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Introduction

IVANA DJORDJEVIĆ and JENNIFER FELLOWS

Although it is relatively little known today, the story of Bevis of Hampton was among the most popular narratives of the medieval and early modern periods, its only serious rival in this respect being that of Guy of Warwick.¹ There are many parallels between the textual and reception histories of the English versions of *Bevis* and of *Guy*, but also considerable differences. Both are translations of Anglo-Norman texts that are generally regarded as ‘ancestral romances’, associated with particular aristocratic families and specific localities;² texts of both appear in two of the major medieval manuscript compilations of Middle English romances extant from the medieval period;³ both were translated into Irish in the fifteenth century;⁴ both were printed in the sixteenth century by Wynkyn de Worde and William Copland, the giants among Renaissance printers of medieval romance;⁵ the ‘vogue’ of both continued well into the seventeenth century, both being repeatedly singled out in Humanist and Puritan denunciations of popular secular literature;⁶ both Bevis and Guy have, to some extent, an extra-literary life as folk heroes;⁷

¹ Cf. Ronald S. Crane, ‘The vogue of “Guy of Warwick” from the close of the Middle Ages to the Romantic revival’, *PMLA*, 30 (1915), 125–94; *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, ed. by Alison Wiggins and Rosalind Field, *Studies in Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2007).

² See, e.g., M. Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 139–75.

³ See *The Auchinleck Manuscript: National Library of Scotland Advocates’ MS 19.2.1*, introd. by Derek Pearsall and I. C. Cunningham (London: Scolar Press in association with the National Library of Scotland, 1977); *Cambridge University Library MS Ff.2.38*, introd. by Frances McSparran and P. R. Robinson (London: Scolar Press, 1979).

⁴ See ‘The Irish lives of Guy of Warwick and Bevis of Hampton’, ed. and trans. by F. N. Robinson, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 6 (1908), 9–180, 273–338.

⁵ See Carol M. Meale, ‘Caxton, de Worde, and the publication of romance in late medieval England’, *Library*, 14 (1992), 283–98; A. S. G. Edwards, ‘William Copland and the identity of printed Middle English romance’, in *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance*, ed. Phillipa Hardman (Cambridge: Brewer, 2002), pp. 139–47.

⁶ See Ronald S. Crane, *The Vogue of Medieval Chivalric Romance during the English Renaissance* (Menasha, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1919).

⁷ See, e.g., David Griffith, ‘The visual history of Guy of Warwick’, in *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, ed. Wiggins and Field, pp. 110–32; Jennifer Fellows, ‘Sir Bevis of Hampton in popular tradition’, *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society*, 42 (1986), 139–45.

scenes from both romances are (or were) represented in a variety of visual media.⁸

On the other hand, while *Guy* gave rise to a generically more diverse group of texts than did *Bevis*,⁹ the latter is unique in having continued to be printed in its fifteenth-century metrical form from the beginning of the Tudor period until the early years of the eighteenth century.¹⁰ The respective lengths of the two romances are probably significant here: only about one-third the length of *Guy*, *Bevis* would lend itself more readily to cheap production for a mass market. By contrast, *Guy* tended to be adapted and excerpted, as well as accruing self-contained episodes (such as that of the Dun Cow) that formed no part of the Middle English romance.¹¹ Curiously, given that the Guy of the romance that bears his name is not of noble birth, he was appropriated as an ancestor for the purposes of 'baronial propaganda' by the families associated with the earldom of Warwick in a way that the aristocratic Bevis seems not to have been by the earls of Arundel.¹² This is perhaps because Guy was, from early on, taken seriously by chroniclers (including Knighton, Hardyng and Holinshed) as a part of English history,¹³ whereas the story of Bevis remained largely confined to the realms of fiction and folklore.

Bevis belongs to a much larger and more complex literary tradition than does Guy, versions of his story spreading throughout Europe during the medieval and early modern periods. In the heyday of Continental philology, with its source-hunting obsession, theories about the origins of the Bevis story were numerous and often fiercely argued over. It was suggested, for example, that it was of German origin, *Hamtone* being a misidentified town not far from Mainz; that the home of the earliest version was in north-western France; that the roots of the story were to be found in a tenth-century Viking saga and that King Hermin's country is not Armenia but Armorica, i.e. Brittany; that the story had to be of Celtic origin because adultery was a central motif in it; that this obviously Anglo-Saxon story was no more than an expanded and romanticized version of the tale of Horn; that the Persian–Armenian origin of the story was confirmed by its onomastics; that the story of Bevis was essentially the same as the story of Hamlet, ultimately derived from a conflation of the

⁸ Jessica Brantley, 'Images of the vernacular in the Taymouth Hours', *English Manuscript Studies, 1100–1700*, 10 (2002), 83–113; Jennifer Fellows, 'Romance among the choir-stalls: Middle English romance motifs on English misericords', in *Profane Images in Marginal Arts of the Middle Ages*, ed. by Elaine C. Block and Malcolm Jones (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming).

⁹ Cf. A. S. G. Edwards, 'The *Speculum Guy de Warwick* and Lydgate's *Guy of Warwick*: the non-romance Middle English tradition', in *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, ed. Wiggins and Field, pp. 81–93.

¹⁰ See pp. 109–13 below.

¹¹ Cf. Griffith, 'The visual history of Guy of Warwick', p. 116.

¹² See Emma Mason, 'Legends of the Beauchamps' ancestors: the use of baronial propaganda in medieval England', *Journal of Medieval History*, 10:1 (1984), 25–40.

¹³ See *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050–1500*, ed. by J. Burke Severs, I: *Romances* (New Haven, CT: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967), p. 30; Griffith, 'The visual history of Guy of Warwick', in *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, ed. Wiggins and Field, p. 118.

stories of Bellerophon and of Brutus; and so forth.¹⁴ These views illustrate both the impossibility of establishing where the individual building-blocks of this not too original narrative came from and the difficulty, for these mostly Continental scholars, of separating the Insular versions of the narrative from the Continental ones with which they were also familiar – especially at a time when the dating of all these texts was even more uncertain and contentious than it is now.¹⁵ We may smile at the foibles of our scholarly ancestors, but there is a reason for their perplexity: the story's pan-European success was so overwhelming that we should not be surprised to see its origins questioned. The Anglo-Norman version, whose Continental French reworkings inaugurated Bevis's triumphant eastward march across Europe, reversing the customary direction of *translatio studii*, featured a hero whose Englishness is more tenuous than subsequent English recastings would indicate.

In this respect further comparison with Guy of Warwick is illustrative. Mobilized for the promotion of a rather ostentatious kind of Englishness as early as its Anglo-Norman redactions, the story of Guy was enormously popular in England but did not spread very far beyond the area of English cultural influence. Thus both the fifteenth-century Irish *Life of Sir Guy* and the *Romaunt de Guy de Warwik et de Herolt d'Ardenne*, composed at roughly the same time in Continental French prose, appear to have been commissioned by English patrons;¹⁶ and while some manuscripts of the French romance did make it to the Continent, they left no progeny. Guy's emphatic Englishness did not travel well; Bevis, on the other hand, did not acquire the status of national hero until he was translated into English (see Robert Allen Rouse's chapter below). The Anglo-Norman narrative was largely free of nationalist baggage, a feature that greatly facilitated its protean transformations in Europe. Only the Irish version, produced in the fifteenth century, was translated from a Middle English redaction; as suggested below by Erich Poppe and Regine Reck, it may have been produced for a family with strong ties to England.

¹⁴ For the views summarized above, see Pio Rajna, *Ricerche intorno ai 'Real di Francia'* (Bologna: Romagnoli, 1872), p. 123 (Gaston Paris was of a similar opinion); Max Deutschbein, *Studien zur Sagengeschichte Englands* (Cöthen: Schulze, 1906), p. 205; Hermann Suchier, 'Nachtrag', in *Der angelnormannische Boeve de Haumtone*, ed. by Albert Stimming, Bibliotheca Normannica 7 (Halle: Niemeyer, 1899; repr. Geneva: Slatkine, 1974), pp. cxv–cxvi; Richard Wülker, *Geschichte der englischen Literatur von den älteste Zeiten bis zur Gegenwart* (Leipzig; Vienna: Bibliographisches Institut, 1896), p. 98; Prentiss C. Hoyt, 'The home of the Beves saga', *PMLA*, 17:2 (1902), 237–46; Franz Settegast, *Quellenstudien zur galloromanischen Epik* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1904), pp. 338–69; Rudolf Zenker, *Boeve-Amlethus* (Berlin: Felber, 1905).

¹⁵ A further problem is posed by the relationship between the Anglo-Norman *Boeve de Haumtone* and the Provençal *chanson de geste* of *Daurel et Beton* – a puzzle as yet without a satisfactory explanation: see *A Critical Edition of the Old Provençal Epic 'Daurel et Beton'*, ed. by Arthur S. Kimmel, University of North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures 108 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1971), esp. pp. 43–6.

¹⁶ See Martha W. Driver, '“In her owne persone semly and bewteus”: representing women in stories of Guy of Warwick', in *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, ed. Wiggins and Field, pp. 133–53 (p. 134).

All the other European versions go back to the Anglo-Norman text and its descendants, in a tradition that places little emphasis on the hero's national origins. *Boeve* was the source of the Middle Welsh *Ystorya Bown o Hamtwn*, discussed here by Poppe and Reck, who study it alongside the Early Modern Irish *Stair Bibuis*; it was also the original of the Icelandic *Bevers saga*, examined in this volume by its editor, Christopher Sanders.¹⁷ The paucity of extant manuscripts of *Boeve* cannot be a true reflection of the story's popularity in the century after its composition. A much better indicator of its attractiveness is the alacrity with which it was translated and otherwise appropriated. Within a few decades of its composition, most convincingly dated to the last decade of the twelfth century or the first few years of the thirteenth,¹⁸ *Boeve* was translated into Welsh (around the middle of the thirteenth century).¹⁹ The Icelandic translation is harder to date, but it too may have originated in the thirteenth century, as Sanders argues. There are two Faroese ballads of Boeve, *Bevusar tættir* and *Bevusar ríma*, based on material from the first few chapters of *Bevers saga*.²⁰

Three Continental French verse redactions, all from the thirteenth century, expanded the briskly compact Anglo-Norman narrative to between ten and twenty thousand lines.²¹ The story was then recast in French prose in the early fifteenth century, in a redaction that subsequently went through several printings.²² From north-eastern France, the Bevis material eventually made its way to the Netherlands, where a verse redaction, of which little remains, preceded a much better-documented prose adaptation, printed texts of which begin to appear in the first decade of the sixteenth century.²³

It was, however, the story's southward move to Italy that was crucial to its subsequent dissemination as far as Russia and to its enduring appeal. The various stages in its journey were marked by narrative transformations, sometimes of a very radical nature. In Italy we encounter a multiplicity of versions composed in different dialects, shaped into different prosodic forms, and performing different functions in the broader context of the Italian narrative

¹⁷ *Bevers saga*, ed. by Christopher Sanders, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi 51 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 2001).

¹⁸ See Judith Weiss, 'The date of the Anglo-Norman *Boeve de Haumtone*', *Medium Ævum*, 55 (1986), 237–41.

¹⁹ See p. 37 n. 3 below.

²⁰ On the Faroese ballads, see *ibid.*, pp. cxxxv–cxxxvi; 'Bevusar tættir', ed. by N. Djurhuus, in *Fóroya kvæði*, Corpus Carminum Færoensium 5 (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1968), pp. 309–12; Michael Chesnutt, 'Bevussrímur and Bevusar tættir: a case study of Icelandic influence on Faroese balladry', in *Opuscula*, vol. XII, ed. by Britta Olrik Frederiksen, Bibliotheca Arnarnagana 44 (Copenhagen: Reitzels, 2005), pp. 399–437.

²¹ *Der festländische Bueve de Hantone*, ed. by Albert Stimming, 5 vols, Gesellschaft für romanische Literatur 25, 30, 34, 41, 42 (Dresden: Niemeyer, 1911–20).

²² Marie-Madeleine Ival, *Beufvès de Hantonne: Version en prose* (Aix-en-Provence: CUERMA; Marseilles: Lafitte, 1984).

²³ See *A Dictionary of Medieval Heroes: Characters in Medieval Narrative Traditions and Their Afterlife in Literature, Theatre and the Visual Arts*, ed. by Willem P. Gerritsen and Anthony G. van Melle, trans. by Tanis Guest (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), p. 63.

tradition. Franco-Venetian *cantari* of the fourteenth century were followed by several Tuscan versions in *ottava rima*, as well as versions in prose. A 1497 printing of a verse tale of Buovo (or Bovo) d'Antona, as the hero is usually called in Italian, was the source of Elia Levita Bachur's translation into Yiddish, *Bovo-Buch*, composed in 1507 and first published in Venice in 1541.²⁴ *Bovo-Buch* was one of the most popular narratives in Yiddish secular literature for five hundred years; it was translated into Romanian as late as 1881. In Italy itself, an important fourteenth-century Franco-Italian redaction, which formed part of a compilation attempting to merge different stories from the Carolingian cycle into a unified whole, served as the basis of Andrea da Barberino's lengthy prose romance *I reali di Francia*, written around the turn of the fifteenth century, first printed in 1491, and endlessly reprinted throughout the sixteenth century.²⁵ Readers familiar with the Anglo-Norman and Middle English versions might not immediately recognize the much-amplified story or some of the characters. Sabot is here called Sinibaldo, though his son is still recognizable as Teris or Terigi, just as the hero's father remains recognizable under his lightly Italianized name, Guido. The boy's mother, who was nameless in the Insular texts, is here called Brandoria and is still an odd combination of the *malmariée* and the wicked stepmother, arranging to have her husband killed by her lover, Duodo di Maganza, and plotting the death of her son too. As in the Insular versions, merchants sell the young Buovo to King Erminione of Erminia. In due course the hero acquires a horse, Rondello, and attracts the attention of the king's daughter, Drusiana. Adventures and characters proliferate, diverging more and more from earlier versions of the story and yet preserving its overall shape. Names change, sometimes beyond recognition, but Yvori is still identifiable in Marcabruno, and Bradmund in Lucafero. Escopart, no longer a giant, has become Pulicane, half-man, half-dog, product of the unnatural union of a woman and a mastiff. In spite of all these, and many other, substantial changes, the principal episodes of the original narrative remain in place until the latter part of the text, when Buovo engages in military campaigns in Central and South-Eastern Europe (rather than in the Middle East), before dying at the hands of his half-brother Gailone.

It is in this form that the story attained its greatest popularity and, from the sixteenth century, spread eastwards by way of Venice. In 1549, twenty copies of the Italian *Buovo d'Antona* were shipped from Venice to Ragusa.²⁶ With its sizeable population of educated Slavs fluent in Italian, this city-state on the Adriatic coast (present-day Dubrovnik, Croatia), was ideally placed to act as a conduit for Western cultural goods; thus when the story surfaced in

²⁴ Elia Levita Bachur, *Bovo-Buch*, trans. by Jerry C. Smith (Tucson, AR: Fenestra, 2003).

²⁵ Andrea da Barberino, *I reali di Francia*, ed. by Giuseppe Vandelli and Giovanni Gambarin (Bari: Laterza, 1947).

²⁶ Veselin Kostić, *Kulturne veze između jugoslovenskih zemalja i Engleske do 1700. godine* (Belgrade: SANU, 1972), pp. 359–60.

a Byelorussian manuscript (now in Poznań, Poland) a few decades later, it was in a form that showed clearly both its derivation from an Italian version current in Venice and traces of its passage through Balkan lands.²⁷ The quickly multiplying Russian versions can all be traced back to the Byelorussian text represented by the Poznań manuscript. It is in Russia that Bevis, now called Bova, reached the apex of his social ascent. Whereas in the West the story was almost certainly never read at royal courts, in 1693 an illustrated copy of a Russian redaction was among the books enjoyed by Peter the Great's young son Alexis. The tsarevich must have made good use of the book, 'many pages of which were torn out and spoiled', as was recorded at the time.²⁸ In Russia the story appealed to all social strata and was transmitted orally, in manuscript form, in chapbooks and broadsheets, well into the nineteenth and, in the case of oral folk narratives, the twentieth century.

In Italy too there is evidence of continuing interest in the story beyond the sixteenth century. In the 1750s, the Italian composer Tommaso Traetta capitalized on the popularity of Buovo d'Antona and, armed with a libretto by Carlo Goldoni, turned a romantic episode from the story into a *dramma giocoso* or comic opera in three acts, first performed in Venice in 1758.²⁹ The comedy must have derived part of its appeal from a radical reversal of the audience's expectations. To the extent that they were familiar with Buovo's life and adventures, listeners would have expected his courtship of the Erminian princess Drusiana to result in their marriage, as in the narrative tradition; instead, Drusiana is tricked into marrying Buovo's rival Maccabruno, while the hero, after some aristocratic misgivings, finds happiness with Menichina, a miller's daughter. In some parts of Italy, just as in Russia, Buovo's exploits attracted and entertained popular audiences as recently as the twentieth century. This was the case in Sicily, where the story became part of the repertoire of storytellers (*cuntastorie*) and puppeteers (*pupari*), who helped preserve the name and fame of Buovo, his father and his twin sons. Sephardic ballads, ultimately derived from the Continental French *Beuve*, were sung on Rhodes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³⁰

A seventeenth-century Russian copy of the story ends with the assurance that 'Bova's fame shall endure henceforth unto all generations'. The words were prophetic, at least for a century or two. The fame of Bova/Bevis/Boeve/Buovo/Beuve/Bovo no longer endures, but few other medieval heroes can boast of such a long, distinguished, and socially and geographically wide-ranging career.

²⁷ For an in-depth study of the Russian versions of the story, see V. D. Kuzmina, *Rytsarskii roman na Rusi* (Moscow: Nauka, 1964), pp. 17–132, 245–64.

²⁸ *History of Russian Literature, 11th–17th Centuries*, ed. by Dimitry Likhachev, trans. by Kathleen Cook-Horujy (Moscow: Raduga, 1989), p. 472.

²⁹ A recording made in 1994 and conducted by Alan Curtis, with the tenor Howard Crook in the title role, is available on the Opus 111 label.

³⁰ *A Dictionary of Medieval Heroes*, ed. Gerritsen and van Melle, pp. 63–4.

The scope of this volume is limited to the Anglo-Norman *Boeve de Haumtone*, the Middle English *Sir Bevis of Hampton*, and their direct descendants. In common with most popular romances and their *chanson de geste* sources, *Boeve/Bevis* received very little serious scholarly or critical attention until twenty or thirty years ago. At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, attention was focused primarily on sources and analogues and on the interrelationships of the various European versions of the story;³¹ the approach in such scholarship was literary-historical rather than critical. The boom in medieval translation studies in the past quarter-century or so has, however, generated increased interest in processes of linguistic and cultural translation in relation to ‘popular’ texts; along with this has come a belated recognition of the literary qualities of such works and a growing appreciation of their poetics. At the same time, Anglo-Norman literature has become more and more a subject of serious study – with particular emphasis on its social, political and historical contexts. With the burgeoning of codicological studies and the production of Scolar Press facsimiles of two important romance collections in the 1970s,³² the Middle English *Bevis* came to be considered in its manuscript context, in its thematic relation to other texts (particularly romances) that appear in the same anthologies. Foremost among collections that have been studied in this way is the Auchinleck MS, which has attracted the attention of, among others, postcolonialist and feminist critics – the primary focus being on issues of national, religious and gender identity as they are reflected in this manuscript.³³ Book history has also been a growth area in recent years, as has the literary-historical study of the post-medieval reception and influence of Middle English texts.³⁴

All these approaches are reflected in the present volume. Marianne Ailes discusses the genre and technique of the Anglo-Norman *Boeve*, relating its stylistic features to the rhetoric of the schools. Erich Poppe and Regine Reck, Christopher Sanders, and Ivana Djordjević all deal with issues of translation and cultural transfer – from Anglo-Norman to Welsh, Icelandic and Middle English, and from Middle English to Irish. Judith Weiss examines the character of the hero’s *mestre*, Sabaot, in *Boeve* in relation to social practices in Anglo-

³¹ Cf., e.g., Christian Boje, *Über den altfranzösischen Roman von Beuve de Hamtone*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie 19 (Halle: Niemeyer, 1909); John E. Matzke, ‘The oldest form of the Beves legend’, *Modern Philology*, 10 (1912/13), 19–54.

³² See n. 3 above.

³³ E.g. Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity, 1290–1340* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), passim; Siobhain Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript*, Studies in Medieval History and Culture (London; New York: Routledge, 2005). Felicity Riddy, in an unpublished paper presented at the third Romance in Medieval England conference (Bristol, 1992), discussed the Auchinleck MS as a ‘women’s manuscript’.

³⁴ See, e.g., Andrew King, *The Faerie Queene and Middle English Romance: The Matter of Just Memory*, Oxford English Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Norman England and shows how it contributes to the construction of English identity within the poem. Issues of identity – with respect to nationality, religion and gender – are also the subject of the chapters by Robert Allen Rouse, Siobhain Bly Calkin, Melissa Furrow and Corinne Saunders, each of these treating a particular theme (Bevis as a distinctively English ‘*kniȝt of cristene lawe*’) or characters (Ascopard, Josian) in the Middle English *Bevis* and demonstrating how they complement and help define the character of the protagonist. Jennifer Fellows addresses the complex textual history of the English *Bevis* in the Middle English and Renaissance periods; while Andrew King describes the nature of the English romance’s influence on the works of such post-medieval writers as Spenser, Richard Johnson, Drayton and Bunyan.

The genesis of this volume was in a one-day colloquium organized by Dr Mishtooni Bose in Southampton in May 2004. We are very grateful to her for her interest in our hero and for bringing together, for the first time, *Boeve/Bevis* scholars from diverse linguistic disciplines and thus sowing the seeds of fruitful interaction and collaboration; we hope that she approves of the fruits that these have borne. Bevis studies have undergone a modest resurgence in the past few years; perhaps the present collection of essays will stimulate further interest in this long neglected, but once hugely popular, romance.