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Many years ago when I was working on my dissertation (on Layamon’s *Brut*), the only version I had available was Sir Frederic Madden’s 1847, three-volume edition—monumental, erudite, filled with information, and as thorough a text as one could wish for since it contained a vast scholarly introduction, parallel texts of the two extant manuscripts, extensive apparatus at the foot of each page delineating manuscript cruxes and peculiarities, an additional foot-of-the-page modern rendition of the two texts, extensive notes in volume 3, and a wonderful glossary.

Also available at that time was the G.L. Brook and R.F. Leslie edition of the first half of the text (Volume I of the Early English Text Society edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963). Volume II was years off, and since I was working on the entire text, I needed to use the only full edition available: Madden’s. A much stripped-down version, edited by G.L. Brook, with a brief introduction and no apparatus, also existed. (The apparatus for the EETS edition was supposed to go into a third—never-realized—volume.)
While working on my dissertation, I corresponded with Brook and Leslie: the former in Manchester, England; the latter in Canada. I was able to help them now and then with a reading or some other query. When my work was completed and I got my degree, and while I was thinking of producing more work on the wonderful text, I received a sizeable grant to study the original manuscripts at the British Library (in 1972). In the 10 months or so before I left for London, Brook and Leslie sent me a version of the earlier manuscript printed from a Copyflo microfilm printer, and I was able to see for the first time what the script looked like. I worked assiduously from that black, imperfectly printed text (it was rather fuzzy at times, never perfectly sharp), and I had the thrill of coming a bit closer to the original than I was able to do from Madden’s or Brook and Leslie’s printed versions.

I eventually spent seven months at the BL, carefully collating the two manuscripts with the two printed versions. The thrill, from day one, of handling the original manuscripts never left me during my full stay in London; and to this day, nearly 40 years later, I can remember the sense of authority and antiquity and accuracy that the originals imparted. Returning home from that magical exposure to the Middle Ages, I felt the letdown that was inevitable when I had to return to my Copyflo and printed volumes.

In a way, the Echard book is about just this dichotomy: the senses imparted by original Medieval texts in their manuscript manifestations, and the efforts of later purveyors of the same texts to conjure up the same senses. Echard’s point is clear: no matter how faithful the publishers/printers/designers try to be with the original texts, no matter how they try to conjure up the sense of authority and antiquity, no matter what they do to the text to present it as authoritative and reliable as possible and able to give the modern reader an honest experience of reading a Medieval text—despite all their efforts, they fail for one reason or another.

This, of course, is a simplification of what *Printing the Middle Ages* is about. But it is the main theme of this densely written, keenly observed text. In the blurb on the dust jacket (apparently written by Echard herself since it contains several of her common prose practices) we learn that “Beneath and behind the foundational works of recovery that established the canon of medieval literature . . . was a vast terrain of books, scholarly or popular, grubby or beautiful, widely disseminated or privately printed. By turning to these, we are able to chart the differing reception histories of the literary texts of the British Middle Ages,” and that “any reading of a medieval text [in a printed manifestation of that text], whether past or present, amateur or academic, floats on the surface of a complex sea of expectations and desires made up of the books that mediate those readings.”
This contention is solidly reinforced throughout and is backed up by Echard’s careful treatments of the printed presentations of *Piers Plowman*, *Guy of Warwick*, *Bevis of Hampton*, John Gower’s and Chaucer’s writings (for Chaucer, primarily the *Canterbury Tales*), and Jean Froissard. The final chapter on digital presentations of manuscripts follows along, proving that, though digital facsimiles show us the originals (as opposed to the printed versions that show us the texts with vast amounts of mediation between originals and printed versions), even the electronic versions entail significant mediation and leave the readers as unsatisfied as do the printed texts.

As I said, this is a densely written volume. Echard has drawn upon an ocean of pertinent sources: her bibliography, in small type, runs to 25 pages, and she has more than 55 pages of notes. She has done her homework, and she delves deeply into such matters as page layouts, typefaces, and bindings of printed versions of the medieval texts; the use of illustrations, photographic or original; how marginalia in early manuscripts affect readership and also affect the shape and content of later printed editions; history and politics and other forces that drove the translators, editors, printers, designers, and publishers; nationalism and similar impulses in the decision making of what got printed and how it was presented; and much more.

One of the overarching themes is that publishers/printers tried in various ways to impart messages to their readers, such as, “this volume is authoritative and trustworthy in what it offers the reader”; “this book is appropriate for its intended audience” (whether that audience be adults or children, scholars or a general readership); or “textually and artistically, you can’t get a more accurate picture of the Middle Ages than you get from the present text.” And much of Echard’s text shows us how inaccurate these assertions are, for various reasons, as I have suggested.

Old-looking typefaces do not really impart a true sense of the Medieval text. Illustrations, whether drawn with verisimilitude to the original or done photographically directly from the original, do not offer enough to replace the experience of handling the original manuscripts. Carefully edited texts are nonetheless edited, filtered through the mediation of a person who sits between the original manuscript and the later reader of the printed volume. Meticulously produced digital versions, even those that allow the reader to “turn the pages” (and allow the reader to see those pages actually turning on a screen), remove the audience from the tactility of the originals.

And in the “modern” world, for many authors, the editors and compilers of the printed editions drew from other printed editions. Even printed editions that were revered for one reason or another are still mediated: separated from the original manuscript texts by years, even centuries.
Echard also points out that early printed editions sometimes draw from a single manuscript when two or several manuscripts are available. The reader’s experience is influenced by which manuscript was chosen—sometimes not the most authoritative or reliable one.

Rather than going through this volume chapter by chapter, I would like to look at a few revealing observations that Echard makes about the experiences we have with authors and their works. With John Gower, the fact that his *Confession Amantis* has been the most reproduced of his works is complex, especially since his Latin and French writings have just as much claim upon us as does his English text. But the mistaken connection between the lower-born Gower and the unrelated noble family also named Gower that eventually acquired the manuscripts of his works in all three languages, along with the family’s nationalistic bent to preserve great things British, led to the concentration of versions of the English work at the expense of Gower’s other writings. Our predominant impression of this important author, then, has been shaped by historical, political, and nationalistic matters.

With Chaucer, the focus of Echard’s fourth chapter, her concentration is on the way editors presented the *Canterbury Tales* to children. Think of all the issues they had to deal with: what tales to present; to be comprehensive or selective; what kinds of illustrations the text demanded or encouraged; the urge to rewrite tales to make them palatable for children or to censor out objectionable passages, scenes, or words; and so forth. Echard points out that a few editors retold the tales with the idea that nothing should be left out, so they reduced some of the fabliaux to a sentence or two and moved on to more “appropriate” tales.

And with Jean Froissard’s *Chroniques*, though it was originally written in French, since the text dealt mostly with the British, the author was eventually brought into the English canon, to be seen as a British writer. His tale was edited, chopped, abbreviated, condensed, and recast in many ways, often to the detriment of the whole, and almost always to bring out the glory of the British.

The “Coda” (what Echard calls her final chapter) on digital reproductions of medieval manuscripts brings all of her claims back to where she began: that digital versions are no better than their printed forebears in creating a sense of authenticity in the reading experience.

Now and again Echard’s “scholarly” language bothered me, in her locutions and her “I would argue”s and “both”s. (Yes, the “argue” thing is typical of scholars, who could do just as well with “assert” or “claim,” especially when there is no real argument. And most of the “both”s—sometimes three on a page—are simply not necessary. As
in, “…revival of interest, both scholarly and popular…” [p. 143] or “…Hawe is both
typical and unusual” [p. 149].) Was it really necessary to use the word “armigerous”
on page 102? (It means “bearing arms”; it sent me to my dictionary. My American
Heritage did not have this word, though it did have “armiger,” one who bears arms.
Merriam-Webster’s Unabridged had it.) These small things, augmented by a few typos,
certainly do not detract from what is a carefully researched, keenly shaped text.

Historians, historic bibliographers, professors and their students, mediaevalists in
many disciplines, printing historians, textual editors, book designers, scholars in
many other fields, and even writers of fiction will profit much from this book. It
can be slow going, but it is always rewarding. ~Sidney E. Berger, The Ann C. Pingree
Director, The Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts; Professor,
English and Communications Departments, Simmons College, Boston, Massachusetts


“An antique is a primarily handcrafted object of rarity and beauty that, by means of its
associated provenance and its agedness as recognized by its style and material endur-
ance, has the capacity to generate and preserve for us the image of a world past.” (14)

Rosenstein’s carefully constructed definition demonstrates the intellectual and prac-
tical skill he brings to the subject of antiques based on more than 50 years of experi-
ence as a Professor of Philosophy and, with his wife, an antique dealer. Although he
indicates that his work should be accessible to the “educated American,” be advised
that this is not an easy book to read. Don’t expect to find any specific reference to,
or discussion of, books. Indeed, his definition—and an antique must meet each ele-
ment of it—excludes a considerable portion of the rare book and special collections
of many libraries since they are not “handcrafted.” Nevertheless, Antiques is a book
that should be of considerable interest and value to readers of RBM.

Rosenstein himself suggests an alternative way of reading his book that makes it
more accessible and understandable. No matter how you approach this book, it is
essential to begin by reading the first chapter including, in particular, his splendid
cautionsary tale “An Antique’s Story: The Nef” that opens the book. The remainder
of that chapter, which can be read in small doses (say, section by section), does
touch on numerous important topics such as the distinction between artworks,
crafts, and antiques that has recently resurfaced as an issue of controversy espe-
cially in the contemporary upscale craft field. The second chapter, “An Archeology
of Antiques: A History of Antique Collecting and Connoisseurship,” and the final
chapter, “Antiques and Civilization,” can be saved for later. Those chapters, which
are based primarily on his expertise as a philosopher, are like reading an advanced
college textbook; they require concentration as, while Rosenstein makes many valuable points, his arguments are often long and complex.

It is clearly his chapter “The Ten Criteria of Antiques” that is of most interest and value to RBM’s readers, as those criteria are essentially ones that may just as appropriately be used to appraise or evaluate a rare book. He breaks the criteria down as follows: Qualitative—(1) Subject, (2) Condition, (3) Technical Perfection; Quantitative—(4) Rarity, (5) Size, (6) Completeness; Historical—(7) Age, (8) Authenticity, (9) Provenance; and Adventitious—(10) Contextual. In each case, he offers not just a description of the criteria but also an intelligent examination of a wide variety of issues. He takes us, for example, well beyond the Antiques Roadshow mantra that furniture should never be refinished into a discussion of how different cultures and societies regard the issue of conservation, restoration, and repair as well as a range of other condition issues. In almost every case, he bolsters his discussion by citing numerous specific, and often out-of-the-ordinary, examples, as when an older Oceanic tribal mask is considered to be in “good condition” even if it has been entirely repainted in the twentieth/twenty-first century, provided that the painting was done by the tribe that made it and it was used at least once in a tribal ceremony. His discussion of fakes and forgeries is equally enlightening, as when he discusses the Chinese and Japanese tradition of copies as an act of homage, and the possibility of now being able to buy in a museum shop “a Chinese copy made for the Western market of a Chinese copy of a German copy of a German borrowing from a Chinese copy made to suit European taste.” (181) These examples, and his examination of their significance, make this by far the best discussion possible of how antiques—and rare books (even those that are not antiques)—should be evaluated, taking into consideration each of the criteria and specific elements of those criteria (such as cultural standards of condition). Perhaps some enterprising rare book collector, dealer, or librarian will develop for us an equally intelligent discussion of appropriate book- and manuscript-related elements and examples for each of those criteria.

The relatively short concluding chapter deals with Rosenstein’s sense that “the aesthetic response to antiques, objects that open windows onto worlds other than our own present” (192) is an important way to link us in an intelligent way to civilization. It is a thoughtful summary of all that he has set forth. That leaves the reluctant reader with the lengthy second chapter “An Archaeology of Antiques: A History of Antique Collecting and Connoisseurship” and almost 50 pages of detailed notes, many of which are short “essays” on such topics as Chinese calligraphy. Those, I would again recommend, are best taken in short doses with time left to contemplate such topics as Plato’s sense of beauty, or the re-emergence of antiques in the Renaissance, without being overwhelmed. Those two pieces are by no means of essential value in the context of the relevance of Rosenstein’s work for readers of RBM and will not be included on the final exam.~Norman D. Stevens, Director of University Libraries, Emeritus, University of Connecticut
In the last several years special collections and archives have assumed a new and more prominent role within our larger host institutions as well as in the wider library community. Once perceived as peripheral to core library services, our collections are now viewed as central. Despite—or perhaps because of—this centrality, we face a perfect storm of increasing needs in a time of decreasing support. How can we keep building and providing effective access to collections that will remain central in the future, fulfilling our obligation to provide stewardship of the cultural record? Join us at the 52nd Annual RBMS Preconference and find out!

Registration opens in February.

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