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The Medieval Review

21.03.13 Hanna (ed.), *Richard Rolle: Unprinted Latin Writings*

Hanna, Ralph, ed. *Richard Rolle: Unprinted Latin Writings*. Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2019. Pp. ix, 261. £85.00 (hardback). ISBN: 978-1-78962-023-8 (hardback).

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Richard Rolle, hermit of Hampole (d. 1349), is regarded today as one of the most significant and influential English writers of the Middle Ages. Largely passed over by sixteenth-century English antiquaries, Rolle came to the attention of modern readers through the editorial and bibliographic labors of Carl Horstman (1895, 1896) and Hope Emily Allen (1927, 1931). In recent decades, Rolle's English works have been interpreted as central exhibits of "vernacular theology," a valuable heuristic that, however, tends to split the oeuvre along linguistic lines, leaving the greater part of it under-attended. The qualities on which Rolle's modern reputation rests--innovative spiritual teaching and pyrotechnic stylistics--find their fullest expression in the Latin writings. Moreover, the Latin writings were the ones that circulated most widely during the fifteenth century and carried Rolle's reputation to the Continent. For Ralph Hanna, the path to Rolle seems initially to have run through *Piers Plowman*: see his "Will's Work," characterizing Rolle as kindred spirit to William Langland. [1] Thereafter, Rolle's writings and the books that transmit them captured Hanna's attention in their own right, with a pivot to the Latin works about a decade ago. The present volume is Hanna's latest research report from the field of Rolle studies. The central offering is an edition and modern English translation of *Super Canticum Canticorum*, Rolle's ruminative commentary on the opening verses of the *Song of Songs*.

Allen, in her foundational study, employed *Super Canticum* as a "touchstone" of the authenticity of all other writings attributed to Rolle. Extracts from this important work have appeared in print in several places; in 1958, Rolle's text was edited (from one manuscript) in a doctoral dissertation that has lately achieved coterie circulation in digital form. Hanna's text is the first complete edition constructed on modern principles of textual criticism. Also included in the volume under review are *editiones principes* of three other works: *Super Magnificat* (a brief idiosyncratic commentary on Luke's Canticle of Mary), *Super Mulierem Fortem* (an essay here re-titled *De vita activa et contemplativa*), and representative excerpts from a treatise on the Psalms sometimes attributed to Rolle in manuscript and here titled *Viridarium, vel De misericordia Dei*. Each text is presented *en face* with a translation by Hanna into modern English; with the exception of the *Viridarium*, the texts are edited in full.

An introductory essay (1–33) describes the texts and editorial method. Three topics receive sustained discussion: organizing motifs of *Super Canticum*, manuscript transmission of that work, and the authorship of *Viridarium*. Hanna's treatment of the first of these topics is conducted as a series of corrective gestures. Whereas previous commentators have emphasized the digressiveness of Rolle's *Super Canticum* or organized their readings of it with (Hanna contends) inapt notions of autobiography and authority, Hanna reads Rolle's text as a weave of productive contradiction, or "oxymora": athletic stillness, advanced rudiments, arrogant humility. These pages adumbrate a sensitive and fruitful approach to Rolle's text, as I will suggest later in this review.

Turning to textual matters, Hanna notes the very extensive yet "piecemeal transmission" of *Super Canticum*, a topic he has investigated in previous publications. On the basis of an analysis of variant readings in a sample segment--this was conducted in *Editing Medieval Texts* [2]--Hanna concludes that *Super Canticum* may be edited from just four manuscripts. The apparatus prints

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variant readings from Dublin, Trinity College, MS 153 (the copy text); Oxford, Balliol College, MS 224A; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 861; and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud misc. 528. Hanna's 2015 volume remains the fullest discursive treatment of the transmission of this text.

Finally, regarding the authorship of *Viridarium*, Hanna judges all previous treatments of the problem inadequate; he makes a fresh consideration of internal and external evidence and concludes that the work is not by Rolle and may perhaps be identified instead with a lost work by the Augustinian friar John Waldeby (d. c.1372). This conclusion is not presented as definitive and is not carried across the edition with absolute consistency: readers are told that the work is "more likely" Waldeby than Rolle (20); "not Rolle" (28); "Rolle (?)" (251). Selections from the *Viridarium* ("about a quarter of the whole") are presented "to give Rollean readers a sense of how they might choose to relate the text to the hermit's writings and to stimulate some future Waldeby scholar to investigate 'Viridarium' more fully" (20).

In an appendix (249-255) Hanna supplies descriptions of manuscripts previously undescribed, plus some corrections and aggiornamenti to published descriptions cited earlier in the volume. The separation of manuscript descriptions from the other introductory matter is peculiar, yet there is a general principle at work here: Hanna prefers not to repeat what he or another has said adequately elsewhere. The principle operates throughout Hanna's publications; the result is sometimes a certain amount of fragmentation of expository prose. Inexpert readers of Hanna's introductory essay will need to procure and consult books and articles listed in his bibliography (29-33). A product of libraries, Hanna's writings are best read in a library beside other books.

The texts and translations are followed by notes (229-248) and an *index fontium* (257-261), supplying a conspectus of Rolle's quotations from and references to the Bible and other sources. The notes, Hanna acknowledges, are "rather sparse" and concerned mostly to identify "overt sources" and "parallels" (21). They do not really correspond to the practice of annotation as Hanna has articulated that elsewhere ("when I annotate, what I am doing is reading through the text with my profoundest attention, asking what it is that a reader should be given so as to facilitate the most attentive reading I can give"). I miss grammatical commentary--that is, acknowledgment of and engagement with the occasional difficulties of Rolle's language. Notes to *Viridarium* identify a pair of interesting Anglo-Latin spellings (245, 246); similar notation would be welcome in the earlier texts, e.g. for *Super Canticum* 4.278 *persepissem* (CL *percepissem*). Rolle's syntax also gives occasion for annotation (see below). Besides guiding a reader through difficulties, a grammatical commentary might indicate interesting or peculiar features of the linguistic construction of the text. For instance, readers might like to know that the intercalated lyric at the end of *Super Canticum* 3 has the line-structure of a well-known medieval form, that of Goliardic verse (7pp+6p in Dag Norberg's notation).

The principal adjunct to the reading texts is the English translation. This is a valuable guide to the Latin and opens the texts in ways that even a grammatical commentary would not. Yet beneficiaries of the translation may be inclined to bite the hand that feeds us. (References in the remainder of this review are to *Super Canticum* unless otherwise stated.) The translation misleads, becomes tangled, or departs from the Latin in at least 1.58-60, 1.383-386, 2.167-170, 3.40, 3.200 (Hanna translates *est*, an easier reading rightly consigned to the apparatus), 5.89-95 (the beta-family reading *licet* is attractive, in place of 93 *set*), 5.130-141, 6.186-187, and 7.2-5. Several of these involve a misplaced negation (perhaps only proofreading errors). In a few cases, noted parenthetically above, difficulties extend to the Latin text. One of the problems faced by a translator is that Rolle's "aggressive voice" (7) expresses itself in idiosyncratic phrasing (for instance, the recurring clausula *iudicare non formidat*) and unwieldy coordinate constructions that contrast the *electi* and *reprobi*. I talk through two examples.

Early in the first part of *Super Canticum*, there is a digression on the theme of spiritual exile and homelessness (cf. Hanna's apt remarks, 4-5). This condition, Rolle emphasizes, is universal. The *electi* are not exempt, but they differ from the *reprobi* in that, "wherever they may be transferred bodily, [they] continually place their goal in heaven." Rolle then continues:

Vnde et illud discursus incomodum electis meritum exaggerat quod tamen populus uel saltem aliquis presumptor iniquus dampnum esse anime iudicare non formidat (1.58-60).

At this point Hanna's translation goes astray, inventing "a bustler about" from *discursus* and rendering *iudicare non formidat* as "does not fear judgement." Translate instead as "Whence the elect accrue merit even from the hardship of itinerancy, which, however, people (or, at any rate, any wicked presumptuous person) do not hesitate to deem an injury to the soul." Rolle's

argument builds directly from previous sentences and sets up the treatment of *reprobi* in the sentences that follow (cf. Hanna's remarks on Rolle's coherence of argument, 3-4). The *electi* have successfully severed interior from exterior. They are therefore misread by the *reprobi*, who have not achieved this separation (cf. 1.63-64) and hence know no better than to make their own compromised existence the basis for judging others.

My second example derives from Rolle's polemic against monastic exceptionalism in *Super Canticum* 5. Rolle concedes that the monastic life is safer than alternatives, if lived correctly (5.118-121). In a sequence of parallel clauses, Rolle contrasts the conditions of cloistered and uncloistered life and lays a foundation for treating the two lives as separate leagues, each with its own standard of greatness. For those *in mundo*, it is a great thing (*magnum est*) simply to avoid hell; for those *in religione*, "no one should be called great (*magnum*) unless he is perfect" (5.126-129). The appearance of *videtur* twice in this sequence of argument indicates that Rolle is laying out the *communis opinio*, to which he willingly accedes insofar as it allows him to circumscribe the authority of his monastic opponents. Given the generally acknowledged advantages of monastic life, Rolle reasons, any monk not *perfectus* is unworthy of commendation or respect. Rolle has previously denied the status of spiritual perfection to any monk who claims that the monastic orders have a monopoly on that state, and he now proceeds to describe the path of the uncloistered renunciant. The passage reads as follows in Hanna's edition:

Denique ut assolet cum presbiteri, uel alij clerici siue laici huic mundo renunciant; in cellis tamen inter homines morantur pro statu suo honestis, congruis, et ordinatis; deinde sanctis studiis incumbentes, iugiter deuocioni insistentes, terrena queque atque carnalia abicientes, sola necessaria retinentes. Quatinus sic inter homines maneant ut tamen nullatenus de negocijs secularibus se interponant... (5.130-136).

Hanna's translation begins "Finally, as is customary with a priest, others, whether clerics or laypersons, renounce the world..." as if the text read *ut assolet cum presbiterijs, alij, siue clerici siue laici...renunciant*. This cannot be right. Re-punctuating the text, one may translate:

Moreover, customarily when priests or other clerics or laypersons renounce the world, they reside in cells proper, fitting, and suited to their station, though still among men. They apply themselves thereafter to holy studies, attending continually to devotion, casting aside all earthly or carnal things (retaining only necessities), to the end that (*quatinus*) they remain among men in such a way as not to occupy themselves in the least bit with worldly affairs...

Rolle is here demolishing the monastic view of the spiritual affordances of uncloistered life--the very position he had provisionally entertained in the immediately foregoing passage. The rhetorical period runs another five lines in Hanna's printed text, piling up the prospective spiritual attainments of the uncloistered renunciant in a great crescendo of clauses. By the following sentence, Rolle has reached escape velocity and passes into celestial *igne* and *calor*.

The point of the foregoing discussion is perhaps just this: Hanna's translation can guide readers to knotty passages that will repay close study of the Latin text here edited for the first time. Careful typesetting has the happy result that Latin and English texts match up throughout the volume--a great service to readers. I note few typographic errors. In the translation of 3.149, read "as long as he esteems" (the subject pronoun is dropped). In the translation of *Super Magnificat* 30, read "so love one another." Something has gone wrong in the Latin text at 4.192: in place of *putante* Hanna's 2015 text has *putantes*, yet the clause lacks a finite verb. Perhaps read *putant*, which is what Hanna translates. At 6.126, read *assuefactus* in place of *assueactus*.

Hanna's aim for this edition is "to attract the attention these texts, especially 'Super Canticum', deserve, and to encourage more searching critical accounts" (21). The edition should be studied by anyone seeking a closer acquaintance with the hermit of Hampole.

Notes:

1. Ralph Hanna, "Will's Work," in *Written Work: Langland, Labor, and Authorship*, eds. Steven Justice and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (The Middle Ages Series; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 23-66.

2. Ralph Hanna, *Editing Medieval Texts* (Exeter Medieval Texts and Studies; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015).

