

**Monica Santini 2010: *The Impetus of Amateur Scholarship: Discussing and Editing Medieval Romances in Late-Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Bern: Peter Lang. 255pp. ISBN 978-3-0343-0328-6**

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Since the mid-eighteenth century and during the best part of the nineteenth, a movement interested in the recovery of the medieval past developed in Britain. It found expression in various artistic activities, including architecture, the most visible example being the Houses of Parliament rebuilt in Gothic style in 1835, but it also influenced other creative arts such as painting, best illustrated by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and literature, as in the case of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819).<sup>1</sup> The monograph under review examines one of the lesser known aspects of this cultural movement, namely "[t]he formative phase of the modern study of Middle English romance", which "began in the 1760s and continued until the 1860s" (9). During the intervening century the foundations of the academic discipline we now call Middle English studies were laid. Significantly, those responsible for this disciplinary advance were not professional academics working under the auspices of a university or any other public institution, but instead amateur scholars who on their own initiative created private clubs with scholarly aspirations. This book is testimony to the commitment and achievements of these pioneer medievalists and presents "a history of tentative and often inaccurate scholarship, in which enthusiastic impetus and nationalist impulses are more important than expertise" (11).

In 'The Key Words of Amateur Scholarship', the first of the four chapters in the book, Santini discusses the terms used to describe the protagonists of the movement and the scholarly activities they carried out. The word by which they preferred to define themselves was *antiquarian* or '*antiquary*', which referred specifically to "one who investigates the relics and monuments of the more recent past" (*OED*, s.v. *antiquary* n. 3). This kind of antiquarianism provides in fact the best definition of their approach to the Middle English romances, which were of interest to them not because of their literary merits but as witness to the customs and manners of the British medieval past. These antiquarians, less frequently described as *scholars* and rarely called *philologists*, wanted to draw a distinction with the so-called 'austere Antiquaries', whose only goal was to find delight in the texts preserved in medieval manuscripts and early printed books, as Santini explains (17). In addition, she also informs us that these early medievalists used the terms *metrical romances*, *early romances*, and *romances of chivalry* to describe their object of study (which we designate as Middle English romances both in prose and in verse), but "neither the word 'Middle English' nor 'medieval' occur in the writings of the scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (24).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Alexander (2007) for a richly illustrated overview of this cultural trend.

<sup>2</sup> Note, however, that the first occurrence of the word *mediæval* is recorded as early as 1827 (q.v. *OED*).

Next the book analyzes in a more or less chronological order the process of rescuing the Middle English romances started in the 1760s. The point of departure of this process can be dated more precisely to 1765, the year that saw the publication of Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, dealt with in the second chapter of the book, titled 'The Achievements of Eighteenth-Century Scholars'. Thomas Percy (1729–1811), bishop of Dromore, who rose to fame in literary circles after having saved from the flames the Percy Folio Manuscript in 1753 (now British Library MS Additional 27879), produced the first survey of the corpus of Middle English romances, charting the romance territory later explored by other fellow antiquarians. In 'An Essay of the Ancient Metrical Romances', which opens the third volume of his *Reliques*, Percy records thirty-nine romance items and provides information about the manuscripts and early printed copies that contain them. Santini (38–42) explains the contents of the aforesaid essay and gives details of the nine manuscripts that Percy seems to have consulted through the recent foundation of the British Museum in 1753. The second figure central to this movement is the poet and historian Thomas Warton (1728–1790), whose *History of English Poetry* (1774–1781) became greatly influential. As Santini remarks, "it was Thomas Percy who spurred Warton into turning his attention to medieval texts and who provided the precious list of the manuscripts he was acquainted with" (44). Putting Percy's bibliographical essay to good use, Warton provides excerpts of eight Middle English romances and lists a total of fourteen, while contributing two new titles hitherto unknown, namely, *Ywain and Gawain* and *The Weddyng of Sir Gawen* (52–53). Last and deserving of some credit is Richard Hurd (1720–1808), bishop of Worcester, who played a part in "the creation of a favourable environment for the study of the romances" (30) by way of his *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762).

The second chapter closes with a complete review of the theories about the origins of romance, some of them ludicrous, proposed during the period covered by Santini's book (53–89). William Warburton (1747) and Thomas Warton (1774) agreed in thinking that the marvellous element in romance is of eastern descent, but while the former suggested that crusaders and pilgrims had brought the romances to Europe, the latter instead argued in favour of the Saracens and believed that romance had arrived in Britain through the Saxons, "descendants of those Goths who had brought the eastern traditions to the North of Europe" (63). Warton distanced himself from Warburton's hypothesis in order to reconcile his own theory with that of Percy (1765), for whom both the French and the English romances were derived from the Old Norse sagas. Clara Reeves (1785), espousing the Saracen derivation of romance, claimed that the first chivalric texts had been produced in Spain and from there, and not France as Joseph Ritson (1802) contended vehemently, brought directly to England. John Leyden (1801) and William Owen (1802) supported the idea of a Celtic provenance, whereas John Dunlop (1814) argued that the classical tradition ran through the veins of the genre. Other scholars like George Ellis (1805), Henry Weber (1810), Robert Southey (1817) and Richard Price (1824) preferred a more eclectic and integrative approach in acknowledging the diversity of possible origins and even the universality of romance. Finally, Santini also includes the views that correlated romance with history: for Richard Hurd (1762) "romance should be regarded as a kind of written record of chivalry" (57), and Walter Scott (1814) concluded that our ancestors had revamped

history into romance, possibly out of vanity or maybe due to lack of memory, thus earning fame for their own forebears.

All these theories are historical evidence of the incipient development of medieval literary studies in Britain, but also of their minor scholarly value, since they have left no discernible trace on modern notions of romance. More long-lasting benefits, however, have had some of the editions of medieval texts produced by this group of antiquarians, published as a response to the interest in romance awakened by Percy's and Warton's studies. Although their editorial methods fail by and large to meet modern standards, for the first time they made available medieval romance texts to a wide readership. The romances printed as part of anthologies are reviewed in the third chapter of Santini's book. John Pinkerton, in his compilation of *Scottish Poems* of 1792, included the romances of *Golagros and Gawane* and *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn* with no explanatory remarks. The first collection devoted entirely to Middle English romances, *Ancient English Metrical Romanceës*, was published in 1802 by Joseph Ritson, who addressed textual issues responsibly in the thirteen romance works he edited. Three years later George Ellis brought out his *Specimens of Early Metrical Romances*, which contains summaries of romances accompanied by illustrative quotations, although Santini exposes Ellis's "disdainful way of looking at them [i.e. the romances] as the products of a primitive age" (125). Since the abstracts were no substitute for the actual texts, Henry Weber edited romances from Ellis's collection in his *Metrical Romances of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Centuries* (1810). In 1817 Edward V. Utterson's *Select Pieces of Early Popular Poetry* contained four metrical romances and printed the text of *Sir Gowther* for the first time. Next, between 1822 and 1827, David Laing published three collections with a Scottish slant that include a total of seven romances. Other collections followed, such as William Thoms's (1827–28), the only one devoted to prose romances, and Charles Hartshorne's (1829), which according to Santini "is undoubtedly the worst of the nineteenth-century collections of medieval romances" (148).

Although discussed in the same chapter, the editions produced by Frederic Madden, John Robson and James Orchard Halliwell are in a different class, since they show greater philological awareness and were undertaken under the aegis of literary societies and printing clubs. These private institutions, most notably the Roxburghe, Bannatyne, Maitland and Abbotsford Clubs, committed themselves to publishing medieval texts, including romances, and they are dealt with in the last chapter of the book. As a direct result of these clubs' publications schemes, from 1819 to 1865 "[f]orty previously unprinted romances were edited by the scholars working within these societies" (174). Santini describes the editions published by these societies and makes obvious their contribution to the dissemination of English medieval romances. The book closes with the section "1864: Time for a Change". In 1864 a Middle English verse romance (the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*) was printed for the first time by a mainstream publisher (Macmillan) aiming to reach a wide readership. Responsible for that edition was Frederick J. Furnivall, who in the same year also started the Early English Text Society, virtually putting an end to the period of amateurism in the study of the Middle English popular romances.

Santini's monograph is written with ample and direct knowledge of the body of scholarship produced by the amateur medievalists of the eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries. This material, however, is for the most part treated descriptively, without providing a systematic assessment of the actual scholarly contribution made by this group of people. For instance, when speaking of Madden's edition of *Syr Gawayne* (1839), Santini comments about the glossary, "though not perfect he [i.e. Madden] believes it is of considerable value" (156), adding at a later point that "he did his best to understand the language the texts were written in and most of the times he achieved his goal" (159). But Santini never explains in what ways the glossary attains the "considerable value" alleged by Madden, nor does she show to what extent he failed to achieve his goal. Besides, she could have also highlighted that Madden was the first to suggest the four-fitt division of this Arthurian romance, generally observed ever since (Edwards 1997: 201). Similarly, she could have noted that Utterson produced the only modern edition of William Copland's printings of *Sir Degare*, *Sir Isumbras*, and of his first edition of *Sir Triamour*. When Santini does make a judgement, she tends to provide general comments based not on detailed analysis but on someone else's opinions (e.g. 209). Therefore, the monograph conveys the overall impression that this scholarly movement was instrumental in stimulating interest in the medieval romances, but fails to spotlight the true academic worth of its contribution. In addition, a more critical approach would have avoided a graver problem present in the monograph, namely, its lack of originality. Readers acquainted with the work of Johnston (1964), Levine (1986) and Matthews (1999) will find few novelties in Santini's book beyond her specific focus on the Middle English romances and on a particular time frame. Her academic integrity, however, is beyond question, as Santini acknowledges at all times her indebtedness to these scholars, whom she cites abundantly.<sup>3</sup>

Other than these general observations, the book contains a number of inaccuracies, factual errors and lacunae. Santini dates Samuel Rowlands's *The Famous History of Guy Earl of Warwick* to 1632 (37n13), when it was first published in 1609 (STC 21378). The materials containing Chepman and Myllar's edition of *The Knightly Tale of Golagros and Gawane* were found not in 1788 (140) but in 1785 (Hanna 2008: xii). About *The Knyght of the Swanne* Santini erroneously says that it was "printed by Robert Copland in 1504" and dates William Copland's edition to ca. 1550 (154; on 180n13 she gives the year 1555?); actually, Robert Copland translated the romance from the French, Wynkyn de Worde published the English translation on 6 February 1512 (STC 7571) and William Copland's reprint is now considered to have been issued around 1560 (STC 7572). John King's and William Copland's editions of *Sir Degare* (STC 6472, 6472.5) were printed not in 1564 and 1545? (217) but in 1560 and 1565?, respectively. *Palmerin of England* is not a Spanish romance (232) but a Portuguese one (cf. Thomas 1920: 109–15). In addition, the manuscript references are not always reliable. For the famous manuscript of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* a wrong shelf-mark is provided: "London, BL, Cotton Nero MS A.9" (155), instead of 'Nero A.X.'. The same happens with a manuscript of *Guy of Warwick*, BL Add. MS 14408, erroneously cited as "14409" (215); and the shelf-mark of the Cambridge manuscript of *King Horn* is incomplete: "CUL,

<sup>3</sup> She explicitly says about Johnston's books: "his is to date the only thorough treatment of the topic and I am much indebted to it" (54n28); at a later point Santini also acknowledges that to Philippa Levine's "monographic study of the phenomenon [i.e. amateur scholarship] I am much indebted" (172).

MS 4.27 II" (202), when it should read 'Gg.4.27 (2)'. Santini states about Henry Weber's edition of *Ipomydon* that the editor knew "an imperfect printed copy in the Library of Lincoln Cathedral" (130). This information is insufficient to identify the exact same copy since it is no longer held at Lincoln Cathedral library; the reader should have been informed that the library sold this book in 1814 and it is now preserved at the Pierpont Morgan Library, accession number 20896 (STC 5733; cf. Sánchez-Martí 2005: 157–59). Finally, Santini does not view *Robert the Devyll* as a "medieval romance proper" (154; cf. 152, 167), although no explanation is offered. While the romance is not listed in Severs (1967), Rice (1987: 603) considers it as part of the corpus of Middle English romances. Nonetheless, due to this unwarranted decision, Santini fails to discuss a relevant edition of a text that in the late-eighteenth century was perceived as a medieval romance: *Roberte the Deuyll: A Metrical Romance, from an Ancient Illuminated Manuscript*, edited by Isaac Herbert (London, 1798).

Another problem has to do with sources and quotations. On page 30 Santini quotes from Johnston (1964: 92), but the words are actually Joseph Ritson's. At a later point (107n25) Santini cites Johnston again, but fails to enclose in quotation marks the text taken verbatim from her source, and when quoting Johnston on pages 31 and 67 she gives the wrong page number (as she does for the block quotation on 194). Santini mentions works not included in the list of references at the end of the book: Brock (228), and Curry (233). I have also noticed that some quotations reproduce the original inaccurately, as happens with the block quotations on pages 167 and 194. Finally, some typographical errors have been overlooked: "adjective" (27) is given for *adjectives*, "deal" (28) for *dealt*, "THE" (28) for *the*, "this mistakes" (83) for *these mistakes*, "those year" (99) for *those years*, "on the *Edinburgh Review*" (105) for *in*, "Kinght" (152) for *Knight*, "those ancient text" (169) for *those ancient texts*, "Fredric" (218) for *Frederic*; as should be added after "define themselves" (16) and "defines" (40), and *a* should be added between "remains" and "matter" (44).<sup>4</sup>

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