

FEMINIST LEGACIES, II

HOPE EMILY ALLEN, THE SECOND VOLUME OF THE *BOOK OF MARGERY KEMPE*, AND AN ADVERSARY

One of the best-known independent scholars of her generation, the name Hope Emily Allen (1883–1960) is now forever linked to that of the fifteenth-century visionary Margery Kempe, whose now famous *Book* she identified, named and annotated. The second volume of that work which she had confidently projected, however, remained unpublished and largely unwritten at the time of her death.¹ The interest in this second volume both was and is considerable, and Hope Allen's failure to complete it can be said to stem from four reasons, two personal, two professional. First, her health, always precarious, worsened during the 1950s; second, her connections to two groups of British scholars, many of them independent scholars like herself, were effectively severed; third, in the post-war period, and thanks in part to Hope Allen's efforts, the EETS became actively engaged in publishing complete texts of works which she had expected to excerpt in her volume; and finally, her own status as an independent scholar, and a woman at that, began, in America at least, somewhat to undermine her professional standing.

Perhaps the most powerful constraint on Hope Allen's post-war scholarship was her health. Never robust, she had from childhood been guarded by her family against what was taken to be a consumptive constitution, but in her later years she developed osteoarthritis, which had the effect of making her appear to be as unwell as she often felt. As early as June 9, 1952, she wrote to Dorothy Ellis, an old friend who had assisted her with her research, remarking that "if I don't think of our happy times too much it is because it makes me sad to do so since—though I insist as to not being sure as to this—I know it will be hard for me to go over [to Britain] again—I appear to be a very old lady" (Hirsh 146). In fact, as the 1950s advanced she left Oneida infrequently, curtailing even her visits to MLA meetings in New York. Perhaps more than any other reason, it was Hope Allen's increasing physical weakness which prevented her from continuing the projects she had confidently set herself.

Her debility was particularly important in preventing her from working at the British libraries—particularly the British Museum (which then included what has since become the British Library) and the Public Record Office—and severely limited her interchange with two groups of British and other scholars, whose interests, and occasionally whose work, bore directly upon her own. The first of these groups included those like Dorothy Ellis and Joan Wake to whom Hope Allen felt particularly close, who followed academic pursuits (Joan Wake's work in early modern history became particularly noteworthy), and who often assisted in her projects. But their friendship, combined with their moral and what can only be called their cultural support, were as important, in the end, as their academic assistance. Although in her later years these close friendships were continued in letters and, in the case of Joan Wake, in a deathbed visit to Oneida, their great value lay in Hope Allen's London years, when they lent a sense of

stability, and offered English roots, to an American who had all but adopted England as her own.

The second group of scholars consisted in those practicing and professional medievalists, many of whom were as concerned as Hope Allen with reading and publishing medieval manuscripts, and whose work interacted with hers. This group included both continental scholars like P. Livarius Oliger, O.F.M.; Dom Maurice Noetinger, O.S.B.; and the Bollandist, Paul Grossjean, S.J.; as well as British scholars like G.G. Coulton; Robin Flower; and particularly her virtual collaborator, J. A. Herbert of the British Museum. Perhaps the best known of these was also one of Hope Allen's closest (and most admired) colleagues, Dom André Wilmart, O.S.B., the great French Benedictine student of medieval liturgy and spirituality, whose death in April, 1941, Hope Allen would describe as "most shocking—the most final finis written to our old wonderful days in the Museum that I have yet seen" (Hirsh 133). During more than 20 years in London, Hope Allen had worked in a congenial and supportive setting, in which like-minded scholars encouraged her work while attending to their own. It must have seemed very distant indeed from what she found during her last years in Oneida.

What bound these scholars together was that, with a few exceptions, they did not enjoy the sort of university affiliations which have since become usual. Some were attached to religious orders (Wilmart, Oliger, Noetinger); others to the British Museum (Flower and Herbert); still others relied upon personal resources (Ellis and Wake). She did as well have highly valued associations with university lecturers and professors, both in Britain and in America, but none of these was as close, intellectually or even personally, as those with scholars who shared her intellectual and personal independence. There was a sense among this group of following their own lights, of being responsible in the first place to the integrity of their scholarship, but also of mutual respect and, whenever possible, mutual support. Their independence gave them the opportunity to explore a vast number of manuscripts and manuscript collections without regard (usually) for deadlines, scholarly production (which however followed), or any agenda but their own. It is not too much to say that there was a measure of "pure science" in their work, some of which underlies more recent developments and discoveries. Although it is true that the "larger picture" which they (and Hope Allen) sometimes evoked has undergone significant modification, it was these scholars who broke with academic convention and insisted on the usefulness and importance of a large number of texts in which more traditional academic scholars had only a limited interest. Recent interest in gender, and to a degree in class, are informed, sometimes deeply, by the work of these pioneers.

But Hope Allen's failing health and consequent isolation from like-minded and supportive friends and colleagues were complicated by two other factors, both of which equally bore in upon her project. One concerned the Early English Text Society, the body which had agreed to publish her work as the second volume of the *Book of Margery Kempe*, whenever she finally produced it. From the beginning, Hope Allen had envisioned her work less as a continuation of the first

volume than as a separate work, one with two main parts. First, it was to present and publish facts and implied connections concerning Margery Kempe and her associates which she had discovered in a number of British archives and manuscript collections since her initial identification; second, it was to include an anthology of works related to Margery Kempe's *Book*, drawn from unpublished manuscripts, with which she had been working for many years. The first of these objectives would allow her to reveal and develop literary, religious and cultural associations which Margery Kempe had maintained during her lifetime, for example, her still unexplored, and somewhat nebulous, connections to a Henry Lovelich, whom Hope Allen identified with the London skinner whose Middle English translations of *Merlin* and *The History of the Holy Grail*, EETS had already published. In 1944 she had reported to the Society through its Secretary, her collegial friend Mabel Day, that she had found in the Rolls a writ ordering the arrest of Margery Kempe's brother, but that when it "was out" Lovelich and others had come to his aid; she also had found evidence that Margery Kempe's father-in-law, also a skinner, had had Richard II's support when he was imprisoned in Luebeck in 1388. These perceived and still unexplored associations with skinners interested her, and she connected them both Margery Kempe's frequent visits to London, and to the fact that the London skinners were a Corpus Christi guild: she wondered if the guild had anti-Lollard associations, and whether its practices could have influenced Margery Kempe to represent her cries at the Eucharist as the effect of the Holy Spirit (Hirsh 135). These are not matters easily resolved, and the mixture of conjecture and now unidentified documents upon which they depend suggests both the strength and the weakness of the approach. But neither are they easily brushed aside, particularly when they come from one who was as deeply read in the Rolls as Hope Allen, and it was probably this reason, together with the promise of fresh discoveries, which interested the EETS council in her proposal for a second volume.

The second part of her projected volume would document the "continuity" of a native tradition of British spirituality, a tradition which she confidently associated with the *Ancrene Riwele*, along with a more affective strain of spirituality which subsequently had been introduced from the continent, and which would find its best English expression in the *Book of Margery Kempe*. She had begun this project as early as 1932, with the appearance of R.W. Chambers' *The Continuity of English Prose* in EETS volume 186 (it was republished as a separate volume in 1957), which supplied the word and the concept "continuity" to her own project. Two years later, in late July 1934, she identified the *Book of Margery Kempe* in a previously unknown manuscript which its owner, Col. William E.I. Butler-Bowdon, had brought in to the Museum of South Kensington (the Victoria and Albert Museum) to be examined. Already supported by a grant from the ACLS, she reached an agreement with the EETS to publish her annotations and projected anthology as volume two of the projected edition of what was to become the *Book of Margery Kempe*, so that when Sanford Meech's glossed and annotated edition appeared in 1940 as volume 212 of the EETS Original Series, it was designated "Volume I."

But the post-war activities of the Early English Text Society, founded by F.J. Furnivall in 1864, were directed in no small part by Hope Allen's friends and colleagues, and they took the Society in a new direction. It is simply not accurate to assume that, whatever their limitations, either the EETS or the OED, which it fed, and with which it is sometimes associated, was militantly colonial and sexist in its mission and practices, as has recently been suggested.² However much certain of the early members may have shared the cultural givens of their period, the effect of the work of the EETS was to privilege texts, persons and scholars which often had been largely marginalized in traditional academic discourse. The texts often engaged were ones in which Hope Allen and her colleagues had long had an interest, and as text followed text in the EETS list, many of the works which Hope Allen had intended to include in her second volume were published in full, or were at least projected for future publication. The French text of the *Ancrene Riwele* appeared in 1954, followed in the next year by an edition of the *Wohunge of ure Lauerd*. Tolkien's edition of the Corpus Christi College *Ancrene Riwele* appeared in 1961, to be followed by another English edition the next year. The *Orchard of Syon*, another work which Hope Allen had intended to excerpt, was published in 1966, though its publication was agreed much earlier. During the last 20 years of her life, Hope Allen was in regular contact with members of the EETS Council whom she advised on the selection of both texts and editors. Although she continued to develop and refine some of the discoveries she had made years earlier, in the Public Record Office in London, concerning Margery Kempe's associations, friends and adversaries, she knew which works were under preparation by EETS editors, and saw that their publications would limit the value of what she had intended to print. As her physical ability to produce the book decreased, so, in one way, did the actual need for the book itself, at least as she had first conceived it.

Finally, there is the larger issue of what was happening in American universities during the post-war period, the emergence of English as a professional discipline. On one hand, this meant the opening of new texts (if not always new approaches), and new hands at work. But it did not mean more openness, particularly for those without a university affiliation. Some of this may have appeared to Hope Allen even in her dealings with the EETS, now largely in the hands of those with university appointments. But one incident in particular shows that those associated with universities had no hesitation about handling her roughly. In 1937 a Professor of French in Trinity College, Dublin, E.F.J. Arnould, had pointed out, in the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, that when Richard Rolle speaks of himself as rising up against an elderly archbishop in his defence of the hermit's life over that of the monastic community ("Ecce juvenis . . . insurgit contra senem, hereremita contra episcopus") he was referring to himself and St. Anselm, not a fourteenth-century contemporary whom Hope Allen had sought to identify from a contemporary document. Two years later, in 1939, Arnould called attention in the *Modern Language Review* to another slip Hope Allen had made in a 1917 *Romanic Review* article on the *Manuel des Pechiez*, and in the same year published yet a third attack on the way Hope Allen (and others) had assumed a reference to Rolle where none existed in a French manuscript

which they wrongly assumed to have been lost. But in a 1940 review of Arnould's work in the *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique*, Wilmart had subjected his transcription of medieval manuscripts to unusually sharp criticism, and it is difficult to escape the impression that Arnould's repeated corrections of Hope Allen's work may have played a part in the tone, if not the substance, of Wilmart's critique.

In spite of these circumstances, however, during the post-war period Arnould determined to publish an edition of Rolle's *Melos amoris*, and approached Hope Allen for support. She pointedly refused, citing Wilmart's critique as she did so. Arnould thereupon replied not only with a particularly sharp answer to her equally candid letter, but also by a pointedly dismissive attack on Hope Allen and on her work which appeared in his edition, *The Melos Amoris of Richard Rolle of Hampole*, published by Blackwell's in Oxford in 1957. In spite of an appearance of scholarly objectivity, such attacks are rarely innocent of vanity, and are often calculated to enhance the academic reputation of the attacker; they are not entirely uncommon. All but ignoring the evident interest and importance of Hope Allen's work, Arnould subjected it to almost continuous correction and attack, returning to arguments presented in his earlier articles (which he reprinted as appendices to his edition), though now adding an almost contemptuous edge to his critique.³ He began his review of the recent history of Rolle criticism by praising, with some reservations, the editions of Carl Horstman in 1895 and 1896, and Margaret Deansely's 1915 edition of *Incendium amoris*, which "though not a critical edition in the strict sense—has probably been the most valuable contribution so far made to a first-hand knowledge of Richard Rolle's mystical experiences" (p. vi). He then turned to *Writings Ascribed to Richard Rolle, Hermit of Hampole, and Materials for His Biography*, Hope Allen's great work, now thirty years old. This he described as a "catalogue of manuscripts and editions of all the works, which gave us the first—and on most points definitive—critical canon of Rolle, thus laying a firm foundation for an accurate study of the mystic. This had somehow been prepared by Miss Allen's brilliant refutation of the common attribution to Rolle of the extremely popular Pricke of Conscience" (p. vi). Arnould's reference to Hope Allen's professionally respectable 1910 Radcliffe College monograph, *The Authorship of the Pricke of Conscience*, together with his faint praise for her "catalogue of manuscripts and editions," was soon followed by a critique of what Hope Allen herself regarded as the most important part of her *Writings Ascribed*, the section containing materials for Rolle's biography. Here Arnould argued that, "although not sharing Horstman's enthusiasm for either the man or his ideals, [Hope Allen has] endorsed some of Horstman's conjectures too readily, and yielded to the same temptation of filling gaps in Rolle's biography, or illustrating quotations from his writings, with names and facts culled from contemporary documents but often linked with the hermit by the slenderest—not to say purely imaginary—bonds. This is particularly true of the section of Miss Allen's book entitled 'Materials for Rolle's biography': apart from a number of indisputable facts and some interesting suggestions, this section contains too many unverifiable conjectures, often presented as such, it is true, but so persistently

repeated and so elaborately woven together that they gradually assume the status of established evidence, and were certainly taken as such by several later writers" (p. viii). Arnould supplied references in an attached footnote, where he added that "cases of plain mistranslation are not infrequent in Miss Allen's works" (n. 11, p. viii). But the instances he actually cited were few and only rarely affected meaning, so that the critique as a whole appears markedly one-sided and even self-serving. Faint praise apart, Arnould so obviously ignored the very real contribution of *Writings Ascribed*, and its considerable historical importance in establishing, far more than Horstman had done, Rolle's reputation and position, that his critique more or less obviously fails in what seems to have been its intended effect, for Arnould to replace Hope Allen as the leading authority on Richard Rolle. His suggestion that Hope Allen was only following Horstman in her work, while lacking his "enthusiasm either for the man [sc. Richard Rolle] or his ideals" is so obviously untrue that it only adds to the sense that Arnould's representation of the scholarly history of the *Melos amoris* is largely untrustworthy.

The language and tone of Arnould's critique is as important as the slips he has found in a long and complex study, and seem deliberately calculated to undermine Hope Allen's by then considerable reputation. Throughout, Arnould loses no opportunity to suggest that Hope Allen is amateurish and slapdash, often returning for evidence to his earlier articles, the importance of which he does not understate. Behind its mask of objective scholarship, his attack upon Hope Allen, by then 74 years old and in failing health, is unpleasantly *ad hominem*, and seems the product of a peculiarly scholarly kind of odium.

In her later years Hope Allen could herself be prickly, and after Arnould's attack became increasingly sensitive to what she took to be slights, particularly from younger scholars. True enough, she had in the past treated possibilities as probabilities, as has many an honest scholar. But what was lacking in Arnould's attack was any sense of the historical moment in which she—and he!—wrote, and any consideration of the extraordinary effect which the work he was denigrating had had, a particularly serious omission in what purported to be an objective account of previous scholarship. Hope Allen's work was of course open to dispute and correction, but it offered perspectives and at least possible connections which opened new ways of reading complex and understudied historical and literary texts.

Arnould's edition of Rolle's *Melos amoris* (the irony of using this text for that purpose will escape no one) offers a rare but revealing example of the ways in which even well-established independent scholars were particularly vulnerable to academic attacks by those "in the profession." In spite of this vulnerability, however, it is important not to think of Hope Allen, and those other independent and unaffiliated scholars with whom she was associated, as victims. Her work, extraordinary and esteemed in its day, is still admired and consulted regularly, and her place in the history of American scholarship is assured. For her and for most of her colleagues, the way they had chosen was elected not enforced, and

offered them the independence to engage the questions which seemed to them most interesting, the tasks they thought most promising, the life they choose to lead.

John C. Hirsh
Georgetown University

1 Throughout I refer to my biography, *Hope Emily Allen: Medieval Scholarship and Feminism* (Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1988), and to the *Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, EETS 212 (London: Oxford University Press, 1940). The unique manuscript which contains the *Book*, formerly owned by Colonel William E.J. Butler-Bowdon, was sold after Butler-Bowdon's death at Sotheby's, on 24 June 1980, as lot 58, and is now a Select manuscript in the British Library, BL MS Additional 61823. On Hope Allen's deeply conflicted relationship with Meech see Hope Emily Allen, pp. 99–130. The title the *Book of Margery Kempe* was assigned by Hope Allen; Meech sought at one point to rename it the "Journal of Margery Kempe" (the name is still preserved at the bottom of the frontispiece of the EETS edition), but was dissuaded from doing so by members of the EETS Committee.

2 For a discussion of the colonial identity of the EETS founders see Kathleen Biddick, *The Shock of Medievalism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 92–96. It is true that the early EETS Reports, often written by Furnivall explicitly to raise money, sounded, sometimes crudely, themes and attitudes which he hoped would appeal to a mass audience, but Furnivall's values and perspectives were not those of later editors and Council members, and as Derek Pearsall among others has pointed out, Furnivall's own social and personal attitudes were as progressive as any. See Derek Pearsall, "Frederick James Furnivall (1825–1910)," in *Medieval Scholarship. Biographical Studies on the Formation of a Discipline*, ed. Helen Damico, et al., Volume 2: *Literature and Philology* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998), pp. 125–138. On like problems, both ideological and other, with the *Oxford English Dictionary*, see John Willinsky, *Empire of Words: The Reign of the OED* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

3 The verbatim republication of two already published and not greatly distinguished articles by the editor is another curious aspect of an altogether curious edition. Most publishers would have indicated that such studies simply be cited and quoted as needed, which was and is the usual practice. But Arnould acknowledges that "the Board of Trinity College, Dublin . . . readily and graciously agreed to contribute a substantial sum towards the printing of this edition" (p. xi), and it was no doubt that subvention which gave him a free hand to republish the articles, and perhaps also to formulate his singularly unremitting attack on Hope Allen without editorial intervention.

"THE EVER-GROWING ARMY OF SERIOUS GIRL STUDENTS": THE LEGACY OF HOPE EMILY ALLEN

In 1928 Father Herbert Thurston reviewed Hope Emily Allen's *Writings Ascribed to Richard Rolle* in terms which appreciated both Allen's long-term contribution to women's scholarship, and the drawbacks of her particular methodology. Thurston highlights the thoroughness of Allen's work, but also suggests that even then Allen's approach set standards which not everyone could, or perhaps should, follow:

the ever-growing army of serious girl students who are keen about success in the research work which was formerly the monopoly of their male rivals, will not be wanting in appreciation of what Miss Allen has achieved. We are tempted to think that she has perhaps been even too