

Figures of Speech in Medieval English Mystics

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The aim of this paper is to examine metaphors and similes as figures of speech in the language of medieval English mystics. We will focus on three contemplative 14th-century mystics in East Midland, Walter Hilton, the *Cloud* author, and Julian of Norwich. Metaphors are figures of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily denotes one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison, as in “a sea of troubles”. For theoretical background, we adapt Lakoff and Johnson’s subcategorization of metaphors into ontological, orientational, and structural metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson significantly remarked that in everyday life, metaphors are pervasive in not only language but also thought and action. As another device of a figure of speech, we will consider similes whereby two concepts are imaginatively and descriptively compared. The use of figurative speech among the medieval mystics is not random but an effective measure in terms of which we can conceptualize their experience. Metaphors and similes used in mystical discourse cannot help but try and construct what cannot be comprehended by acting on embodying the abstract. Numerous figures of speech found in devotional prose, though some noted earlier in biblical works, are novel in their use. In trying to make the ancient teachings of the Christ accessible for the lay public, the prose observed in this study uses figurative language in association with their writings.

Keywords: metaphor, simile, figures of speech, English medieval mystics, Walter Hilton, the *Cloud* author, Julian of Norwich

I. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to examine metaphors and similes as figures of speech in the language of medieval English mystics. How do we understand the literature of the ineffable with the aid of the rhetoric? Let us focus on three contemplative 14th-century mystics in East Midland, Walter Hilton, the *Cloud* author, and Julian of Norwich. As for the significance of their prose, Gordon (1966, p. 54) mentions that they continue what the *Ancrene Riwe* established, idiomatic native prose suited equally to reading or private listening.

Metaphors are figures of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily denotes one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison, as in “a sea of troubles”. For theoretical background, we adapt Lakoff and Johnson’s subcategorization of metaphors into ontological, orientational, and structural metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson significantly remarked that in everyday life, metaphors are pervasive in not only language but also thought and action. They posited the notion of the event structure metaphor. Moreover, Lakoff and Johnson (1999, p. 543) maintained that the main aspects of events include such as states, change, cause, purpose, means, difficulty, and progress. Metaphors are thus the very means through which we can

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understand abstract domains and extend our knowledge into new areas. Gibbs (1994, p. 7) claims that much of our conceptualization of experience is metaphorical—this both motivates and constrains the way we think creatively. Gibbs (1994, p. 260) emphasizes the richness and complexity of metaphors in literature and compares these metaphors with those in scientific writings. Referring to Gentner (1982) and Steen (1994), he states that literary metaphors serve predominantly to convey the author's idea expressively and evocatively. An impressive amount of theoretical research is devoted to this topic, but very little to the language of medieval mystics from the viewpoint of persuasive rhetoric.

As another device of a figure of speech, we will consider similes whereby two concepts are imaginatively and descriptively compared. Here we pick up instances of the commonest connectives such as *like*.

This paper will, perhaps contribute toward the notion that the use of figurative speech among medieval mystics is not random but an effective measure in terms of which we can conceptualize their experience. Thus, by using metaphor, a divine subject is presumably made corporeal. In Section 2, the author begins by quoting instances to discuss stylistic effects of metaphors in the prose of medieval mystics, *The Scale of Perfection* (henceforth, *Scale*) by Walter Hilton, *The Cloud of Unknowing* (henceforth, *Cloud*) by anonymous, and *A Revelation of Love* (henceforth, *Revelation*) by Julian of Norwich. In this section we will consider metaphors under the following heads; ontological, orientational and structural. In Section 3, stylistic effects of similes will be observed. Section 4 offers conclusion.

II. Metaphors in the Works of Medieval Mystics

II.i. Ontological Metaphors

Lakoff and Johnson define ontological metaphors as follows:

Just as the basic experiences of human spatial orientations give rise to orientational metaphors, so our experiences with physical objects (especially our own bodies) provide the basis for an extraordinarily wide variety of ontological metaphors, that is, ways of viewing events, activities, emotions, ideas, etc., as entities and substances. (2003, p. 25)

Ontological metaphors enable us to understand abstract ideas by *referring*, *quantifying*, and *identifying*. Let us consider the experience of rising prices. It can be metaphorically viewed as an entity and substance via the noun “*inflation*” in “*Inflation is lowering* our standard of living”. Viewing inflation as an entity and substance makes it possible to refer to it, quantify it, identify a particular aspect of it, see it as a cause, act with respect to it, and eventually understand it.¹ The author must specify, however, this paper does not aim at assessing the validity of their theory but adopting their viewpoint to analyze metaphors of medieval mystics.

As one metaphorical interpretation, Hilton uses a ladder to ascend to heaven. In *Genesis* (28, 10-17), we read how Jacob saw a ladder or stairway to heaven, so for a long time many religions have included an idea of such a ladder. Even Jesus indirectly referred to something similar to Jacob's ladder in *John* (1.51) as “and the Angels of God *ascending*, and *descending* vpon the sonne of man”. Jesus' ascension to heaven is recorded in *Mark* (16.19) as “he was *receiuedvp* into heauen”, and elsewhere, using phrases such as “He was *taken up*”. Here we will take examples of conceptual ideas being reflected onto more concrete conceptual domains.

II.i.i. Fire

It should be noted that Hilton does not apply “fire” to excessive emotion or burning sensation. He states *fier of love* as follows:

¹ As for other types of ontological metaphors, container metaphors and personification cannot be discussed here for lack of space.

- (1) ...the fier of love...is neither bodily, ne it is bodili feelid². A soule mai fele it in praiere or in devocioun, whiche soule is in the bodi, but he felith it not bi no bodily witt...yif it wirke in a soule the bodi mai turne into an heete as it were chafid for likynge travaile of the spittit, nevertheles the fier of love is not bodi. (*Scale* xxvi, 59)

It is worth noting that the fire is comfortably warm, and can be felt in prayer or in devotion by a soul. It is only in the spiritual desire of the soul. Richard Rolle in his Latin prose *Incendium amoris*, translated as *The Fire of Love*, similarly describes the fire as “It was real warmth, too, and it felt as if it were actually on fire..., that this fire of love had no cause, material or sinful, but was the gift of my Maker,... If we put our finger near a fire we feel the heat; in much the same way a soul on fire with love feels, I say, a genuine warmth” (Wolters, 1972, pp. 88-89).

Rolle also mentions the “fire of love” at the height of contemplation. As there is no instance of it in the *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*³ (henceforth, CME), though, we can infer that this metaphor is created by Rolle, and Hilton models it after his prose. Hilton uses a similar analogical metaphor as “hertis melten in devocion”.

Cloud author claims that when Him list and as Him list, thou wilt think it merry to let Him alone. Then one feels affection inflamed with the fire of god’s love by piercing the cloud of unknowing.

- (2) Than wil He sumtyme paraventure sende oute a beme of goostly light, peersynghis cloude of unknowing that is bitwix thee and Hym, and schewe thee sum of Hispriveté, the whiche man may not, ne kan not, speke. Than schalt thou fele thine affeccion enflaumid with the fiire of His love, fer more then I kan telle thee, or may, orwile, at this tyme. (*Cloud* xxvi, 58)

As we see in works by Rolle and Hilton, the fire is compared with grace of god far more than one can tell.

II.i.ii. Body

We see that the virtue of humility consists in the naked will in (3a). In contrast to this merit in the metaphor with “nakid”, it is noteworthy that Hilton expresses aridness of sensible devotion by means of “nakid” as in (3b). When the devotion is removed, the soul becomes naked. Then the devil sends temptations of lechery and gluttony to certain people:

- (3a) the vertu of mekenesse that was first in the nakid wille schal be tunyd into feelynge of affeccion. (*Scale* xix, 51)

- (3b) that the soule is left as it were nakid for a tyme, thane he sendeth to summe men temptacions of leccherie or glotonye, ... (*Scale* xxxviii, 71)

We see its original biblical expression in *Works of John Wyclif* in CME:

- (4) Þe first booke of Goddis lawe telliþ of Adam and Eve, how þei lyveden naked in tyme of þer innocence. But fro þei hadden synned, þei wisten þat þei weren nakid, ... (Proprium Sanctorum)

Julian uses a metaphor related with body as “body shewid hevye and ogyley” to stand for the great misery of our mortal flesh. Opposite to the heaviness and ugliness of our bodies, she compares a child to the pure soul as in (5):

- (5) And in this tyme I saw a body lyand on the erth, which body shewid hevye and ogyley, ... And sodenly out of this body sprang a ful fair creature, a little childe full shapen and formid... (*Revelation* lxiii, 105)

² All the underlines in the quotations are mine to emphasize the arguing points.

³ The collection includes around 50 texts at present.

A little child is an embodiment of the soul contrastive with the body.

The *Cloud* author compares the function of the Holy Church to our limbs by indicating when a limb of our body feels sore, all the other limbs are pained and diseased therefore, or if a limb is well, all the remnant are gladdened therewith. For Christ is our head, and we are the limbs if we are in charity. Consider a quotation (6) below:

- (6) For right as if a lyme of oure body felith sore, alle the tother lymes ben pined and disesid therfore, or yif a lyme fare wel, alle the remenaunt ben gladdid therwith rightso is it goostly of alle the limes of Holy Chirche. For Crist is oure hede, and we benthe lymes if we be in charité. (*Cloud* xxv: 57)

Christ is our head and we are the limbs in a figurative expression.

II.i.iii. Animal, Bird

Hilton employs creatures other than human as metaphors like “beestly lust” (xlili, 77) and “beestli lust” (xlili, 78). Animal pleasure exists in the flesh to express foulness, which opposes against God. The phrases common in *The Holy Bible* is quoted in CME as “a beestli man”, “beestli bodi” to signify subjects which do not perceive the spirit of God. The importance of working persistently for the grace of God is likened to a hound chasing after a cat as shown in (7):

- (7) An hound that renneth aftir the hare oonli for he seeth other houndes renne, whanne he is weri he seeth other houndes renne, whanne he is weri he resteth him and turneth hym agen. But yif he renne for he seeth the hare, he wole not spare for werynesse til he have geten it. Right so it is gosteli. (*Scale* xli, 74)

Two images of the attitude toward belief in God are contrasted here. A person with sham faith is likened to a hound that runs after the hare only because he sees other hounds running. He will rest when he is tired and turn back. Another devotee whose faith is strong is compared to the one who runs just because he sees the hare. He will not spare weariness until he has it. In addition, Hilton uses the caged bird metaphor to lucidly demonstrate that one cannot use well any of the wits purely toward any lovely created thing without one’s heart being caught and entangled by vain pleasure and delight as in “but yif thyn herte be take and gleymed with weyn lust and likynge of it, ...” (xlili, 78).

We see Hilton and Julian express their concepts in varieties of distinct metaphors. In the next section, they will be quoted as miscellaneous.

II.i.iv. Miscellaneous

Hilton compares the depth of faith to the power of overturning hills and carrying them away:

- (8) And yif I have so moche feith that y⁴ mai turne hillis and bere hem away, and I have no charité yit am I nought. (*Scale* lxvii, 106)

Here, Hilton advocates the importance of charity as nothing else but to love God and his fellow Christian as himself. Hilton brings up a metaphor with a Greek coin *drachma* to embody Jesus as in (9). A *lantern* conveys words of God metaphorically:

- (9) “Makith mirthe with me and melodie, for I have founden the dragme that I had lost.” This dragme is Jhesu, whiche thou hast lost; yif thou wilt fynde Hym, light up a lanterne, whiche is Goddis word, ... (*Scale* xlvi, 86-87)

⁴ Y is a variant of I.

Hilton unfolds metaphors following (8) as “sweep your soul with the broom of the fear of God, and wash it with the water of your eyes; and you shall find your drachma, that is Jesus”. He must have been aware of the following passages of *S. Luke*, which *drachma* is equivalent to *pieces of Siluer*. It is conceivable that the image of Jesus embodied in the coins here:

(10) Either what woman hauing ten pieces of siluer, if she lost one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweepe the house, and seeke diligently till shee find it? (*Luke*, 15.8)

Dust to be swept is the carnal loves and fears. Thus, there are not a few metaphors from the Scriptures. To take some examples, in addressing the audience, he chooses to call out, “Mi dere children” (xci, 132). *The Oxford English Dictionary* cites the first instance of this metaphorical calling which dates back to *Wycliffe Bible* in the year of 1382. As a date range for the composition of *Scale* of the whole is from about 1380 to his death in 1396,⁵ he must have adopted the phrase from the Bible and its related texts. In another instance, Hilton relates the reason why Jesus has virtues in affection to “the bitter bark of the nut” putting as, “for he hath so wel gnawen upon the bittir bark of the note that he hath broken it” (xv, 45). Thus, the writings of these mystics are thoroughly informed by the Bible. Mueller (1984, p. 164) indicates the influence from a passage in Guigo’s *Scala Claustralium (The Ladder of Monks)* like “Reading presents as it were solid food to the mouth, meditation chews and breaks it”. As for the unique metaphors, we see “sward of love” (xxx, 62). Hilton exhorts to wound the earthly thought with the blissful sword of love, which enabled the vicious or carnal person to become serious and sober with its sharpness. Now let us turn to ontological metaphors from Julian of Norwich. As expected, she quotes from the Bible as in (11):

(11) but also by the curtes gift of his Fader we be his blis, we be his mede, we be his worshippe, we be his corone. (*Revelation* xxii, 32)

We see Julian cites metaphorical phrases from the Bible, such as “we are his bliss” is in *Luke* 3.22, “we are his mead” is found in *Psalms* 127.3, “we are his worship” is seen in *John* 17.10, and “we are his crown” is already in use in *Philippians* 4.1. Other examples occur in describing whipped Christ on a cross; she mentions that “sin is the sharpest scourge that any elect soul can be flogged with” (xxxix, 53). And Christ as “medicine to heal every soul” (xxxix, 54) concurs *Matthews* 9.20 and 9.21. It must be noted that, however, the importance of her original metaphor is especially noteworthy since her prose is marked by definite descriptions based on her own original senses. To cite one example:

(12) And the bliss and the fulfilling shall be so deepe and so hey that for wonder and mervell all creatures shal have to God so gret reverent drede, overpassing that hath been seen and felt befor, that the pillars of hevyn shall tremelyn and quakyn. But this manner of tremelyng and drede shall have no peyne; but it longith to the worthy myte of God thus to be beholden of his creatures, dredfully tremeland and quakand for mekehede of ioye, ...

Wherfore it behovith needs to ben that all hevyn and erth shall tremelyn and quaken when the pillars shall tremelyn and quaken. (*Revelation* lxxv, 121)

Julian expresses immensity of the bliss and the fulfillment by metaphors of trembling and quaking pillars. This metaphor is also noticeable in amplifying the rhetorical effect by paired words, “tremble and quake”. The image of trembling the pillars of heaven is likened to his creatures, who tremble in dread and quake in humble

⁵ The correct year of composition has not been fixed yet. Bestul, the editor of our present edition, however, made an educated guess in its introduction referring to earlier researches.

joy. Moreover, this chapter concludes with repetition of the preceding content as, “all heaven and earth inevitably tremble and quake when the pillars do so”. And Julian makes variation to describe Christ’s face as “the fairhede of heavyn, flower of erth and the fruite of the mayden wombe” (x, 15).

While Hilton quotes existing metaphors literally from previous religious pieces, Julian is likely to put her own thought into preceding religious works. In Chapter li, she saw the lord who had a servant in her vision. The servant fell into a deep ditch and injured himself very badly. While he groaned, the lord was sitting in solemn state peacefully. The lord is taken to be God, and the servant suffering from the pain is understood to be Adam. Julian perceived the aim of this vision was to make her understand that God saw every man and his fall. The servant was in pain, for he turned away from looking at his lord. She urged metaphorically that God always behold our sin, and went on that our lord comforted and sympathized with us because he was ever kindly disposed towards our soul.

II. ii. Orientational Metaphors

Orientational metaphors organize a whole system of concepts with respect to one another, giving a concept of spatial orientation; “*Happy is up; Sad is down*”. Since such metaphorical orientations have a basis in our physical and cultural experience, they are not arbitrary. The main focus of this chapter is on three types of orientational metaphors collocated with “rise” and “fall” as verbs, “high” and “low” as adjectives, as well as adverbial “up” and “down”.

II. ii.i. RISE and FALL

While the act of going up connotes drawing near to delightfulness as grace of God, negative representation of moving downward is related with bodily sins and earthly desires, as is indicated from (13ab) in *Scale* and (13c) in *Revelation*:

(13a) thou schalt see also the wrecchidnesse and the myschief of synne whiche thou art fallen in. (*Scale* xl, 76)

(13b) thanne riseth therof a love and a delite in his herte of himsilf that he is so good and so hooli and so moche grace hath. (*Scale* lix, 97)

(13c) And by his suffranc we fallyn; and in his blisful love with his myte and his wisdom we are kept; and be mercy and grace we arn reysid to manyfold more ioyes. (*Revelation* xxxv, 48)

Nouns occurring with the two types of verbs are presented in the following list (14) and (15):

(14) Rise, arise

delite “delight,” *love and glaadnesse* “love and gladness,” *feelynge* “feeling,” *yvelwil* “evil will,” *hool ground of synne* “whole ground of sin,” *thisilf bi a fervent disire to feele of thi Lord Jhesu* “thyself by a fervent desire to feel thy Lord Jesus,” *alle thynghe whiche thou hadde delite* “all thing which thou had delight” (*Scale*); *ioye* “joy,” *swete touching of grace* “sweet touching of grace,” *Holy Gost* “Holy Ghost,” *spiritual light* “spiritual light” (*Revelation*)

(15) Fall

hevynesse “heaviness,” *synnes* “sins,” *fantasies* “fantasies,” *caytif* “wretch,” *idel occupacion* “idle occupation,” *necgligence* “negligence,” *veyn speche* “vain speech,” *worldli thoughtis* “worldly thought,” *fleschli affeccions* “fleshly affection” *errours* “errors,” *conceites* “conceits,” *veynglorie* “vainglory,” *sobirté* “sobriety,” *temptacions* “temptations,” *drede* “dread,” *wordli man or woman* “worldly man or woman,” *lust* “lust,” *idel tales* “idle tales,” *vanytees* “vanities” (*Scale*); *nowte* “nothing,” *wisdam of God* “wisdom of God,” *synne* “sin,” *sorrow* “sorrow,” *tempests* “turmoil” *blindness* “blindness,” *frehte* “frailty,” *peyne* “pain” *wretchidnesse* “wretchedness,” *ourself* “ourself,” *sleuth* “sloth,” *maydens wombe* “maiden’s womb,” *our lords brest* “our lord’s breast” (*Revelation*)

The nouns occurring with *rise* imply desirable effect in faith, such as delight and joy. The nouns which co-occur with *fall*, on the other hand, tend to take unfavorable nouns except some words by Julian. The woman mystic takes the image of motherhood as the object of *fall* as *maydens wombe* and *our lords brest*. Moreover, she creates vivid effects by repetition as in (16):

(16) in as mech as we faylen, in so mekyl we fallen, and in as mekyl as we fallen, so mekyl we dyen... (*Revelation* xlvi, 68)

Julian advocates, with the act of falling which arouses our fail and death, we really must die in so far as we fail to see and feel God who is our life.

Next, let us see an instance from *Cloud*:

(17) Bot fast after iche steryng, for corrupcion of the flesche, it falleth doune agein to som thought or to some done or undone dede. Bot whattherof? for fast after, it riseth agen as sodenly as it did bifore. (*Cloud* iv, 34)

After each stirring, for the corruption of the flesh, the soul of a person falls again to some thought or some done or undone deed. But it rises again suddenly as before. The sequence of actions of falling and rising is rendered as springing unto God. The movement represents a movement between knowledgeable power and loving one. The fast and sudden stirrings are likened to a sparkle from the coal.

II. ii. ii. HIGH and LOW

Hilton begins Chapter ix by contrasting burning love in devotion with that in contemplation; the former is lower and the latter is higher. His reason for the distinction is whether the love is sweeter to the bodily feeling or to the spiritual one. In the Chapter xix, we see the quotation from *Luke* 14.11. Following this precept, he depicts, "Whoso higheth hymself, he schal be lowed, and whoso loweth hymself, heschal be highed". In the next chapter, he emphasizes the teachings in *Luke* by placing a premium on the *vertu of mekenesse* as the requisite for the naked will to turn into a feeling of affection:

(18) The highere he clymbeth bi bodili penaunce and othere vertues and hath not this, the lowere he falleth. (*Scale* xix, 51)

Although bodily penance and other virtues raise him higher, he falls lower by the lack of meekness.

Cloud author points out a higher and lower lives so coupled together that although they are divers in some part, yet neither of them may be had fully without some part of the other.

(19) I answeere and sey that thou schalt wel understonde that ther ben two maner of lives in Holy Chirche. The tone is active liif, and the tother is contemplative liif. Actyve is the lower, and contemplative is the hier. Active liif hath two degrees, a hier and a lower; and also contemplative liif hath two degrees, a lower and a higher. Also these two lives ben so couplid togeders, that thof al thei ben divers in som party, yit neither of hem may be had fully withouten som party of the other. (*CU* viii, 39)

The author argues that one manner of lives in Holy Church is active life, and the other is contemplative life. Active is the lower, and contemplative is the higher. A significant point is that these two lives be so coupled together that although they are divers in some part, yet neither of them may be had fully without some part of the other.

Let us now turn to the usage of Julian. In the eighth showing, she saw in Christ both higher and lower part of soul. Then she explained the distinction as in (20):

- (20) The heyer part was on in peace with God in full ioy and bliss; the lower partie, which is sensualite, suffrid for the salvation of mankynd. (*Revelation* lv, 89)

The higher part represents inner awareness of the spirit, and the lower does on sensuality. She recites that we need to hold these both together likewise to have the humble self-accusation that our Lord asks for. That is, the same single love pervades all as described in (21):

- (21) ...for it is all one love; which on blissid love hath now in us double weking; for in the lower part arn peynes and passions, ruthes and pites, mecsies and forgevenes and swich other that arn profitable; but in the higer parte are none of these, but al on hey love and marvelous ioye, in which marvelous ioy all peynis are heyly restorid. (*Revelation* lii, 84)

Such bodily pains and passions like sympathy, pity, mercy as we have in the lower part of our nature spring from the higher part, and the higher part exceeds the feelings by tremendousness of love and marvelous joy. All our sufferings must be put right in this joy. Meanwhile, the *Cloud* author describes unity of higher and lower part as follows:

- (22) The tone is active liif, and the tother is contemplative liif. Actyve is the lower, and contemplative is the hier. Active liif hath two degrees, a hier and a lower; and also contemplative liif hath two degrees, a lower and a higher. Also these two lives ben so couplid togeders, that thof al thei ben divers in som party, ... (*Cloud* viii, 39)

He claims that active is the lower, and contemplative is the higher. In addition, active life has two degrees, a higher and a lower; and also contemplative life has two degrees, a lower and a higher. These two lives are coupled together that neither of them may be had fully without some part of the other.

II. ii. iii. UP and DOWN

Hilton applies *up* and *down* contrastively according with the objects:

- (23) Slee thanne and breke down pride and sette up mekenesse; also breke down ire and envie and reise up love and charité to thyn even Cristene. (*Scale* lxxxvi, 128)

As is evident in *Scale*, *up* is linked to desirable state of mind like *meekness*, *love*, and *charity*, while *down* is connected with distasteful mental attitude as *pride*, *ire*, and *envy*.

In *Revelation*, *up* is employed in the collocation “verb + *up* + preposition + noun” in various ways as follows:

- ascend, berith, browte, come, draw, lifte, send, take + up + into + hevyn
 browte + up + to + our faders bliss
 glode + up + onto + hevyn
 have us + up + to + his bliss
 lift + up + into + contemplation

As obvious in the sequence of words, Julian uses *up* with nouns associated with divinity. And the phrases with *down*, on the other hand, accompany opposite phrase of godhead like *descendid downe into helle* and *descendid downe with Adam into helle*.

II. iii. Structural Metaphors

We in part conceptualize arguments in terms of battle as “attack a position”, “indefensible”, “gain ground”, etc. Thus, a portion of the conceptual network of battle characterizes the concept of an argument, and the

language follows suit. Lakoff and Johnson (2003, p. 61) point out that this allows us not only to elaborate a concept in considerable detail but also to find appropriate means for highlighting some aspects of it and hiding others. Structural metaphors provide the richest source of the case whose concepts are based on another frame of concepts. The following are entities of source domains, typically corresponding to concrete, simple, familiar, physical, and well-delineated experiences. They form a parallel to target domains which usually correspond to abstract, complex, unfamiliar, subjective, or poorly delineated areas of experience.

II .iii. i. Faith and soul are clothes

We see that the two mystics are common in the concept of expressing religious belief with the metaphors of clothing, as is suggested by the instances of Julian:

(24) He is our clotheing that for love wrappith us, halseth us and all beclosyth us for tender love, ... (*Revelation* v, 7)

She uses another metaphor for faith as an image of clothes as “soul and body are clad in the goodness of God” (vi, 9).

There are also some metaphors by Hilton to make us associate divinity with clothes:

(25) The more goostli that he desireth, the fastere is Jhesu knyt to the soul; and the lesse that he desireth, the lousere He knyt. (*Scale* xii, 43)

The image that Jesus is knitted to the soul leads to Julian’s metaphor of faith as clothes. Comparing a dark and painful image of one’s soul to black clothes is couched by Hilton in “...al bilappid with blake stynkande clothis of synne” (lii, 90). And this common foul image of a cover with blackness takes place as “overlaid with a blaak cloude” (lxxviii, 120).

II .iii. ii. Love and wisdom are liquid—wine and blood

In *John* 2.1-11, the wine is deemed a symbol of the sweetness of God’s love and wisdom. Hilton describes in Chapter iv that the knowledge by itself is only cold insipid water, but with Lord’s blessing, it will turn into wine symbolizing wisdom. Hilton compares wine to the supreme joy of love in the bliss of heaven in Chapter xliiii, and in Chapter lxxx, he refers to Jesus who led him into a wine cellar, that is to say, Jesus ascended above him alone to recommend him to try some wine. The work construes the incident figuratively that Jesus urged him to taste a sample of spiritual sweetness and heavenly joy. Julian does not quote that image verbatim from Scriptures, but we get a glimpse of the similar image of liquid in (26):

(26) Of this substantial kindhede mercy and grace springith and spredith into us, werking al things in fulfilling of our ioy. (*Revelation* lvi, 90)

The Julian’s figurative expression might show us mercy and grace flowing like fluid to fulfill our joy.

II .iii. iii. Jesus Christ compared to food

People of the middle ages understood food to be the very essence of survival, symbolized in the ritual of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the ritual devouring of the spirit and knowledge of God, as we see the process of the experience of eating. In the act of eating we taste and savor what has been eaten, and finally we see the interior sight or self-awareness of the knowledge and spirit of God. Some of the food metaphors include:

(27) dlites of lovyng...mylk, ... mete (*Scale* ix, 39); my soule schal be fed (*Scale* xxxii, 64); tasteth and seeth the swetteness of oure Lord (*Scale* vi, 36); the frughte of goostli swetteness. (*Scale* xxxii, 64)

In offering spiritual virtue to God, Hilton elucidates cooking figuratively as follows:

(28) ...caste it al in the mortar of mekenesse and breke it small with the pestel of drede of God, and throw the pouder of alle thise in the fier of desire. (*Scale* xxiii, 57)

Julian states in Chapter lx, Jesus feeds us with himself by means of the Blessed Sacrament, the precious food of all true life.

We must note that both Hilton and Julian frequently employ “savor”, “sweet”, and “sweetness” to describe spirituality and grace of God.

II .iii. iv. Jesus compared to members of a family

In stating rigid ties with faithfulness, Hilton brings up a theme of marriage like:

(29) the mariage maad bitwixe God and the soule. (*Scale* viii, 38)

Turning now to Julian, one may notice that Christ is frequently compared to members of a family as in (30):

(30) God enioyeth that he is our fader, God enioyeth that he is our moder, and God enioyeth that he is our very spouse, and our soule is his lovid wife. And Criste enioyeth that he is our broder, ... (*Revelation* lii, 81)

God is likened to father, mother, spouse, wife, and brother. Especially, the image of Jesus as mother is striking. One of her reasons for believing that god is our mother is reflected in Chapter lix that he made us, and in lx that motherhood means love and kindness, wisdom, knowledge, which carry us to goodness. She emphasizes that it is God’s will to become our mother in (31):

(31) Our kynd moder, our gracious moder, for he wold al holy become our moder in althyng, he toke the ground of his werke full low and ful myldely in the maydens womb. (*Revelation* lx, 97)

It is certain that this sort of spiritual inversion comes as a shock to most Christians.⁶ Let us see another instance, not a family member, though, Jesus is compared to a lover in *Cloud*:

(32) He is a gelous lover and suffreth no felawship, and Him list not worche in thi wille bot yif He be only with thee bi Hymself. He asketh none helpe, bot only thiself. (*Cloud* ii, 30)

Since Jesus does not ask help from anybody else except you, he is likened to a jealous lover.

III. Stylistic Effects of Similes

Similes have effects on converting abstractness into tangible thoughts. Hilton quotes words of St. Gregory:

(33) He that gadreth vertues withouten mekenesse, he is like to hym that maketh and berith poude of spicerie in the wynde. (*Scale* xviii, 50)

By using a simile to compare spices to virtues, he aims to impress that humility should always accompany with good deeds. Without humility, good deeds are merely synonymous with doing nothing.

Let us see another simile from *Scale*:

(34) The kyngedom of hevne is like to tresoure hid in a feld, whiche, whanne a man fyndeth, for joie of it he goth and selleth al that he hath, and bieth that ilke feeld. Jhesu is tresoure hid in thi soule. (*Scale* xlix, 87-88)

⁶ Wolters (1966, p. 34) presents its causes; the one is her influence from some exponents, but argues it is simpler to believe that the teaching is her own, and that blessed with a happy childhood she saw in her own mother’s love is reflected in God’s care.

To describe the kingdom of heaven, a simile is used to compare to “treasure”. When treasures are found, people go and relinquish their belongings to get them. In addition, Jesus is comparable to the treasure in the soul as a metaphor.

A simile helps deliver vivid images of crucifixion of Christ. See below:

- (35) The plentioushede is like to the dropys of water that fallen of the evys after a greate showre of reyne that fall so thick that no man may numbre them with bodily witte. And for the roundhede, it were like to the scale of heryng in the spreadeing on the forehead. (*Revelation* vii, 10-11)

The similes to depict the blood falling from under the garland are drops of rain after a heavy shower and the scale of herring.

IV. Conclusion

Figures of speech are ways of revealing the truth, but also a way to understand that God is beyond words. Metaphors and similes used in mystical discourse cannot help but try and construct what cannot be comprehended by acting on embodying the abstract. Hence, this discourse leads writers to question received language and further understand its possibilities. The rhetoric is a way in which we work to organize and make sense of the mysteries of life. The task of clerics and mystics of the middle ages were confronted with this challenge. Numerous figures of speech found in devotional prose, though some noted earlier in biblical works, are novel in their use. And they have the potential to provide us with fresh insights and new ways of thinking about their experiences. In trying to make the ancient teachings of the Christ accessible for the lay public, the prose observed in this study uses figurative language in association with their writings. They attempted to encourage conviction, commitment, and understanding, as well as represent their faith and experiences.

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Medieval Mystics. gale. views updated. Medieval Mystics. Movement origin. Representative authors.Â There is little information about the life of Julian of Norwich, who was one of the most important figures in medieval English mysticism. She reveals something of herself in her Revelations of Divine Love. She reports that she was given her revelations in 1373, when she was thirty and a half, which would mean she was born in 1342. A concise definition of Figure of Speech along with usage tips, an expanded explanation, and lots of examples.Â The ancient Greeks and Romans exhaustively listed, defined, and categorized figures of speech in order to better understand how to effectively use language. The names of most figures of speech derive from the original Greek or Latin. Figures of speech that play with the literal meaning of words are called tropes, while figures of speech that play with the order or pattern of words are called schemes.