

EARLY ENGLISH TEXT SOCIETY

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New Volumes for the year 2017

The publication for 2017 is a two-volume set. As such, members are asked to take both volumes, and those who chose to substitute titles from the backlist in place of this publication, are asked to substitute both volumes.

O.S. 349, 350, *Sir Bevis of Hampton*, ed. Jennifer Fellows

The story of Bevis was immensely popular and influential during the late medieval and early modern period. References to it are made by Shakespeare, Spenser, Bunyan, Drayton and Steele, and the story gave rise to versions, written and oral, in a dozen or so languages, from the beginning of the fourteenth century to within living memory, when, as the editor notes, a version of the story was still being performed by Sicilian puppeteers.

Sir Bevis of Hampton is arguably one of the most important non-Arthurian romances in Middle English, and it is attracting growing scholarly and critical attention. The Middle English poem edited here was translated around 1300 from an Anglo-Norman original. The romance packs in a wide variety of themes and exciting content: the hero, who escapes death at the hands of his mother, is sold to heathen pirates, and the story moves between England and the Near East, taking in much of Western Europe, as Bevis battles against giants and dragons, and 'a parade of interesting villains, foreign and domestic, exotic and local,' including dragons and giants. The description of *Bevis* in Wikipedia is picturesque, and I hope I may quote it: here may be found 'forced marriages and episodes of domestic violence; myriad disguises and mistaken identities; harsh imprisonments with dramatic escapes, harrowing rescues, violent urban warfare; and, last but not least, a horse of such valour that his death at the end of the poem is at least as tragic as that of the heroine, and almost as tragic as that of Bevis himself.' The hero is endlessly resourceful as he progresses from youth to maturity, the heroine is appealing, and the servants faithful. The story lends itself well to analysis in terms of contemporary literary criticism, in particular, postcolonialism, liminality and gender studies.

With all this on offer, the Society has decided to publish this important, and substantial, work in two volumes which will together constitute next year's issue to members in the Original Series. Two parallel texts are presented on facing pages, and the edition complements the earlier edition of *Bevis* prepared for the Society by Eugen Kölbing in 1885-1894. A substantial introduction and extensive annotation present the romance in its literary and cultural contexts from the fourteenth century down to the present day. It is the editor's hope that the edition will set out the variety and complexity of the poem's textual tradition, and provide material for further, more nuanced approaches to a significant cultural phenomenon.

H. L. Spencer

Editorial Secretary