents a distinctive voice in the translation controversies dominating England's spiritual consciousness — that his work delineates a theologically progressive but otherwise conservative monastic reading community concerned with disentangling the vernacular from 'vernacular theology', cloistering advanced mystical experience, and protecting sophisticated mystical texts from *both* lay practitioners *and* clerical authorities.

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[19] As Nicholas Watson summarizes in 'Censorship', pp. 842–43.

[20] See Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy*, pp. 86–111.

[21] *The Chastising of God's Children*, ed. by Joyce Bazire and Edmund Colledge (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957), p. 59.

Methley's Divina caligo ignoranciae

The preface by the original author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* limits the intended audience to those who are true followers of Christ in the 'souereinnest pointe of contemplatife leuing'.[22] Nicholas Watson observes that, as the *Cloud*-author aims to 'exclude all but a few from opening his book, then treating even them with suspicion, this writer would seem to belong to the conservative faction which, by the 1390s, was arguing (against both the Wycliffites and moderates) that the clergy's function was to enshrine and protect the truths of the faith'.[23] In other words, English does not always signal an 'equal reading opportunity'. When Methley translates the *Cloud* into Latin, out of a vernacular at least linguistically accessible to all, he seems to be supporting the *Cloud*-author's elitism, even pushing it further by rendering the text in a language *inaccessible* to many lay readers. However, this is also where Methley departs from the author of the *Cloud*. While for the *Cloud*-author, the vernacular seems the preferred medium for shedding all the baggage of learning and *scientia* which blocks the soul's union with God, for turning off the analytic mind in favour of the *affectus*, for Methley, Latin worked perfectly for mystical purposes. It worked for him and his readers just as it had worked for Pseudo-Dionysius, for Bonaventure, for the Victorines, for Bernard. Apparently Methley saw nothing inherently 'vernacular' about the *Cloud*'s theology that would not succeed in Latin. In fact, we could interpret Methley's choice of Latin as serving another purpose as well: it could help to keep the text out of the reach of those unworthy readers the *Cloud*-author warns away, and thus out of the reach of most lay and female readers. Watson is correct to 'enlist the *Cloud*-author among those who worked to constitute a sense of *vernacular intellectual community* in late medieval England in the face of what was probably always a degree of opposition'.[24] Over a hundred years later, Methley, it seems, could be considered part of that opposition. Whatever 'vernacular intellectual community' there was in 1491 — at least, interested in sophisticated mystical texts such as the *Cloud* — Methley seems to have been composing these translations for a different community, a Latinate community, and I would argue, almost certainly a Latinate monastic community.

Methley, it must be pointed out, never says exactly so much himself. With the opening sentence of his prologue to the *Cloud* he does, however, very roughly sketch his reasons and intended audience for the translation:

[22] *The Cloud of Unknowing and Related Treatises on Contemplative Prayer*, ed. by Hodgson, p. 1.

[23] Watson, 'The Middle English Mystics', p. 553.

[24] Watson, 'The Middle English Mystics', p. 554. My italics.

Qvoniam ignorantibus non solum sophistriam et logicam sed et ethicam et phisicam, quin immo sed et theoricam et practicam, purissime non dicam speculatiue sed superintellectualis et superspeculatiue[25] scienciam defacatissime et vnificatissime et viuificatissime vnicionis et vnionis inter deum et viatorum animas, difficillime maxime modernis diebus refrigescente caritate, non dicam solum multorum sed pre nimietate malorum fere omnium christianorum, difficillime, inquam, intelliguntur libri contemplatiuorum super-splendidioribus theorijs theodoctorum, institi vt potui et tandem inueni secundum ocium a ceteris scilicet vacare necessarijs, et transferre de anglico in latinum, et vbi necesse fuerit explanare pro capciosis et opiniosis in fine capitulorum quorumdam que quidem difficilia videntur ad intelligendum, transferre autem librum cui nomen caligo. (fol. 1va)[26]

(Because the books of contemplatives, taught by God in most super-splendid knowledge [*theoriis*], are understood with much difficulty by those who are ignorant not only of sophistry and logic, but of ethics and physics, and indeed, also of theory and praxis, and even more [ignorant] of the purest knowledge [*scienciam*] of the (I hesitate to say 'speculative') but *super*intellectual and *super*speculative [knowledge] of the most refined, most unifying and most vivifying unifying and union between God and the souls of pilgrims — with much difficulty, I say, especially in modern times with the cooling charity of many (in fact, of almost all Christians, since there are so many evil ones) — [because of all this] I have tried, and succeeded, insofar as I was able, and as often as I found leisure to be free from other necessary duties, both to translate from English to Latin and, where it is necessary, to explain for the argumentative and opinionated at the end of each chapter whatever seems difficult to understand — indeed, to translate the book whose name is the *Cloud*.)

The sheer length and impenetrability of such a beginning stands like a barrier at the entrance to the text, like a locked gate in the charterhouse wall — an apt form for content that reaffirms its 'greatest difficulty', and its elitism, three times over. In framing the sentence with *ignorantibus* and *caligo* Methley elegantly alludes to the title of the text, *Caligo ignoranciae*, and in doing so he also re-emphasizes the ignorance of those *ignorantes* who struggle with *libri contemplatiuorum*: 'turn back now' if your reading ability fails you here, the sign seems to say. Clearly, however, any *ignorantes* who make it past this initial rhetorical bluster are not so ignorant at all; in fact, not only must they have mastered the regular sciences of logic, ethics, physics, etc., they must also be fluent in the language and terminology of apophatic

[25] The adjectives *superintellectualis* and *superspeculative* modify an implied *sciencie*.

[26] All quotations of Methley's Latin *Cloud* and *Mirror* are cited by folio number from the Colledge and Walsh unpublished edition of Pembroke College MS 221; with gratitude to Marcus Elder for his assistance, all translations are my own, as well as any errors. My translation of this passage in particular benefited greatly from the collaborative efforts of Michael Sargent, Kantik Ghosh, and Alastair Minnis, with Richard Beadle generously checking the transcription against the manuscript.

mysticism, of *superspeculatiue scienciae*, such as that developed by Pseudo-Dionysius, Thomas Gallus, Hugh of Balma, Richard of St Victor, Bonaventure, and others.[27] The qualified reader, at this opening moment, must be able to differentiate 'bad' ignorance (i.e. lack of experience with advanced philosophy and theology) from 'good' ignorance (i.e. the *via negativa*, the abandonment of burdensome knowledge which keeps the soul from God, according to the *Cloud*'s theology). This is only the first difficulty: the second, the general decline of Christian charity, has already dramatically thinned the ranks of qualified readers. The final difficulty rests within the text itself, which is difficult to understand without a hermeneutical apparatus. Through this series of exclusionary rhetorical moves — and yet stopping short of specifying his audience further — Methley's explanation by default points reflexively back to his confreres as his intended audience.

Methley's Speculum simplicium animarum

The question of audience takes on added meaning when we consider Methley's translation of Porete's *Mirror*. Methley's source was the Middle English version translated from the French by the mysterious M. N., known only by the initials that he used to mark off glosses. As far as we know, neither Methley nor M. N., nor anyone in England, knew anything about the true identity of the author of the *Mirror*: they were not aware it was written by a woman, much less the condemned heretic Marguerite Porete.[28] However, both M. N. and Methley clearly considered

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[27] On this tradition, see Alastair J. Minnis, 'Affection and Imagination in "The Cloud of Unknowing" and Hilton's "Scale of Perfection"', *Traditio*, 39 (1983), 323–66 (pp. 324–36).

[28] An excellent introduction to Porete and the story of her book and inquisition can be found in *Marguerite Porete: The Mirror of Simple Souls*, trans. and intro. by Ellen L. Babinsky, preface by Robert E. Lerner (New York: Paulist, 1993), pp. 5–26. For a broader history of the heresy of the Free Spirit with which Porete was associated, see Robert Lerner's *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 73–75 cover the English reception. M. N.'s Middle English version is edited by Marilyn Doiron, '"The Mirror of Simple Souls": A Middle English Translation', *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà*, 5 (1968), 241–355. In the same volume, see also Edmund Colledge and Romana Guarnieri, 'The Glosses by "M.N." and Richard Methley to "The Mirror of Simple Souls"', *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà*, 5 (1968), 357–82. For further discussion, see Michael G. Sargent, '"Le Mirouer des simples ames" and the English Mystical Tradition', *Abendländische Mystik im Mittelalter: Symposion Kloster Engelberg 1984*, ed. by Kurt Ruh (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1986), pp. 443–65; Sargent, 'Marguerite Porete', in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition, c. 1100–1500*, ed. by Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp. 291–309; and Edmund

the *Mirror* a problematic text — one needing to be glossed, though nevertheless one worthy of reading.

As Kathryn Kerby-Fulton has recently argued, manuscript evidence suggests that M. N.'s vernacular version of the *Mirror* was considered an appropriate text for female contemplatives, even with its history of controversy.[29] And despite the text's nebulous association with the heresy of the Free Spirit, Kerby-Fulton proposes that M. N.'s translation and glosses seem to have been 'produced for an audience of stratified abilities — with the most fascinating meanings *left to be made* by those with the sophistication to do so'.[30] What, then, are the consequences of translation into Latin? I would suggest that Methley, working several decades later, reacts against vernacular accessibility and produces a Latin version of the *Mirror* not for a stratified audience at all, but for a severely restricted audience. Instead of opening itself to an audience of stratified abilities, these Latin translations self-select the top stratum and become distanced from the bulk of lay readers, female lay readers, and female contemplative readers — in large part, those readers targeted by the Constitutions. In effect, Methley 'cloisters' the text in the more tolerant climate of the monastic world, where, this text seems to demonstrate, Arundel's Constitutions had remarkably little impact. As Watson, Kerby-Fulton, and others have suggested, throughout the decades after 1409 many religious houses seemed to go on reading and copying as before, ignorant of or simply ignoring any restrictions on the speech and writing of the ecclesial and scholastic spheres.[31] Methley's rather bold promotion of Porete's *Mirror* supports this conclusion. This is not to say that heretical texts might be safely 'hidden' in Latin, as certainly Latin could be radical and heretical, and radical language of any sort was the concern of the Constitutions.[32] Rather, radical Latin might be safely sequestered within a monastery where access and supervision could be tightly controlled by its own authorities.

Colledge, 'Liberty of the Spirit: *The Mirror of Simple Souls*', in *Theology of Renewal: Proceedings of the Congress on the Theology of the Renewal of the Church; Centenary of Canada, 1867–1967. Vol. 2: Renewal of Religious Structures*, ed. by L. K. Shook (Montréal: Herder & Herder, 1968), pp. 100–17.

[29] Kerby-Fulton, *Books under Suspicion*, p. 262.

[30] Kerby-Fulton, *Books under Suspicion*, p. 291.

[31] Kerby-Fulton, *Books under Suspicion*, pp. 276–78, 281, 295–96; Watson, 'Censorship', pp. 831, 834.

[32] See Fiona Somerset, 'Expanding the Langlandian Canon: Radical Latin and the Stylistics of Reform', *The Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 17 (2003), 73–92 (pp. 77–79).

Through his hermeneutic apparatus for the texts, Methley reveals his awareness of the dangers of the heresy of the Free Spirit and his concern for potential critics of both the *Cloud* and the *Mirror* in several ways, one of which I shall touch on here.[33] In the prologue to the *Cloud*, Methley warns against the heresy of the Begards, also known as the heresy of the Free Spirit, by name. He defines the term *vnificacio* as the union of the soul and God:

> Est autem vnicio actiue ex parte dei, passiue ex parte anime, in purissima coniunccione vt possibile est viatori. Vnio autem est illorum duorum copulacio quorum vtrumque manet in sua substancia. Et hoc contra heresim Begardorum. (fol. 1vb)

> (But this uniting is active on the part of God, passive on the part of the soul, in the purest conjunction possible for the pilgrim. Moreover, this union is the joining of those two, each of which remains in its own substance. And this is against the heresy of the Begards.)

Methley's point is that in this type of uniting in life (as opposed to the union of death) there is not a substantial co-inherence of the soul in God, a view which he assigns to the heresy. By placing this clarification at the beginning of the pair of texts, just before the orthodox *Cloud*, Methley acknowledges and diffuses the question of heresy while distancing its mention from the more problematic *Mirror*.

Methley also negotiates with his readers by adding glosses throughout both texts, a practice shared with his original Latin compositions. As we have seen him explain at the beginning of his prologue to the *Cloud*, he will translate the work, 'et vbi necesse fuerit explanare pro capciosis et opiniosis in fine capitulorum quorumdam que quidem difficilia videntur ad intelligendum' (and, where it is necessary, to explain for the argumentative and opinioned at the end of each chapter whatever seems difficult to understand') (fol. 1va). By adding glosses, Methley fully absorbs this vernacular text into the Latin tradition of rhetoric and hermeneutics, lending the *Cloud* the cultural privilege he no doubt felt had been unjustly denied it because of its vernacularity.[34] These *capsiosi et opiniosi* are now forced to engage with the true orthodoxy of the text, and can no longer be misled by a vulgar linguistic medium.

Methley likewise provides a set of glosses for the *Mirror*, though in doing so he discards the glosses already in his source-text, the Middle English glosses by M. N. Methley's rejection of these vernacular glosses perhaps reveals his own concern that

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[33] Kerby-Fulton offers a somewhat controversial consideration of the larger question of insular awareness of the Free Spirit heresy and its relationship to the *Mirror* in England, *Books under Suspicion*, pp. 250–61.

[34] As understood according to the terms set out by Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages*, p. 3.

M. N.'s version left the *Mirror* too open, too accessible to naïve, easily misled readers, and perhaps also suggests a disdain for a vernacular misappropriation of a Latin hermeneutical discourse. This rejection is slightly different from but related to the general failure of vernacular glosses in late medieval England, with both *translatio studii* and *translatio auctoritas* tainted by the Lollards — as Alastair Minnis explains:

> In an atmosphere of 'gret drede and persecucion' wherein just about any Middle English text, however innocuous its use of theological and philosophical doctrine, could be cited as evidence of heterodoxy (particularly in the cases of the socially weak and vulnerable), with the secular and ecclesiastical authorities colluding to maintain a clear division between the roles of *dominus* and *clericus, dives* and *pauper*, any attempt to develop an English commentary-tradition was doomed to failure.[35]

M. N.'s vernacular glosses, a valiant attempt to initiate or enter an English commentary-tradition, were purposefully jettisoned in Methley's Latin recuperation of the *Mirror*. By distancing his Latin version from any mark of its previous vernacular incarnation, Methley ensures a fresh start for what he knows is a borderline heterodox text. At the same time, he seems to collude with those censoring secular and ecclesiastical authorities he otherwise resists, as his acts of translation disallow access by uneducated laity — those who would be most susceptible to the heresy of the Begards.

The Cloistered Text

Further proof that Methley was not writing for a stratified audience but for one single stratum — enclosed male contemplatives — derives from the exclusively Carthusian milieu in which Methley saw himself working. Several instances in the translations insist that these are somehow distinctly Carthusian texts, meant for Carthusian readers, who, as Methley might argue, should either be Latin-literate or not reading these texts at all.

In his first gloss on the first chapter of the *Cloud*, Methley explains what the author means by the *quatuor gradus* of Christian life.

> Hoc loco attende, lector, quod communis status est laycorum, specialis clericorum vel religiosorum, singularis solitariorum scilicet heremitarum, anachoritarum vel precipue Cartusiensium. Vnde videtur quod cuidam Carthusiensi hic liber compositus fuit, quia

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[35] Alastair J. Minnis, *Translations of Authority in Medieval English Literature: Valuing the Vernacular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 35.

scilicet non solent moderni de approbata religione exire ad heremum vt antiquitus, sed ad Cartusienses. (fol. 4ᵛᵃ)

(Attend to this place, reader, that 'common' is the status of the laity, 'special' of clerics or the religious, 'singular' of solitaries such as hermits, anchorites or principally Carthusians. From whence it seems that this book was composed for some certain Carthusian, because modern men are not accustomed to move from an approved religious order to the desert as in ancient times, but to the Carthusians.)

Not only does Methley conclude that the *Cloud* was originally composed for a Carthusian reader, this kind of comment seems relevant only to a thoroughly Carthusian readership — or, conversely, the comment assures a Carthusian readership of the relevance of this text. Of course, Methley ostensibly translated the *Cloud* for the Carthusian Thurston Watson, but this kind of comment suggests that even Methley's conception of a wider readership did not extend beyond the charterhouse walls (whether in England or continental Europe).

Then there is the scribe's Latin inscription on the page before Methley's *Mirror*: 'Iste liber aliter intitulatur Russhbroke, quie fuit prior de ordine Cartusiansi et hunc libellum primo composuit' (This book is called Ruusbroec, who was a prior of the Carthusian order and first composed this little book) (fol. 41ʳ). The tradition of a misattribution of the *Mirror of Simple Souls* to Jan van Ruusbroec, the Flemish mystic and Augustinian canon, and his further misidentification as a Carthusian, might have helped to validate Carthusian interest in this problematic text, at least in its Latin form.[36]

It is also possible that Methley considered the *Mirror*'s English translator, M. N., to have been Carthusian. At the very end of the *Mirror* Methley closes with a prayer, which is introduced with this statement: 'Oracio vel translatoris primi vel nunc secundi Cartusiensis' (The prayer of the first, or now of the second, Carthusian translator) (fol. 99ʳ). Colledge and Walsh interpret this to mean that Methley was referring to Ruusbroec.[37] But Methley did not necessarily know about the attribution to Ruusbroec, even if the scribe did. Also, the scribe's attribution

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[36] For a more in-depth discussion of the attribution to Ruusbroec see Marleen Cré, *Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse: A Study of London, British Library, MS Additional 37790*, The Medieval Translator, 9 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), pp.165–69; Michael G. Sargent, 'The Annihilation of Marguerite Porete', *Viator*, 28 (1997), 253–79 (p. 262); and Michael G. Sargent, 'Medieval and Modern Readership of Marguerite Porete's *Mirouer des simples âmes*: The Old French and English Traditions', forthcoming.

[37] Colledge and Walsh, '*The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Mirror of Simple Souls*', unpublished edition, p. 321, footnote to line 20.

to Ruusbroec implies that Ruusbroec would be considered an *auctor*, as the originator of the text ('hunc libellum primo composuit'), not a *translator*, and it seems unlikely that Methley would think Ruusbroec (thought to be from the Parisian Charterhouse of Vauvert) would have translated from French into English. Thus, this first 'Carthusian translator' is more likely to refer to M. N., who identifies himself as the translator of a French original of the *Mirror*. Methley's reference to this first 'Carthusian translator' might be the only biographical hint we have regarding M. N.'s identity. One might think that Methley would have been in a position to know if M. N. were of his order — although, of course, the Carthusians were wrong about Ruusbroec. M. N.'s identity must remain conjectural because it cannot be proven solely through the possible, though probable, conclusion that Methley's reference to a preceding Carthusian translator refers to M. N. himself.[38]

However Methley envisioned his readership, the manuscript evidence suggests that the text had only a limited monastic audience. Pembroke College, MS 221 is a thoroughly Carthusian product: containing only Methley's Latin *Cloud* and *Mirror*, it was copied out by the skilled Carthusian scribe William Darker of Sheen, and commented on by several readers who display the kind of close attention to textual accuracy which defined Carthusian readership throughout the Middle Ages.[39] In addition, English charterhouses are to be thanked for the careful preservation of many Latin and vernacular spiritual works which survive today, often in only one copy. As Vincent Gillespie has noted, the English Carthusians were particularly concerned with collecting the *ipsissima verba*, 'the raw data of psychic phenomena' such as the *Shewings* of Julian of Norwich, the *Book* of Margery Kempe, and the texts of Edmund Leversedge, a layman whose vernacular visionary text was allegedly translated into Latin by a Carthusian monk in the 1450s.[40] Porete's *Mirror* would also add a formidable voice to the exceptional library of apophatic mystical texts which seem to have been a Carthusian specialty: the *Cloud of Unknowing*, the Pseudo-Dionysian *Mystica theologia*, and Hugh of Balma's *Viae sion lugent*, among others, are all preserved almost exclusively in charterhouse collections.[41]

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[38] For speculation on the identity of M. N., see Robert E. Lerner, 'New Light on *The Mirror of Simple Souls*', *Speculum*, 85 (2010), 91–116 (pp. 103–107).

[39] On the editing of Pembroke College MS 221, see Colledge and Walsh, '*The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Mirror of Simple Souls*', unpublished edition, pp. 23–33.

[40] Gillespie, 'Dial M for Mystic', p. 244.

[41] For more on Carthusian manuscripts of these texts, see Michael G. Sargent, 'The Transmission by the English Carthusians of some Late Medieval Spiritual Writings', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 27 (1976), 225–240.

Preaching not with their mouths but with their hands, the Carthusians occasionally demonstrate attention to lay spiritual needs through their provision and transmission of texts appropriate for lay readers: most famously, Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Christ*, with its official approval by Arundel.[42] Another prime example of this *cura pastoralis* is Methley's sole surviving vernacular text, *To Hew Hermyte: A Pistle of Solitary Life Nowadayes*, which he wrote for the sake of a local hermit.[43] In this text Methley makes it clear that this hermit, Hugh, has a very crude knowledge of Latin — not even knowing the Psalms — and encourages him to read 'holy englysh bookes'. It is very likely, as it has been suggested, that these English books were provided by the monks of Mount Grace.[44] Clearly the Carthusian interest in spiritual and devotional texts overlapped with an interest in offering counsel to those outside the cloister, though it has been aptly noted that in selecting works for a lay audience the monks took care 'to modify or adapt the text for devotional, as opposed to contemplative purposes'.[45]

This brings us to a crucial, if problematic, intersection between Margery Kempe and Methley. Methley was a practising mystic, documenting his experiences in three Latin treatises, *Dormitorium dilecti*, *Schola amoris languidi*, and *Refectorium salutis*.[46] In them Methley explains how he received striking visions and raptures at unexpected times: while saying mass, during the night office, even while reading in the

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[42] See Vincent Gillespie, 'Cura Pastoralis in Deserto', in *De cella in seculum: Religious and Secular Life and Devotion in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Michael G. Sargent (Cambridge: Brewer, 1989), pp. 161–81.

[43] *Richard Methley, to Hew Heremyte: A Pystyl of Solytary Life Nowadayes*, ed. by James Hogg, Analecta Cartusiana 31 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1977), pp. 91–119.

[44] Kelly Parsons, 'The Red Ink Annotator of The Book of Margery Kempe and his Lay Audience', in *The Medieval Professional Reader at Work: Evidence from Manuscripts of Chaucer, Langland, Kempe, and Gower*, ed. by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo (Victoria: English Literary Studies, University of Victoria, 2001), pp. 143–63 (p. 146).

[45] Denise L. Despres, 'Ecstatic Reading and Missionary Mysticism', in *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England*, ed. by Rosalynn Voaden (Cambridge: Brewer, 1996), pp. 141–60 (p. 148).

[46] Dating from 1484, 1485, 1487, respectively; all are preserved only in Trinity College, Cambridge, MSS, 0.2.56, and show no sign of transmission outside the charterhouse. For a facsimile reproduction of this manuscript, see *Mount Grace Charterhouse and Late Medieval English Spirituality*, ed. by James Hogg, Analecta Cartusiana 64, 2 vols (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1978), II: *The Trinity College Cambridge MS.0.2.56*.

refectory. As a monk of an order known for its austerity, he does not seem to fit in with the usually lay, usually female, usually vernacular examples of 'sensory devotion' such as Margery Kempe — yet this is exactly where he is placed by one reader of her *Book*. The single surviving copy of Margery Kempe's *Book*, London, British Library, MS Additional 61823, features marginalia by several different readers, but one of them, using a distinctive red ink, refers to Methley at three points where Margery's visions provoke some of her most physical and shocking displays. In Chapter 13:

> hir hert mygth lestyn þat it was not consumyd wyth ardowr of lofe*, whych was kyndelyd wyth þe holy dalyawns of owyr Lord
> **R. Medlay v. was wont so to say*. (fol. 14b, p. 29)[47]

In Chapter 24:

> & sche had hem so ofteyn-tymes þat þei madyn hir ryth weyke* in hir bodyly myghtys, & namely yf sche herd of owr Lordys Passyon.
> **so father RM & father Norton & of Wakenes of the passyon*. (fol. 33b, p. 68)[48]

And in Chapter 73:

> Whan sche beheld* þis sygth in hir sowle, sche fel down in þe feld a-mong þe pepil. Sche cryid, sche roryd, sche wept as þow sche xulde a brostyn þer-with.
> * *father M. was wont so to doo*. (fol. 85a, p. 174)

The annotator's references to Methley and Norton suggest that the annotator, too, was a monk at Mount Grace Charterhouse or at least closely familiar with them.[49] Not only do his red-ink annotations help to validate Margery's visionary experiences by connecting them directly to the authority of the monastery; conversely, they also testify to a Carthusian willingness to parallel their members' experiences of extreme ecstatic devotion with those of a laywoman. Whether or not the evidence implies that the *Book of Margery Kempe* was prepared for a lay or female lay readership, as Kelly Parsons has controversially argued,[50] these references to Methley

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[47] *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Sanford Brown Meech, EETS, O. S. 202 (London: Humphrey Milford for the Early English Text Society, 1940). Citations are by folio number from the manuscript and page number from Meech.

[48] John Norton was prior of Mount Grace Charterhouse at the same time that Methley was vicar, until Norton's death in 1521–22; several of his visionary texts survive, and have yet to receive much scholarly attention. See W. N. M. Beckett, 'Norton, John (d. 1521/2)', *ODNB*.

[49] Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), p. 209. Lochrie's discussion of Methley and Margery Kempe, in her chapter entitled 'The Disembodied Text', remains one of the most insightful.

[50] See Parsons, 'The Red Ink Annotator', pp. 155–63.

and Norton do not attempt to promote the brand of advanced apophatic mystical contemplation which texts such as the *Cloud* and the *Mirror* espouse.

What Methley's vernacular letter *To Hew Hermyte* strongly suggests, when compared to Methley's Latin translations, is that in 1491 Methley regarded the divide between Latin and the vernacular as effective a divide between monastic and lay readers as the thick stone walls of the charterhouse. By shifting the difficult *Cloud of Unknowing* and the *Mirror of Simple Souls* into Latin, out of the reach of most lay readers, Methley was, perhaps, expressing a kind of pastoral concern not unlike that expressed by Arundel's Constitutions — keep confusing, easily misread, and possibly dangerous texts out of the reach of easily imperiled souls. Where Methley departs from those so-called 'draconian' decrees is his approval — his endorsement — of sensitive, adventurous works of vernacular theology once they have been defused, Latinized, and limited to appropriately supervised readers, readers whose spiritual aptitude matches their linguistic aptitude. Behind Methley's choice of language can be discerned a desire for closely supervised reading, and closely scrutinizing reading, within a monastic setting. Siding with Arundel on the general issue of lay access does *not* necessarily mean siding with him on all issues of theological writing.

What does this one monk's theological daring, and his rejection of the vernacular, mean for our understanding of late fifteenth-century spiritual and textual communities? For one, it is a reminder of the plurality of these communities: we cannot assume the same approach to texts by any one social stratum, any one order, any one house. Likewise, the climate of tolerance evolved over time, and 1491 was more than a lifetime after 1409: Methley's father or grandfather would have witnessed the 'age of Wyclif'. Methley may not represent anything more than his own personal views on literary access and mystical experience; his Latin *Cloud of Unknowing* and *Mirror of Simple Souls* may have been the result of an isolated effort to disentangle the 'vernacular' from 'vernacular theology', to Latinize products of a vernacular culture, and to sneak it past overly suspicious authorities. Yet he does force us to ask: what happens to vernacular theology when it is no longer in the vernacular? What is gained by writing vernacular theology in Latin?

We must also remember that Methley was participating in a conversation with his readers, his critics, and his texts. In reality the English Carthusians were no hermits on a remote mountaintop. They were voices in dialogue with other charterhouses, other orders, lay readers, and secular leaders. Indeed, the monastic world listened and responded to the laity's need for spiritual texts which would survive the censorship of the Constitutions. But perhaps it was this increasing permeability — a blurring of the line between cloister and parish — that drove Methley to use

Latin as a 'barrier language' rather than a vehicular language for these mystical texts. Perhaps it was the extreme shows of devotion and claims of visionary gifts by everyday people which drove Methley to reclaim the mystical tradition for the Latinate, for professional (that is, professed) contemplatives — in his eyes, the rightful heirs of Pseudo-Dionysius and Hugh of Balma. Perhaps Methley's translations reveal that monastic readers would go to great lengths to circumvent the problem of the over-accessible vernacular. Perhaps all this must remain speculative until further study of this monk's fascinating œuvre.

Part IX
Acting Holy