

4-1-2003

# Ars edendi: A Practical Introduction to Editing Medieval Latin Texts

Scott Gwara

University of South Carolina - Columbia, [gwaras@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:gwaras@mailbox.sc.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://scholarcommons.sc.edu/engl\\_facpub](http://scholarcommons.sc.edu/engl_facpub)



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

## Publication Info

Published in *Speculum*, Volume 78, Issue 2, 2003, pages 531-533.

Gwara, Scott. (2003). *Ars edendi: A Practical Introduction to Editing Medieval Latin Texts*. *Speculum*, 78 (2), 531-533.

©Speculum 2003, Cambridge University Press

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the English Language and Literatures, Department of at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact [SCHOLARC@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:SCHOLARC@mailbox.sc.edu).

and if there is one area I would like to have seen included, it is his work on the Book of Aneirin, represented primarily by the introduction to the facsimile edition produced by the National Library in 1989 and his article on the other manuscripts of the "Gododdin" in *Early Welsh Poetry: Studies in the Book of Aneirin* (ed. B. F. Roberts, 1988). However, both these volumes are still in print, and are far more widely available than the material appearing in the book, so my regret stems only from a dream of completeness.

The book is lavishly produced, with a rich supply of black-and-white facsimile pages, giving clear examples of seven of the multifarious Hendregadredd hands as well as thirteen of the hands of the Book of Llandaf. There are very few printing errors of substantive importance, though the facsimile of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 199 noted on page 10 is plate 3, not plate 4, and on page 76 "Plate 28" should read "Plate 27," and "Plates 28 and 29" should read "Plates 27, 28 and 29." In footnote 3, page 67, "pp. 000-000" should read "pp. 230-32," and in footnote 23, page 80, "PBRH" should read "PRBH." These are extremely minor slips and do nothing to lessen the fact that this is the most important work on Welsh manuscripts to appear in the last half century, and one of the most important in the field of codicology. It should bring the discussion of Welsh manuscripts into the mainstream of the field.

DAVID N. KLAUSNER, University of Toronto

R. B. C. HUYGENS, *Ars edendi: A Practical Introduction to Editing Medieval Latin Texts*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2000. Paper. Pp. 80.

Robert Huygens retired in 1997 from Leiden University, where he was professor of medieval Latin language and literature. His rich experience and inexhaustible energy have led to many distinguished volumes in the Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis series, most of which he plunders to illustrate points argued in *Ars edendi*. This *libellus* imparts a "practical" digest of Huygens's immense learning, his "personal views and advice." Anticipating that "readers are familiar with basic manuals, bibliographical guides, methods and theories," Huygens conducts a fireside chat about medieval texts, essential background knowledge, textual criticism, variation, *stemmata codicum*, spelling, punctuation, hyphenation, capitalization, annotation, and indexing. Throughout he betrays the classicist's exuberant intellectual machismo (he seems to admire Housman's bullying), making editing sound as exacting as brain surgery ("you have to be painstakingly accurate"), as perilous as the psychiatrist's couch ("you will be a failure"), and as potentially mortifying as "authenticating" the Hitler diaries ("more knowledgeable readers may unmask you"). Beginners might be intimidated to learn from Huygens's remarks how high the stakes can be. Confessing a "moderate talent" and selecting a project "worth publishing," the tyro is enjoined "to be thoroughly at home in classical Latin literature" and to "start reading [the Bible] more than once in Latin," all the while learning not a little about liturgy and patristics (the latter "an immense field which . . . is easier to become acquainted with than with Liturgy") and a lot about paleography ("you naturally have to be thoroughly familiar with palaeography"). Depending on one's chosen text, Middle Eastern geography or archaeology would be suitable adjuncts: "it is too bad to print the word *gladius*, *ensis* or *spatha* in your text without ever having seen such a weapon dating from the period that particular text deals with, and I for one felt really embarrassed while editing the 12th century *Apologia de barbibus*, when I proved unable to trace any razor which the author of that wonderful treatise might himself have observed being used." (Here I must pause: disregarding the complication of naming artifacts, how can we be sure that medieval writers distinguished *gladius* from *ensis*? Quite possibly an author knew *ensis* as a poeticism for *gladius*, but he may never have encountered a *spatha* in his life, or maybe what was called an *ensis* in

Lincoln was a *machaera* in Tours. Aldhelm of Malmesbury [d. 709] describes the *cittum* of a pomegranate, but we can be fairly sure he never saw one in England! *Sapienti sat.*) Having overcome the shock of realizing that possibly only a dozen people worldwide are qualified to edit medieval Latin texts and that tenure at an American university is out of the question for you (“if you wish to publish just one single text in your whole life, then take your time . . .”), you might reflect on Huygens’s advice with more skeptical detachment.

While I cannot deny that editing medieval Latin texts is a technical, artistic, and humane vocation, I do not share some of Huygens’s first principles—and not simply because he is a liberal Lachmannian and I a conservative Bédieriste. For example, Huygens charges that an edition should offer accurate “information” to “much larger groups other than just specialists” by which they may study the past. Partly because I cannot imagine anyone but a specialist reading medieval Latin, I regard editing as an investment preliminary to analysis, something more than a stemma, orthographical commentary, or codicological résumé. Complete immersion in a single work confers an unparalleled opportunity for discovery or re-vision. Models of such philological, codicological, or historical criticism can be found in the Oxford Medieval Latin Texts or in the astonishing *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian* edited by Michael Lapidge and Bernhard Bischoff.

Furthermore, to insist that “your work should aim at being the last word in editing” creates an unreasonable standard. Publication impersonates conversation. Having done as good an editorial job as reasonably possible with your capable expertise, await the reactions—good or bad—that will inevitably augment your findings. Do not become anxious that you will produce “a failed edition . . . a bad edition . . . an unsatisfactory edition” (according to Huygens there are already plenty of them) or have a “stain upon your record” or “bungle” the job. But be honest in assessing your qualifications and temperament: are you comfortable that you can do it? If so, dive in.

Finally, as a Lachmannian recensionist, Huygens urges us “to trace the text as far back as possible . . . to reconstruct the oldest attainable stage of the manuscript transmission,” although the result may not reflect the author’s *ipsissima verba*. Unfortunately, this procedure typically supplants evidence with conjecture and validates an imaginary text over a real one. Why should a hypothetical abstraction have more value than a widely circulated extant recension? Furthermore, how do we recover the author when every scribal copying represents a textual performance? Huygens takes inspiration from Housman: “Don’t fall into the opposite trap either by printing just plain rubbish for lack of ability to deal with a difficult text and/or a defective manuscript tradition, an attitude not infrequently described as respect for the manuscripts.” Huygens does concede that Petronius’s drunken Trimalchio might actually declare “*tres bybliotheas habeo: unam Graecam, alteram Latinam.*” But sometimes the editor has trouble winnowing mannerisms and ornaments from defects. Æthelwold’s *Chronicon* boasts nominative absolutes among other “rubbish.” Here, too, is a gem from Latin dialogues I have recently edited: “. . . dedus uel absidis [*corr.* obsidem] uel arra [*corr.* arrham] uel pignus deduxerunt” (*De raris fabulis*). If, as I believe, this phrasing could represent genuine Latin conversation from ninth-century Wales, why impose regularity? To be sure, Huygens brilliantly and satisfyingly allows for exceptions (substrate, idiolect, textual reminiscence), but they all highlight the consequences of a methodology that often makes not perfect Latin but better Latin a desiderandum.

Many editorial decisions hinge on determining “authorial” or “original” readings. Huygens recalls emending a word in Guibert of Nogent’s *Monodiae*: “quod Iudeis metum fidelium impresumptibile erat.” All editors prior to Huygens logically altered *metum* to *metu*, but appealing to a Gospel context Huygens adopted “<propter> metum.” Many theoretical issues are submerged here, not the least trivial of which is that *propter metum*

and *metu* are perfectly reasonable equivalents. Why do we imagine, then, that a biblical reminiscence has to be exact in wording? Surely, a writer could paraphrase (misquote, if you will): “we have nothing to fear *except for* fear itself.” What is more, Huygens refers us to page 52 of his book, where he calls this example a “corruption . . . much more serious than it looks at first sight.” In the very same paragraph he invites us to consider how the mechanics of transmission can affect variation. The question arises: is *propter* more likely to have been omitted, or is the letter *m* more plausibly attracted to *metu* because of the ending of *fideliūm*?

Elsewhere Huygens cites a corruption in a poem by Gillebert: “iste flet tenacibus vinculis astrictus.” Two manuscripts have “tenacibus unguis,” but Huygens cleverly reasons that Gillebert was quoting from Vergil’s *Georgics* (“tenacia vincla”) and restores *vinculis*, found in a third—and later—source. Why, I wonder, must every occurrence of *tenax* + *vinculum* ultimately derive from a Vergilian cadence? Furthermore, while “confined by firm claws” seems less satisfying than “confined by firm chains,” I find it perfectly conceivable to describe “bonds” metaphorically as “talons, nails, claws” and the like. Such reconstructions as Huygens’s, though shrewd and learned, ultimately remind me of a passage from Aldhelm’s prose treatise on virginity: “crepitante nauclerii portisculo.” Certain of Aldhelm’s facility in Greek, Rudolf Ewald misread *naucleru* (a Greek genitive) for *nauclerii*, although *nauclerii* or *naucleri* stands in every source.

Huygens concludes with some excellent technical advice, sometimes in need of slight augmentation. Thus the abbreviations *corr.*, *del.*, *eras.*, *exp.*, *om.*, *trp.* employed in an *apparatus criticus* also have passive forms, present and preterite. To them I would add, for example, *ante corr.* (*ante correctionem*) or *e corr.* (*e correctione*). I prefer complete, rather than selective, indexes. Hence I would record every *locus* in William of Tyre’s *Chronicle* where Queen Melisende of Jerusalem is mentioned, with appropriate subheadings: features, politics, marriage, etc. Overall I would urge familiarity with two topics deserving more attention: conjunctive and disjunctive errors as the basis of recension and the commonest reading and writing slips to which scribes are prone. Huygens recommends Ludwig Bieler’s *Grammarian’s Craft*, a very useful guide. Finally, remember to check your Latin dedications to avoid such mistakes as that mentioned on page 72.

At the very least, this little book (which strikes me as a *vade mecum* for editing *Corpus Christianorum* volumes) has managed to open up some complicated editorial issues that continue to afflict the business. Any monograph as arch, scrupulous, and thoughtful as this one deserves some serious reflection.

SCOTT GWARA, University of South Carolina

PATRICIA CLARE INGHAM, *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain*. (The Middle Ages Series.) Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001. Pp. vii, 288. \$49.95.

Using poststructuralist and postcolonial theory, Patricia Ingham reads medieval English Arthurian texts as sites of negotiation and vision in this densely argued book. Her goal is to “take seriously the role of imagination in making (and contesting) notions of union in late medieval Britain” (p. 2). She presents the Arthurian romance narratives of late-medieval English literature as fantasies of insular union and imagined communities. Welsh origins of Arthurian romance figure prominently in her approach and criticism, as she delineates the ways in which Anglo-Norman and later English writers appropriated the history of Britain just as they contested control of the island with Celtic peoples who claimed the same heritage.

Ingham divides the book into three sections, “The Matter of Britain,” “Romancing the