

The Tale of Gamelyn of The Canterbury Tales. An Annotated Edition. (Introduction, translation, commentary and glossary by Nila VÁZQUEZ. Foreword by Teresa FANEGO) 2009. Lewinston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press. 466 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-7734-3852-1. ISBN-10: 0-7743-3853-1.

11,100,000 results in 0.22 seconds. This is the figure you obtain if you type “Geoffrey Chaucer” in Google Books. “Googling” this way is, of course, nothing but some kind of educated game—but it is numbers like these (though still far from Shakespeare’s: 193,000,000 results in 0.31 seconds) which often lead laymen to wonder about the need for still another book about Chaucer. They would be wrong. Nila Vazquez’s book is not just another one—it is a fine philological work which contributes to Chaucer scholarship (and to English medieval studies in general) in a variety of ways which go beyond providing an annotated edition of a poem whose authorship—and hence its belonging to *The Canterbury Tales* canon—has been much disputed.

The Tale of Gamelyn is a poem of 902 lines which appears in twenty-five of the eighty-four extant manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales*, and a frequent belief is that, be it a draft by Chaucer, or by an unknown author, it may have been intended as a second tale told by the Cook (on account of the place it occupies in various manuscripts and of the fact that in some of them it is labelled as “The Cookes Tale of Gamelyn”). It tells the story of the youngest of three brothers, who is treacherously deprived of his right share of their father’s inheritance by his eldest brother. After many adventures, including some time as an outlaw (a sub-theme which connects the tale with the Robin Hood tradition), the false brother is punished and Gamelyn is restored back to his honour and his property. Modern editors of the *Tales* have generally chosen to exclude it, mostly under the influence of nineteenth-century scholars like Skeat. Nila Vázquez does not aim at settling such matter beyond the point that none of the arguments against Chaucer’s authorship “have proved compelling” (p. 289). In any case, she interestingly observes that “this text does not occur anywhere else than in manuscripts including, either complete or incomplete, versions of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*” (p. 5). It may not be

a concluding argument for Chaucer's authorship, but it is an excellent one for the text to be studied in its own right, and to be thoroughly edited.

As it could not be otherwise, the main body of this work (around 300 pages of a total of 466) consists of a synoptic edition of *Gamelyn*, on the one hand, and Vazquez's own edition of the tale with *Apparatus Criticus* and Textual Notes, on the other. They are preceded by an Introduction, and a chapter with general considerations on the *Tale of Gamelyn* and the *Canterbury Tales*. Vazquez's own version of the text into Present-Day English, a glossarial index and a short chapter with final remarks follow the critical edition; the book is completed with a Reference List and a General Index. As to abbreviations, a List subdivided into "Abbreviations for Items in the *Canterbury Tales*" and "Other abbreviations used" is included at the very beginning, right after the detailed Table of Contents, whereas specific lists concerning identifications of manuscripts sigils and abbreviations used in the glossarial index to the text have been very usefully placed right before the relevant parts of the work (pp 6–9 and pp. 414–415 respectively).

The Introduction contains an outline of the whole work, together with a brief history of the initial research which finally led to the book in its present final form—within the context of the *Canterbury Tales* Project initially launched by Norman Blake, Peter Robinson and Elizabeth Solopova and currently based in the University of Birmingham under Dr. Robinson's direction. The instrumental character of the book is readily stated (p. 3: "the chief goal of this new critical edition ... is to offer the reader the possibility of dealing with all the material directly, in such a way that she/he can use it for her/his own purposes") plus a general justification of the need for a new edition of the tale following the tenets of Modern Philology. The General Considerations in Section I frame the *Tale of Gamelyn* within the *Canterbury Tales*, and describe the particulars of the poem. This first section also contains a list with the complete references (plus sigil abbreviations) of the eighty-four extant manuscripts of the *Tales* (a real "best-seller" indeed for the period), which I find useful in a work aimed at researchers with all kinds of agendas. Preliminary descriptions of each of the twenty-five manuscripts containing *Gamelyn* end the section.

The bulk of the work consists, as mentioned above, of a synoptic edition and a critical edition of the *Tale of Gamelyn*, preceded by a brief history of the previous editions from the eighteenth century onwards, upon which Vázquez bases her arguments for the need of a new one based on a different group of manuscripts: she feels that not only more exhaustivity and reliability are necessary but also an entirely different approach which aims at finding evidence for and not against including *Gamelyn* within the *Canterbury Tales*). The synoptic edition is based on Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 198, and uses Oxford, Christ Church MS 152; Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, McLean MS 181; London, British Library, MS Harley 7334; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Hatton Donat I; London, British Library, MS Lansdowne 851; Lichfield, Lichfield Cathedral, MS 29; Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, Mm.2.5; Petworth, Petworth House, MS 7 and London, British Library, MS Royal 18 as the other witnesses for collation. All ten diplomatic editions start with a codicological analysis of the manuscript containing each text. The introduction to the very complete critical edition provides a detailed summary of the plot and information regarding language, metre, possible date of composition and authorship and comments on literary connections of the text, besides something historical phonologists will value very much indeed: a list of the 451 rhyming couplets of *Gamelyn*. Apart of the *Apparatus Criticus* and the notes to the text, the edition is completed by a glossarial index and the editor's own version into Present-Day English. The translation seems to be half-way between a philological translation and a "final product"—discussion on this point is not certainly as detailed as those on editorial matters. I assume that when she decided to provide this translation, Nila Vázquez had in mind a variety of researchers, not necessarily medievalists, some of whom would need to work with medieval texts and would, therefore, need the guidance of a modern version (I cannot imagine any serious researcher on English medieval texts lacking the basic tools of their trade, i.e. a sound knowledge of both Old and Middle English).

This is the point of the whole work: to address the needs of a wide range of prospective researchers, something in which she has fully succeeded. Vázquez has learnt much more than the essentials of paleography she modestly refers to—no such task can be satisfactorily accomplished just

with the “bare necessities”. Her argumentations concerning her various choices (Corpus Christi College Oxford MS 198 as her *codex optimus*, the guidelines for transcription and for the elaboration of the glossarial index, for example) seem convincing to me, but I am no paleographer. I am just a historical linguist who needs to rely on good paleographic work and whose best way to make her choice for an edition is high-quality argumentation... like the one offered in this work, which Professor Fanego’s justly characterises in her Foreword as “a welcome and exhaustive contribution to Chaucer’s scholarship” which “will no doubt become an important reference in the text of textual editing”.

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