

REVIEW

Ralph Hanna, ed., *The Knightly Tale of Golagros and Gawane*. Scottish Text Society, 5th Series, no. 7. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2008. Pp. xlv + 145. ISBN 978-1-89797-629-6. £35.00.

The metrical Arthurian romance *Golagros and Gawane* is one of the hidden gems of Older Scots literature. Thomas Hahn's edition of it for TEAMS (Kalamazoo, 1995) has brought it to the attention of a wider readership in recent years, but it has remained in need of a full scholarly edition. Hanna observes that *Golagros* was once 'fortunate to receive the attentions of F. J. Amours' (p. xlv, referring to *Scottish Alliterative Poems in Riming Stanzas*, 2 vols., STS 1st ser. 27, 38 [Edinburgh, 1897]). The text has once again been extremely fortunate to receive the attentions of Ralph Hanna.

As he explains in the preface, Hanna took over the edition from W. R. J. Barron after the latter's death in 2005, but the introduction and notes are almost entirely his own. Hanna is generous in his praise of former editors and forthright when he disagrees with them. He also cheerfully disagrees with himself, describing a critical note from his own edition of *The Awntyrs of Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn* (Manchester, 1974) as 'perhaps wrongheaded' (note to ll. 274ff.). His detailed discussion of the sole extant witness to the text, the 1508 Edinburgh print by Chepman and Myllar, represents an important contribution to the study of Scotland's earliest prints. Other sections of the introduction cover 'Language and Date' (on which more below), 'Sources,' and 'Past editions and this edition.' 'Sources' offers in passing a disconcertingly plausible argument for assigning a Scottish provenance to the *Awntyrs of Arthure*, always previously assumed to have been English (p. xxxv-xxxvi). The explanatory notes run to forty pages for the 1,365 lines of text; the glossary to fifty-five pages. The rhymed-alliterative stanzas of *Golagros* rely, like most medieval alliterative poems, on a

large and difficult vocabulary, made even more unfamiliar to most readers by being Scottish: Hanna's careful glossary is therefore a vital interpretative aid. The bulk of the explanatory notes is given over to discussion of questions of vocabulary or metre – not, perhaps, to every reader's taste, but appropriate for a critical edition.

The one point on which I would disagree with him is his dating of the text. *Golagros* is usually assigned rather vaguely to the latter part of the fifteenth century, following a long and often unjustified tradition of dating any text featuring a flawed king to the turbulent reign of James III and its aftermath. Hanna dates the text more precisely to the period c.1475-1508 (p. xxx) on the basis of two sound-changes evidenced in the rhymes: the coalescence of the diphthong /ai/ and long vowel /a:/, and the occasional rhyme of historical long /a:/ or /ai/ with historical open /e:/. He describes these as being 'distinctive to "late Middle Scots"' and states that evidence for them does not appear until the late-fifteenth-century poetry of Dunbar and Douglas (p. xxx). For this he cites the acknowledged authority on Older Scots phonology, A. J. Aitken (both his 1977 article 'How to Pronounce Older Scots' and his posthumous *Older Scottish Vowels*, ed. C. Macafee, STS 5th series, no. 1 [Edinburgh, 2002]). Aitken's rough chronological chart (1977: p. 7) lists these coalescences as two of the features of 'early Middle Scots,' c.1475, which distinguish it from 'Early Scots,' c.1375, but he offers no firm opinion on when such changes *began* other than a 'cursory impression' that 'earlier poets including Henryson and Blind Hary' avoid rhymes showing /ai/ > /a:/ (1977: p. 8). In his 2002 study he offers more reasons for caution in dating such changes: for example, that in some Modern Scots dialects these vowels have yet to merge, so dialectal variation may play a greater part than chronology in predicting their appearance (2002: p. 141); he finds rhymes of *plain* adj.: *tane* pp.: *ane* pron.: *ran* n. in Holland's c.1448 *Buke of the Howlat* (2002: p. 143; *Howlat* line 211ff.); he describes several phonetic environments in which these changes did take place earlier (before *r*, *l*, *v*, *s/z* etc. [2002: pp. 144-6]). Finally, there is the fact that both changes seem to have taken place much earlier in northern Middle English, making it difficult to argue for a *late* date for a Scots text on the basis of their absence. I would love to have a more precise date for *Golagros* than the c.1420-1508 provided

by, respectively, its dependence on the *Awntyrs* and the Chepman and Myllar print, but I do not think Hanna has succeeded in providing one.

Nevertheless, this is a superb edition of a sophisticated and absorbing poem and it deserves the acceptance it will certainly enjoy as the new authoritative version.

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