UNCOUPLING THE HERMIT: RICHARD ROLLE'S HERMIT-*ING*

Christopher Roman

> . . . because *ontos* is always a question of *ethos* and *praxis*. In that sense, the tone of a thing tells us more than anything else what it *is,* for its tone is its ethic, its practice, its ontology, *its rapport.*
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> – fragilekeys[1]

Be aware of deception. Rolle's *The Form of Living* wrestles with deception; not to beware, but to be *aware.* How does one form living in the face of such common deception? And, as Rolle is concerned with deception, as such, living then must be something taken from deception; it is something that must be formed, shaped out of what is before us. Of course, there are those who cannot rise to love God: "þay fallen in lustes and lykynge of þis world, and for þey þynken ham swete" (7-8).[2] They "þynken" them sweet; their taste for *faux* sweetness has left them fallen. They have no form– those who are deceived. Rolle addresses *The Form* to one who wants to fashion a solitary life, but this solitary life is shaped from this miasma of deception. The *problem* of reality is paramount. On the one hand, there are many things that lead the solitary astray: the devil, sin, the flesh. On the other hand there is revelatory depth beneath these obstacles–a way to live that is bound to these obstacles that reveals truth. Rolle is not rejecting the act of rejecting sin; as he repeats, it is sin that will lead the soul to everlasting torment that is without comparison. However, that reality–the

Thank you to Andrew Albin (Fordham University) for his assitance with relevant passages to *Melos Amoris.*

[1] http://fragilekeys.com/2012/04/26/common-ontology/.

[2] All citations from *The Form of Living* come from *Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse*, ed. S. J. Ogilvie-Thomson, EETS (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988).

reality of sin–is at the same time a real deception–it leads one to live a false life so that the solitary does not know who they are, does not allow themselves to be led by God or joined with Him. However, it is the *awareness* of deception that is necessary since it produces the furniture of the hermit's room.[3]

What am I to you? Initially, the solitary does not know itself. Rolle devises a chart of being with two axes. On one axis, Rolle explores the being of the contemplative in love: how do I recognize myself in you? On the other axis, Rolle sets out the being of Love itself. The question of how to love God is found on this second axis. Rolle needs to address the act that will lead to burning, the fire of love. Rolle emphasizes a kind of stability: "verray loue is to loue hym with al þi myght stalworthy, in al þi hert wisely, in al þi soule deuotely and sweetly" (705-707). Might stalworthy, hert wisely, soule deuowtly and sweetly–these three flow to constitute the gift of the contemplative to God. *I will give my will, my heart, my soul–these are the elements of my solitary body.* The solitary body is not anatomical, but a being like an exploded diagram. The will, the heart, the soul are the organs that matter; they float around each other in concentric orbits around the God-touch. This is the becoming that the mystic opens itself to. These three organs reach out to sense–this is the open space by which the contemplative touches a withdrawing God-object.

The form of living, this *progressive* verb–living–indicates that this form is found in the shifting, and it will not be fixed. "'*Ontology*' means doctrine of being."[4] So begins Martin Heidegger's 1923 lecture course where he lays out the philosophical investigation of ontology that finds full fruition in *Being and Time.* This early lecture course, however, provides us with Heidegger's definition of phenomenology as a mode of research, one that "needs to be understood *in accord with its possibility* as something which is not publicly and self-evidently given . . . Objects come to be defined just as they give themselves."[5] From this we can understand Rolle's need to develop an awareness of deception–it is not self-evident.

[3] Although *The Form of Living* was written for a very specific anchoress, in this commentary I am going to use anchorite/anchoress/hermit/solitary interchangeably. This may undermine historicism, but I am aiming for how this text speaks trans-historically.

[4] Martin Heidegger, *Ontology–the Hermeneutics of Facticity*, trans. John van Buren (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2008), 1.

[5] Heidegger, 58.

As well, we notice that as sin presents itself it remains fixed. It is *always already* the devil, the sin, the fleshy world. In recognizing that there is evil, the index of the transcendent is evident . It is in shifting, in living, that the solitary recognizes their capability, their thing-hood. The solitary is a shape that must be made. As Graham Ward writes, "an orientation toward ontology–some model of the relationship between existence and existents, being and becoming–is necessary. The question also presupposes that an enquiry into the relationship is possible. The question demands that there is or can be an identification of a 'thing,' an understanding of thinghood."[6] For Ward, the debate surrounding the ontological nature of God is between God as beyond (such as found in Jean-Luc Marion or Heidegger) and God in the Augustinian sense, as source. For Ward, then, the debate is between a philosophical and theological line of questioning one in which the former is contained in the latter (for Augustine, and, thus, Ward). Ward's concern with "thinghood," however is important for Rolle's sense of the God-object and the solitary that I mentioned earlier. For Ward "its 'thinghood' and the varieties of 'thinghood' of which it is composed is never stable, never static. Its thinghood is in suspension, as the 'what' is what it is in the fullness of its becoming."[7] Ward echoes an object-oriented ontology here in that what Ward calls "suspension," OOO philosophers would call *withdrawal.* Ward further elucidates, "whether a thing is can never be fully defined. That there *is* can be affirmed, but the nature of that *is* is not a thing that can be grasped or even experienced as an *is,* as presence, as that which can be isolated as present to itself."[8] Ward writes that only in the line of questioning do we have a sense of God's presence, but we will never know God-in-himself; "the

[6] Graham Ward, "Questioning God" in *Questioning God*, ed. John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley, and Michael J. Scanlon (Blooming: Indiana UP, 2001), 279. Also see Joannes Scottus Eriugena, who, in the *Periphyseon writes,* "Divine essence, which in Its pure state surpasses all intellect, is rightly said to be created in the things made by, through, in, and directed toward Itself; so It is recognized in Its creations through the intellect (if the creations are solely intelligible) or the senses (of they are sensibles) of those who search for it with proper zeal" (*Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature,* ed. and trans. Myra L. Uhlfelder [Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976], 17).
[7] Ward, 280.
[8] Ward, 280.

questioning of God (both subjective and objective genitive) never ends; it just plumbs deeper into the mystery of the Godhead as the Godhead unfolds its own infinite nature."[9]

If the fundamental question of ontology is 'what is?' then *The Form of Living* investigates that question through the lens of the becoming continuity of the hermit-God relationship, and in that becoming the God-object floats. Therefore, Rolle is concerned with separating how what *is* relates to that which *negates*. And, what negates is what stands still. For Rolle, the problem of ontology is finding the ways in which the solitary can fulfill their capability. Grace Jantzen's commentary on a queer theology assists us in thinking through Rolle's attempt to "uncouple" the hermit from traditional frames of reference, to be aware of what is not self-evident. Jantzen is interested in a theology that "gets rid of the straight and narrow boundaries of traditional Christendom and is open to difference, fluidity, curvature."[10] This fluidity and curvature finds fulfillment in the aesthetics of the self:

> those of us who already take up queer positions have some extra practice in the creativity and the cost of an aesthetics of the self. We are learning how to dig deep into our best possibilities, and not to allow ourselves to become flat mirrors of our contexts, reflecting and reinforcing its self-perceptions . . . the mirror we hold up to our culture, religious and secular, is a mirror of curves and corners that reveals the multiple distortions of discursive and material reality.[11]

Rolle repeats in many of his works the formula "knowest thi self" (453-454). The need to know oneself is integral in understanding the life of solitude, as well as how that life opens towards God.[12]

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[9] Ward, 282.

[10] Grace Jantzen, "Contours of a Queer Theology" in *Feminism and Theology*, ed. Janet Martin Soskice and Diana Lipton (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), 344.

[11] Jantzen, 351.

[12] Rolle's need for ontological prescription finds its counterpart in Heidegger's commentary on the relationship between object and hermeneutic: "the theme of this hermeneutical investigation is the Dasein which is in each case our own and indeed as hermeneutically interrogated with respect to and on the basis of the character of its being and with a

Rolle's hermitic ontology is based on fulfilling being; in a word, how the hermit is becoming-*hermit.*

At the heart of Rolle's ontology is the role of God in the hermitic life. But role is too static of a word: God is a catalyst in the relationships. It is the middle of the river. God is revealed through the connections between solitary and God. God is not present to itself because it is never fixed. The solitary's relationship with the *unknown* is where they find God. So, God is not a stable object, rather, something only definable in terms of movement, in terms of love. God is an unhittable moving target. God is negated when the relationship between God and solitary is disrupted by sin, deception, or falsity. Early in *The Form of Living,* Rolle warns that people are not what they seem. It is easy to see "worldisshe men and wommen that vsen glotony or lecherie and other oppyn synnes, bot þei ben also in sum men þat semen in penaunce and in good lif" (18-20). Rolle emphasizes the "semen" throughout this text. Worldly people wallow in gluttony and lechery, so it is easy to see what not to do in their case; they are actively and publicly sinning, but they are also standing still–they are gluttony, they are lechery, and it fixes them like so many pins inside so many bugs.

The lecherous, the greedy, they are, perhaps, easy to spot. Rolle poses the question about those we might identify as role models: the priests, the bishops, the enclosed, who, to all appearances, are living a holy life. What if they are also–on the inside–actually sinning and leading an unholy life? Rolle emphasizes that what happens in these situations is that the devil especially likes to pick apart the holy: "when he seth a man or a womman amonge a þousand turne ham holy to God . . . a thousand wiles he hath in what manere he may deceeyue ham" (21-25). Further, Rolle writes, if he cannot make them publicly sin so that others can see them for what they are, "he begileth many so priuely þat þai can nat oft tymes fele þe trape þat hath take ham (26-28). The devil then sets a trap that the holy person is not aware of–in other words they are living what they *think* is a holy life, but in truth they are ensnared in a devil's web because they are living in imagination, as opposed to what is. They are fixed. In order to live more harmoniously with God this trap must be avoided.

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view to developing in it a radical wakefulness for itself," (*Ontology–the Hermeneutics of Facticity,* 12). The wakefulness is what Rolle is addressing against the problem of deception.

But, first Rolle insists we understand the very nature of the snares, so that the hermit can continue being. Again, Rolle wants us to know ourselves in order to live in God. Many of these initial traps have to do with pride: "sum men he taketh with errour þat he putteth ham in; sum with synguler witte, when he maketh ham wend þat þe thynge þat þei thynken or done is beste, and fortþi thei wol no conseil have of other þat ben better and connynge þan þei" (29-32). The nature of pride is that it cuts oneself off from relationships; we fix ourselves. The self is entirely centered on the *itself* and is not opened. Further, this stain of pride attacks what could be beneficial spiritual activities. For example, Rolle writes that one could "delite in ham self of þe penaunce þat þei suffren" (35-36). Penance, abstinence, good works: for Rolle these are easily bent to be sinful as the solitary fixes them onto oneself. The activity stops; it becomes *not* a process, but is embraced only for false outputs. Because the solitary places themselves in the middle of the act, cutting off the benefits that connect one with God.

Therefore, Jesus cannot be loved "bot in clennesse" (159-160). This cleanness has to do with righting the self outwards in understanding true Being. The original tempter came "in an angel of lighte" (who "hideth yuel vndre þe liknesse of good") (182-184). The solitary's work is in being able to separate the "liknesse of good" from Real good. So, the Real works beneath the level of appearance. And this "liknesse" can easily be faked while the Real beneath is hidden from uncritical eyes. Rolle places the solitary in a unique position: "the state þat þou art in, þat is solitude, þat is most able of al othre to reuelaciouns of þe Holy Goste" (138-139). The solitary, though, has a certain predilection for privation, the ability to push the body is a hallmark of hermitic living. However, Rolle emphasizes that the solitary should not be excessive in their habits since this leads to further deception. If the solitary eats, drinks and sleeps too well then it "makes vs slowe and cold in Goddis loue" (190). On the other hand, if there is too much penance the solitary risks "destrue" of the self (192). In both cases, extremes lead to misconception. In the first case, easy living leads to too much comfort and thus a contentment in earthly pleasures and a distancing from God. In the second case, bodily punishment leads to an erasure of the body, a body that is necessary to live a contemplative life. There also develops a sense of competition with excessive ascetic practices–the solitary begins to pride themselves

on their extremes and, thus, prove that these practices are not for God, but, rather are done out of their own excessive sense of self.

What is the relationship between self and solitary, then? We can begin in thinking about the connection between body and soul. Rolle writes, "I know þat þi lif semeth yeuen to þe service of God. þan is hit sham to þe, bot if þou be as good, or bettre, within in þi soule, as þou art semynge at þe syght of men. Therfor turne þi þoȝt perfitly to God, as hit semeth þat þou hast þi body" (233-234). Even if the solitary is publicly identified–bodily–as someone whose spiritual practices are strong–*semeth*–it does not guarantee that they are actually living a good life devoted to God; there is a delineation being made here: one between the body and the activities devoted to it and the activities of the soul which must be connected to those bodily activities. The becoming-solitary cannot separate oneself into two modes of being; they must flow together. Therefore, the solitary must move both body and soul toward God, aligning the soul with the body. The body is already *acting like a hermit,* but the solitary's soul might not be. Note Rolle's mapping here, since usually it is the body that leads the soul astray. Here, it is the soul that must correct itself to the habitation of the body.

For Rolle, the concept of "perfit love" indicates this alignment of body and soul in space. In order to achieve this, the solitary must also contemplate time. The solitary must keep four things in mind:

> on is þe mesure of þi life here, þat is so short is þat vnnethe is oght; for we lyve bot in a point . . . Anoþer is vncerteyntee of oure endynge; for we wot neuer whan we shall dey . . . The þrid is þat we shal answare before þe righteous juge of al þe tyme þat we han had here: how we haue lyved, whate oure occupacioun hath bene and whi . . . The fourth is þat we þynke how mych ioy is þat þay shal haue, þe which lesteth in Go[ddis] love to har endynge. (280-288; 297-298)

Not only does the solitary need to think of their life as a point–to reveal themselves within the control of eternity, but the solitary is encouraged to see that life moved forward into eternity. As Eileen Joy writes, "every point of each of us coincides with every point of everyone else in a single point which is where we all are. There is nowhere else. The idea of distance, or separation, or estrangement,

is a dream. Which is not to say we should not mind the gaps."[13] Rolle asks the solitary to consider this distilled point of time in which they exist and connect to everything else. In this way, Rolle sets up the contemplative life as a revelation: it will need to be revealed, accounted for at the time of judgment, but the contemplative, as a way to make sense of the point of time they currently occupy will also set themselves into an eternal future. As Heidegger remarks:

> Taking historical consciousness to be an exponent of being-interpreted in the today draws its motivation from the following criterion. The manner in which a time (the today which is in each case for a while at the particular time) sees and addresses the past (either its own past Dasein or some other past Dasein), holding on to it and preserving it or abandoning it, is a sign of how a present stands regarding itself, how it as being-there *is* in its there.[14]

The hermit regards itself. The "uncerteynte" of the ending of life is countered by the comfort of being "breþere and felewes with angels and holy men, louynge and hauynge, praising and seynge þe kynge of joy in þe fairheed and shynynge of his mageste" (299-301). The nature of time is both finite–life, narration of that life–and eternal–love of God, joys of heaven. But, the contemplative cannot have one without the other. It is in the taking account of time–seeing it for what it is; seeing it for how it projects forward–that the contemplative is the most successful in their living.

Rolle emphasizes a certain kind of life as the source of contemplative power, hence his emphasis on living *appropriately*. The ideal of living appropriately is made clear in his discussion of being "right disposed" (323). Being "right disposed" means to understand the character of the human being: "what thynge fileth a man . . . What maketh hym clene . . . what holdeth hym in clennesse . . . what þynge draweth hym for ordeyne his wille al to Goddis wille" (323-327). Again, we return to the concept of

[13] Eileen Joy, "You Are Here: A Manifesto" in *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects*. ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Washington, DC: Oliphaunt Books, 2012), 154.
[14] Heidegger, 28.

knowing oneself, but also, as is indicated in the use of the third-person "hym," Rolle seems to be widening his reach and suggesting an anthropology that guides the contemplative: what is this "hym?"

It is in this "hym" that Rolle addresses the nature of hermitic being in the relation between the heart, the mouth, and the deed. These sites of the body are vulnerable to sin and must be carefully guarded and made right, but they also indicate the foundation of hermitic being. These three complement the orbiting will, heart, soul in which Rolle's ontology is based: the heart, mouth, and deed are points in the hermitic being that cause perturbations in the local–they uncouple the hermit from one environment (the world) into another (the hermitic space) or, if not properly aligned with God, they re-couple the hermit to the world. In other words, the heart, mouth, and deeds *are* hermitic being in that it is through them that being is constituted.

The heart is where the emotions and thought are situated. Rolle writes that the sins of the heart consist of "il thoghtis, il delite, assent to syn, desire of il, wikked wille . . ." (329-33). The heart is not only connected to emotional stuntedness, for example "il dreed, il loue, errour, fleishly affecioun to þi frendes or to others þat þou lovest" but also poor thinking, "vnstablenesse of thought, pyne of penaunce, ypocrisi, loue to plese men, dred to displese ham, sham of good deed" (3301-332, 340-342). Thoughts and emotions are situated in the heart and this catalogue of problems that Rolle reports indicates both the inability to align the heart with God, as in the "assent to sin," and also an unhealthy relationship with the community and the self. Being too concerned with pleasing or displeasing others leads one astray from the ability to love God, but, also, leads one to be ashamed of one's good deeds. Earlier in this litany of sins, Rolle writes of "perplexite (þat is dout what is to do, what nat, for euery man oweth to be sikyre what he shal do and what he shal leue)" (336-338). The idea of "perplexite," this inability to decide, speaks to the bent nature of the self–it is being upset by a lack of becoming, of distraction that clouds the contemplative being.

If the sins of the heart indicate the ways in which the emotions and thoughts can ground the hermit in the wrong path, the sins of mouth indicate the public nature of the contemplative being. The environment of the hermit is important in that Rolle's text is attempting to move, to cause vibrations in the solitary. Rolle

recognizes that the solitary can never be completely severed from the world–as was indicated earlier, the body is in a relationship with the soul–however, he works to change the track of the solitary so that they are moving towards God. With his discussion of the mouth, Rolle connects the disjointedness that results from the relationship between God and community. Not only is it sinful to slander God or swear in his name, but to "gruch ayayns God for any anguys or noy or tribulacioun þat may befalle in erth" (352-353), indicates a lack in understanding of God's being on the part of the community. To "gruch" would imply that God does not know what it is doing, and, thus putting oneself at odds with a divine will. God is no longer part of becoming if it is out there acting *apart* from the community.

As mentioned earlier, *The Form of Living* is concerned with deception–the world that presents itself is a series of flows and stops that *produces* the hermit. The concern in Rolle's hermitic ontology is what kinds of objects need to exist in order for the contemplative to exist. One key to hermitic relations is the attitude toward neighbors. The contemplative must avoid discord with the neighbors: "manacynge, sowynge of discord, tresone, fals witnes, il consail . . . turne good deeds to il for to make ham be holden il þat don ham (we owen for to lap oure neghbors dedes in þe best and not in þe worst)" (355-358). Rolle's capacious attitude towards neighbors, to hold them to the best intentions is a way to "uncouple" from judgement. As Slavoj Žižek remarks, "the person who mistrusts his others is, paradoxically, in his very cynical disbelief, the victim of the most radical self-deception . . . the true believer . . . sees Goodness in the other where the other himself is not aware of it."[15] To place oneself in judgement of the neighbor's deeds or even to cause *negative* political (treason, false witness) problems with one's mouth proves that one is out of joint with being.

Finally, Rolle describes the problems of the sins of deeds. Rolle begins with a roll call of the various ways one can break the law of the Ten Commandments. These are direct acts against the Law, but, again, Rolle widens actions to describe community disharmony. Rolle is critical of hurting "any man in his body or in his goodes or in his fame . . . , withhold necessaries fro þe body or yeve hit outrage . . . , feynynge of moore good þan we haue for to

[15] Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*. London: Verso, 2000, 119.

seme holier or connynger or wiser þan we bene" (367-372). Again, Rolle speaks to the way that these elements–God, self, community–constitute the being of the contemplative. It is of interest to note not only the power that the contemplative has in his community, and the damage the solitary can cause through making themselves out to be better than they are, but the political nature that it can also hold. Rolle warns against treason and false witness, and also harming goods. There is a sense that Rolle has cast a wide net–these are the problems of every *body* and, thus, his anthropology is of human failing, what is wrong or out of joint with Being. On the other hand, however, Rolle is suggesting that human being is not a lost cause–the nature of the human simply needs to be remedied in a clear fashion:

> the thynges þat clenseth vs of þat filthede ben þre, ayeyns þay þre manere of synnes. Þe first is sorowe of hert ayeynes þe synnes of thought; and þat behoueth to be perfite, þat þou wolt neuer syn moor . . . The tother is shrift of mouth again þe syn of mouth; and þat shal be hasted withouten delayynge, naked withouten excusynge, and entier without departynge, as for to tel a syn to oon prest and anoþer to anothre; sey al þat þou wost to oon, or al is nat worth. The þrid is satisfaccioun, þat hath þre parties, fastynge, prier, and almsysdede . . . for to foryeve ham þat doth þe wronge and pray for ham, and enfourme ham how þay shal do þat ben in poynt to perisshe. (399-410)

The advice that Rolle provides here is in protracting the body into stability. Stability, though, is a kind of flow. The mouth should be given "shrift" but also made transparent. Rather than try to spread around one's sins to multiple priests so that no one has any clear idea of the depth of sin, one should tell them all to one so as to avoid shallowness. The depth of the solitary needs to be revealed.

This becoming toward God by the contemplative is based on Rolle's discussion of the nature of love. Rolle's discussion of love involves two dimensions. First, Rolle addresses degrees of love. These degrees of love are levels to which the contemplative must attain or "win" (525). The other dimension of love that Rolle discusses is Love itself–the being of Love. If *The Form of Living* is a guide for contemplative to turn their life to God, Rolle's ontology

is in the nature of Love itself. In a Socratic-like dialogue, Rolle begins with three questions: what is love?, where is love?, and how do I love? As mentioned previously, one can think of Rolle' analysis as a diagram–on one axis is the being of the contemplative, on the other, is the love that God reveals. In the final *how* of the dialogue the two axes meet.

The three degrees of love are "insuperabile," "inseparabile," and "synguler." The contemplative achieves "insuperabile" love when the love is stable in the face of all obstacles. In marriage ceremony-like language, Rolle describes the love as stable whether "in ese or in anguys, in heel or in sekeness, so þat þe þynke þat þou will nat for al þe world, to haue hit withouten end, wreth God oo time" (529-531). This love conforms with Rolle's wish for stability of heart. This is the foundational love that the other forms of love rest upon. Rolle writes further that this is a good love to have, but it is even better for the contemplative if they can move into other types of love.

If "insuperabile" love is marked by the external, "inseparabile" love is marked by the internal. Insuperabile love is threatened by the external, so that for Rolle love is truly inseparabile if it is stable and will not bow to anything that happens to the contemplative. Inseparabile is characterized by a oneness with Jesus. The contemplative is fastened to the thought of Jesus so that "þi thought and þi myght is so hooly, so entierly and so perfitly fasted, set, and stablet in Ihesu Criste þat þi þoght cometh neuer of hym, neuer departeth fro hym" (538-540). The prepositions "of" and "fro" indicate the contemplative's flow–they are immersed in Jesus–being both a part of and emanating out from. The only time the contemplative's thoughts depart from Jesus is in sleeping, but immediately upon waking the contemplative returns to Jesus-thought. There is a singularity in this thinking as the contemplative is aligned with Jesus, however, Rolle leaves his longest discussion for the third kind of love: synguler.

Synguler love is the highest form of love that the contemplative can experience and it is marked by the feeling of fire that the contemplative experiences. As Rolles writes, this love "hath no pere" (550). The contemplative experiences solace and comfort from Jesus only and nothing else. For Rolle, Jesus is the sole occupier of the heart at this level. The fire that burns in the heart is "so delitable and wonderful þat I can not tel hit" (556). The fire defies descriptions though it is can be likened to the fire one

feels if one sticks their finger in the candle's flame (555). At this level the soul is Jesus-bound: "þe sowl is Ihesu louynge, Ihesu thynkynge, Ihesu desyrynge, only in coueitys of hym" (556-557). The gap between Jesus and the heart is lessened here–if there is a gap at all. The heart begins to embody the present progressive verb-form that is Jesus; the heart makes itself Jesus-*ing*, as it burns, thinks, desires. The soul makes a final transformation when it becomes song.

The soul–in the midst of its desire for Jesus, thinking of Jesus–becomes a song of Jesus. It is at this point that Rolle points out the contemplative will be overwhelmed to see Jesus and that the feeling of "deth swetter þan hony" (562) is proof the soul is secured to Him. As the contemplative is absorbed into Jesus-thought, Rolle still feels in his contemplative ascension that the payoff is to see Jesus, to have him confirmed visually. But, despite this death-wish, Rolle indicates that along with the song, it is here that the contemplative no longer "languishes" rather, it is here that the contemplative experiences the profound change of their body sleeping and the heart awake.

As Rolle points out, in the first two levels the contemplative languishes, like a sickness (567). It is only in the third degree that the heart/soul is awakened like a "brennynge fyre, and as þe nyghtgalle, þat loueth songe and melody" (571-572). This soul is only comforted in song and so will sing for the rest of its days of Jesus. Like song, the soul moves, but it is not graspable.[16] It is a flow both as a point (think musical notes) and as a movement (the notes roll along the notation, touch the ear). Rolle further wants to separate this song from regular every day singing. This genre of song is only experienced *at this level* of love. And, further, this love is a gift from God, it comes from heaven; when the contemplative

[16] See *The Melos Amoris of Richard Rolle of Hampole*, ed. E.J.F Arnould (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), especially chapters 44-46 for Rolle's discussion of the ontology of song in his mystical work. For example, from the beginning of chapter 46, Rolle writes of the nourishing song before the Almighty that reveals the lover: "Novum nimirum cantant canticum, quia novata natura in nitore nutriuntur quousque conscendant castrum cupitum et clare conspiciant Cunctipotentem. Optime orantes elevantur in altum et ordinem habentes muniminis mirandi, modulando in melos organizantur. Ingenter iubilant ante Auctorem, Regique referunt almiphonum amoris ac canunt conformes concentui preclaro et odas ostendunt amantibus excelsis iperlirico in ympno" (137-138).

has this song all the songs of earth seem "bot sorowe and woo" (583-584).

These three levels of love act as a guide to what the contemplative is capable of experiencing. The ontology of love desires Jesus, and the need to not be separated from Him; there is a level or eroticism that Rolle will explore further in the lyrics and in his centering of worship on the name of Jesus. Here Rolle's ontology is of a love that is there for the contemplative to experience as long as they can become aware of the fixed and flowing worlds. The world of some kinds of matter are a distraction that limits what the contemplative can experience–either by keeping them still or keeping them at the lower levels of the love experience.

For Rolle, this ontology of love has another dimension, that of the Loved. The questions that Rolle poses at the end of *The Form of Living* create an ontology of God that suggests being, location, and intersubjectivity between contemplative and God. God contains Love and is contained by it: "love is a brennynge desire in God, with a wonderful delite and sikernesse. God is light and brennynge" (633-635). This love emanates through God (of and from) so that love shows itself as object: "love is a thynge þrogh which God loveth vs, and loveth God, and euery of vs other" (639-640). For Rolle, love is an object by which God and contemplative touch. We can think of it as the object that Rolle is attempting to unravel; one that changes shape, size, dimension depending on who is touching it. It is the object that is the nexus. Like the power of gravity it couples "togiddre þe louynge to þe loued" (636-637). Rolle separates Love from loving here–love is the object, something necessary in order to Love. Love is a surface of God and it is that surface that we touch and love God and through which God loves us.

Love is, then, the turning from earthly things. This object joins the contemplative with God. As Rolle writes, Love "clenseth þe soule, and delyuereth hit fro þe peyn of hel" (667). So, the nature of Love, the essence, is of a cleansing pseudobezoar, one that joins, saves, and centers loving. This Love is this centering object where love can be experienced; without it there is no focus, no clear direction for the contemplative to move. The heart, Rolle remarks as he closes the discussion of this first question, is central, as well; the contemplative's "hert shal so bren in love þat hit shal be turned in to fire of love, and be as hit were al fyre, and he shal

be so shynynge in vertuȝ þat in no partie of hym [he] be durke in vices" (674-677). The contemplative's heart becomes fire. It is important to note, however, that the contemplative's being becomes the phenomenon of Love–God is fire; He is the burning–the true contemplative becomes like that God-object with light emanating from them, as well.

Love is found, then, within a heart unconcerned with anatomical function. Rolle locates love not in works–not in the "hand ne in his mouth" (679). Works lead to flattery and the contemplative can be misled by works down a different path, so that they rest in their works assured by others that they are doing good. Again, Rolle warns his audience about those who "seemeth holy" (682). The deception covers over the lack of stability in those who devote themselves to garnering praise from others. Rolle insists that good works are truly good if they are based in thinking about and through God. Rolle further points out that no one can tell if he loves God: "then can non tel me if I love God, for noght þat þay may see me do" (698-699). There is a division between those who do good and those who do good based in love. However, as Rolle indicates, human beings are unable to tell the difference. Love, however, will continually work since it occupies the will "verraili, nat in werke bot as signe of loue" (700). Love is not found in the outward good works that are visible except as sign: "loue will nat be ydel" (702). Love here is located, then, in the heart and it is noteworthy that it emanates out only in significance. Love is found through good works, but it is not in the works themselves. One who is "possessed" by love will act out in goodness always, but the one who does good work is not necessarily occupied by love, especially if they act in order to get praise. For them, though Rolle does not say so explicitly, acts and love are separate objects, only colliding in the true contemplative's environment. On the one hand, love is foundation for good works, on the other hand, good works can happen without love, though, the implication is that these works are not "best" practices. If love is the object, the mediator in relations that is found in the heart, the gift of good works passes through it, charging it with higher value. Without love, as found in the one who seeks praise, the good work is cheapened by the giver, though the receiver still benefits from the gift (i.e. giving someone a blanket to keep them warm, even if one is doing it to receive praise, cheapens the giver's act for the giver, but not the receiver's warmth).

In answering the question, how does one love God?, then, Rolle further explores the nature of the will. The will must first be made meek: "he is stalworth that is meke, for al gostly streynth cometh of mekenesse" (708-709). The strength from humility argument that Rolle employs delivers the contemplative into the might of will that the contemplative will have as a heavenly reward: "þat þay may haue hit plenerly in þe toþer" (729-730). A meek will overcomes even the devil; Rolle sees humility, not passivity, as stronger. No matter what a person does on earth–fasting or suffering–without the meekness of will that is stable, for it is "nat stirred for any word þat men may say" (722), they are unable to have love. It is interesting to note on these last items that Rolle is critiquing traditional ascetic acts–fasting, suffering–as not enough. This repeats his critiques of good works earlier in that acts need Love behind them. In this way, any act, for it to be worthy, must have love–and as an add-in here–meekness of will.

The heart must also wisely love God. Wisdom consists of moving oneself away from the world. Those who are foolish "spend in coueitise and bisynesse about þe world" (738-739). Wisdom for Rolle most has to with object choice. A person who is unable to identity true value is unable to love wisely. So, for Rolle, those who love an apple, rather than precious stones (in order to buy a castle), we would see as a fool (739-741). Rolle, oddly uses this extended metaphor to warn the contemplative not to be so concerned with the world. The contemplative's precious jewels, however are "pouerte and penaunce and gostly trauaille" (742-743). With these jewels the contemplative can buy the kingdom of heaven. For Rolle wisdom–using the heart wisely–has to do more with turning to heart to God than solving real world problems. The wise heart knows where true value is: in recognizing the way the world distracts from loving God, and, thus, correcting from that distraction.

Finally, Rolle writes that the soul will love sweetly and devotedly. Sweetness is connected to the chaste body and clean thoughts. Rolle likes this love to rest and peace: "as þou ware in silence and sleepe, and set in Noe shippe, þat no þynge may letþe of deuocion and brennynge of swet loue" (769-770). The ship-rested love will accompany the contemplative until death–Jesus "resteth in þe" (772). The sweetness of love, then, brings the contemplative peace as it is stable rest–a resting place for Jesus.

Rolle then moves on to thinking through how one would know one was in love. Rolle has focused thus far on the getting-to-love and the experience of love, he further wants to explain how one could self-identify that what one feels is truly love. Here is a great level of uncertainty here for Rolle in that there is no objective way to verify love. Rolle writes that if one found oneself at the "synguler" level of experiencing love that one could be assured that what the contemplative was feeling was indeed love. In "synguler" love, "he þat is so hegh, he wold nat hold hym selfe worþier þan þe synfullest man that gooth on þe erthe (788-790). So, finding oneself in love is like recognizing that one is no better than the lowliest sinner.

Finally, Rolle addresses the issue of the state of the contemplative: how must they *be* in order to love God? For Rolle, this has everything to do with the body: "in moste reste of body and soule and leste is occupied with any nedes or bisynesse of þis world" (820-821). Further, Rolle writes that "I have loued for to sit, for no penaunce ne for no fantasie 'þat' I would men spake of me, ne for no such þyng, bot only for I knewe þat I loued God more, and langer lested with me comfort of loue, than goynge or standynge or knelynge" (829-831). In sitting, Rolle is rested, able to focus, able to aim his "hert most vpward" (833). Sitting, too, is a kind of flow: forming the body's shape, setting the spine, the legs, the arms. So, Rolle ends *The Form of Living* with a discussion of opening the body–the experience of the body in contemplation is key to focus and stability.

Rolle is first concerned with the hermit's concern, or, to put it another way, the hermit's *being*. The nature of the hermitic being is one that must be "unplugged" from one assemblage to be re-coupled to another. As Kevin Hart writes "the Christian experience of God is that he has left his trace in the life and death of Jesus, that consequently it both is and is not an experience. One could say, loosely, that Christianity involves an experience of absolute interruption."[17] Rolle's concern in this work is showing how, ontologically speaking, the world is necessary for the hermit-*being* and that hermit-being is entwined with an absolute

[17] Kevin Hart, "Absolute Interruption: On Faith" in *Questioning God*, ed. John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley, and Michael J. Scanlon (Blooming: Indiana UP, 2001), 194.

interruption that can be opened to comprehension (albeit not *full* comprehension, since the God-object withdraws) through Love.

As Žižek comments, "in true love, 'I hate the beloved out of love'; I 'hate' the dimension of his inscription into the socio-symbolic structure on behalf of my very love for him as a unique person."[18] This inscription for Žižek places *limits* on love, reduces love, and, thus, deceives us into loving the wrong kinds of things. Rolle wants to open the hermit to love, to avoid this deception. It is in his hermitic ontology that this "socio-symbolic" realm is punctured and Žižek's "absolute" (absolute interruption?) can be seen. Žižek writes that the Absolute is "something that appears to us in fleeting experiences–say, through the gentle smile of a beautiful woman, or even through the warm, caring smile of a person who may otherwise seem ugly and rude: in such miraculous but extremely *fragile* moments, another dimension transpires through our reality."[19] Rolle's hermitic ontology frames the experience of the hermit so that these fragile moments can be recognized.

It is in Žižek's late discussion of "uncoupling" from *The Fragile Absolute* that we see Rolle's challenge: "as every Christian knows, love is the *work* of love–the hard and arduous work of repeated 'uncouplings' in which, again and again, we have to disengage ourselves from the inertia that constrains us to identify with the particular order we were born into."[20] With Rolle (and Žižek), then, we can ask, how do we continually uncouple and not fall into a rigidity that leaves the hermit unsatisfied and destroyed while avoiding the rigidity of fundamentalism in which the smile from the ugly goes unrecognized or the fixed becomes a resting place? We must keep hermit-*ing*.

[18] Žižek, 118.
[19] Žižek, 119.
[20] Žižek, 119-120.

Christopher Roman is Associate Professor of English at Kent State Tuscarawas. His publications include *Domestic Mysticism in Margery Kempe and Dame Julian of Norwich* (2005), as well as articles and reviews on mysticism and anchoritism in *Mystics Quarterly*, *Florilegium*, and *Speculum*. His recent work deals with digital humanities studies, critical animal theory, and speculative realism and their collision with concepts of the medieval. He also likes comic books.