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Learning Lessons in Middle English Romance

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In these enlightened times, teachers and librarians argue that as long as children read, it does not matter very much what they read – fiction, non-fiction, comics – anything will do to form the habit of reading and encourage the acquisition of literacy skills. But in earlier times, and even now in other places, the content of children's reading matter has been hotly contested – for instance, there was an outcry in the United States when the first *Harry Potter* book came out, and some parents and teachers' groups objected to what they saw as its dangerous depiction of magic and feared for its effect on young minds. Of course, it is not hard to see why people might think that serious education and fantasy fiction do not mix. There is plenty of evidence from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century of the profound anxiety surrounding romances, the fantasy fiction of the Middle Ages, among moralists and educational theorists, who regularly inveighed against romances as reading matter. The *Cursor Mundi*, written about 1300, begins with a long list of romance heroes and their deeds – Arthur and Gawain, Charlemagne and Roland, Tristram, Isumbras – stories which it is said people long to hear and read, but which are dangerously unpredictable in the lessons readers may draw from them: 'þe wisman wil of wisdom here; þe fole him drauis to foli nere' (ll. 27-8), and the writer goes on to discuss the worldly follies that romance may teach – particularly a delight in 'love paramours' – and to stress how fruitless such reading is by contrast with the 'geste' of creation and salvation that he is about to tell.¹ A broadly similar argument informs Roger Ascham's educational treatise, *The Scholemaster*, published in 1570. This text is concerned with 'the bringing vp of youth', and Ascham warns against the corrupting effect of 'bawdy bookes' on young minds: 'Suffer these bookes to be read, and they shall soone displace all bookes of godly learnyng' (p. 231).² Ascham's immediate target is contemporary translations of Italian books, but the only text he specifically names as an example of such 'vaine bookes' is an English romance, the *Morte Arthure*.

In our forefathers tyme, ... fewe bookes were read in our tong, sauynge certayne bokes of Cheualrie, as they sayd, for pastime and pleasure ... : as one for example, *Morte Arthure*: the whole pleasure of which booke

standeth in two speciall poyntes, in open mans slaughter, and bold bawdrye: In which booke those be counted the noblest Knightes, that do kill most men without any quarrel, and commit fowlest aduoulteries by subtestlyshiftes: as Sir Launcelote, with the wife of king Arthure his master: Syr Tristram with the wife of king Marke his vncler: Syr Lamerocke with the wife of king Lote, that was his own aunte. ... What toyes, the dayly readyng of such a booke, may worke in the will of a yong ientleman, or a yong mayde, that liueth welthelie and idelleie, wise men can iudge, and honest men do pitie. (pp. 230-31)

However, despite these strictures, scraps of evidence survive to suggest that romances were not only read for pastime and pleasure but were actually used as teaching material.

One such scrap appears on a page from a late-fifteenth-century manuscript, now in the National Library of Scotland, known after the name of its scribe as the Heege MS.³ In the margin at the bottom of folio 49r, a later hand has added the following words: 'thes llesun ys of ser Isumbras'. Isumbras is one of the literary heroes named in the prologue to the *Cursor Mundi*, and the Middle English romance of *Sir Isumbras* is one of the most popular, to judge by the number of surviving manuscripts. In this collection, the Heege MS, it occurs with two similar romances, *Sir Gowther* and *Sir Amadas*, and another romance-like text, the medieval best-seller known as the *Vision of Tundale*. All four narratives follow a broadly similar trajectory, telling of a knight who temporarily falls from a position of wealth and/or power into a state of poverty and/or helplessness, and is finally restored, chastened, to his former life. In the margins of *Tundale* may be found two annotations indicating lessons, like the one in *Isumbras* (fols 123r, 138v), and two others marking particular pages: 'a lefe off tundalle' (fols 114r, 116v).

What were these lessons and marked pages likely to be teaching? It is possible they were part of a programme of reading exercises, with the child set to practise a passage for reading aloud. Some evidence to support this can be seen in a fifth annotation in the margin of *Tundale*: 'Tundale voys Wylyyam Rogerres' (fol. 126r), apparently indicating a passage to be read *viva voce*, by the named boy. But as we know from the choice of texts set in the medieval school curriculum for boys to learn Latin, texts such as the *Distichs* of Cato and Aesop's *Fables*, it was desirable that as well as enabling young readers to master the language, the content of the texts should teach them moral lessons. It does seem that moral teaching was on the agenda in the Heege MS reading texts too, for the passages marked as lessons in *Tundale* are clearly identified as cautionary in nature: both are inscribed: 'a lesson of Tundale that wicked man'. For the *Isumbras* lesson, no scribal guidance is given as to its moral complexion, but a glance at the page reveals that the passage may well have been selected with some care, as it consists of the crucial scene in which the hero experiences the sudden loss of wealth and status and sees his wife and children naked before him.

A delfull sy3th þe *knight con* se,
 Of is wyfe and ys chyldur þre
 Pat fro þe fyre *con* flee.
 As nakyd as þei were borne
 Þei stoyd vndur a hawthorne,
 And þen changyd is blee;
 When he þem nakyd see
 In is hert þen heue was he,
 For he saw þem vncladde.
 The lady bad þe chyldur be blithe:
 'For nowe I se yowre fadur on lyfe,
 For noþynge be ye sadde.'

Þei wept all and gafe þem yll,
Siryse mbrace bad þei schuld be styl
 And wepe not so sore:
 'For all þo bale þat we ar In,
 Certen hit is for dedely syn;
 We ar worthe wyll more.
 We *con* no warkus werke,
 Owre fryndus of vs sone wyl be yrke,
 On londe I rede we fare.
 Of my selfe have I no þow3th,
 But I mey gyfe my men ry3th no3th,
 Of hom is all my care.'

He toke a ryche robe of pall
 Ouer his wyfe he lette done fall
 With a drvry mode.
 A ryche mantyll þen toke he
 And hyld his fayr chyldur thre
 Pat nakyd be for hym stode.
 'Nowe schal ye do aftur my reyde:
 We wyll seche þer god was ded
 Pat dede for vs on rode.
 For Jhesu Cryst so heynd is he,
 All þat hym *seruus wih* herte fre,
 He sendus hom lyuys fode.'

Þen *wih* a lytyll knyfe he *con* schare
 A crose on hys chyldur bare
 In store as I yow say.

And all þæt his fryndus ware,
 Þei wepyd fast and sicud sare,
 His songe was 'welawey.'
 Þe knight and þo lady hynd
 Þei toke þerleue at þer frynde,
 And made þer Indyng day.
 Þei wept boþe olde and ȝyng
 Þer was a delfull partyng,
 When þei went hor way.

As these stanzas make clear, Isumbras accepts all his family's losses as just punishment for the deadly sin of pride in their previous life. A bird sent from God previously revealed to him that, despite living an outwardly virtuous life, he had been seduced by material prosperity into forgetting his true status as a mere creature. Now, having learned humility – figured here through the repeated motif of seeing his wife and children in their nakedness – he leaves his former life; in fact it is presented as if they are settling their affairs before death, making their 'indying day'. He resolves (somewhat literally) to walk henceforth in God's ways, trusting that whole-heartedly serving God will ensure their livelihood. This is a clearly presented lesson in Christian values, and one that chimes with contemporary moral and social teaching, which was much focused on the transience of worldly goods and on the gap between rich and poor. More specifically, in the aftermath of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, it chimes with late-medieval concerns for the better instruction of the laity, especially in relation to the practice of penitential disciplines. Sir Isumbras, like his companion knights Sir Gowther and Sir Amadas in this manuscript, and like the knight in the *Vision of Tundale*, offers the reader a practical lesson in the essential elements of Christian penance – contrition: sorrow for sin, and amendment of life.⁴

These romances have in fact sometimes been described as 'homiletic' or 'penitential' romances,⁵ and the didactic impulse in them is hard to miss, despite the complementary interest in standard romance ingredients such as fighting, feasting, and occasionally, falling in love with a future wife. There is not much in pious romances such as these to alarm the strict moralists. But there is evidence for the contrary belief that lessons in virtue could be learned from the great stories of romance, too. John Milton, describing his formation as a Christian poet in 1642, writes:

I betook me among those lofty fables and romances, which recount in solemn cantos the deeds of knighthood founded by our victorious kings ... from whence even then I learned what a noble virtue chastity sure must be, to the defence of which so many worthies, by such a dear adventure of themselves, had sworn. So that even those books which to many others have been the fuel of wantonness and loose living, ... proved to me so many incitements ... to the love and steadfast observation of that virtue which abhors the society of bordelloes.⁶

Indeed, this is pretty much what the author of *Cursor Mundi* predicted: 'þe wisman wil of wisdom here; þe fole him drauis to foli nere'; and Milton's experience also supports the argument famously made by Edmund Spenser, in the explanatory Letter attached to his epic romance *The Faerie Queene*, that virtue is best taught through exemplary fiction rather than by direct preaching.⁷

Each of the three romances in the Heege MS is followed immediately by an overtly educational text. Such juxtapositions are fairly typical in the manuscripts containing Middle English romances, especially those classed as 'household manuscripts', compendious volumes of miscellaneous texts that have apparently been brought together to form domestic collections of family reading.⁸ These manuscripts can perhaps best be understood as repositories of family values, intended for passing on to each new generation. In some, the romances are accompanied by 'primer' texts aimed at giving elementary education to young children in the home; often they occur together with conduct or courtesy manuals addressed to young persons and intended to equip them with a comprehensive guide to courtly life, from hints on personal cleanliness to the rules of precedence. Following Spenser's distinction, this looks like a two-pronged educational initiative: courtesy texts to give plain instruction; romances to teach by inspirational example. Further, the fact that so many of the romances selected for these household manuscript collections feature child protagonists and their education may suggest that romances were considered especially appropriate narratives for performing the important work of handing on traditional family values to the young.

It is remarkable how many Middle English romances do, in fact, explicitly represent the education of the young hero or heroine. Perhaps not surprisingly, this often includes the explicit involvement of the child's parent or parents, carefully planning the development of the young protagonist.⁹ For example, in the Middle English *Le Bone Florence of Rome*, the heroine's father is shown planning an extensive programme of courtly education, where his daughter will learn lessons in reading, writing, and music:

Syr Otes, þe nobull emperowre,
 Gart norysch the chylde with honowre,
 And kept hur hole and sownde.

He set to scole that damysell,
 Tyll sche cowde of þe boke telle,
 And alle thyng dyscrye.
 Be þat she was xv yere olde,
 Wel she cowde as men me tolde,
 Of harpe and sawtyre. (55-63)¹⁰

The father's twin concerns for his daughter here, to preserve her virginity and to equip her with appropriate skills and accomplishments, succinctly express the same perennial parental anxieties that Chaucer addresses at much greater length in the introductory lines to the

Physician's Tale,¹¹ the story of the exceptionally virtuous fourteen-year-old Virginia, where the narrator directs explicit warnings to 'ye fadres and ye modres' (93) and to the governesses of 'lordes doghtres' (73), reminding them of their duty to protect the innocence and modesty of the young girls in their charge by example as well as by teaching – at least until they are married: 'For al to sone may she lerne lore | Of boldnesse, whan she woxen is a wyf' (70-71).¹²

Other romances may represent this concern for education through a more oblique approach, as in the tale of *Sir Percyvell of Gales*, a unique Middle English narrative that deals with the *enfances* of Perceval (making no reference to his future role as a Grail knight). Having lost her husband in a tournament, Percyvell's mother takes the radical decision to prevent her son's suffering the same fate by removing him from the world of the court and chivalry, and raising him in complete ignorance, with none of the training or instruction appropriate to a boy of his birth:

Nowther nurture ne lare
Scho wolde hym none lere. (231-2)¹³

However, when he reaches fifteen – the age that, as Eve Salisbury notes, 'seems to mark a conventional rite of passage into the adult masculine world'¹⁴ – Percyvell's mother marks his potential new status with a piece of pious advice:

'Swete childe, I rede thou praye
To Goddez sone dere,
That he wolde helpe the,
Lorde, for his poustee,
A gude man for to bee,
And longe to duelle here.' (235-40)

Naturally, Percyvell has no idea what or who a God might be, and his mother is obliged belatedly to teach her son the first article of the Creed – an introduction to the religious education that conventionally it would have been her responsibility to provide:

'It es the grete Godd of heven,
This worlde made he within seven
Appone the sexte d[ay].' (246-8)

Once Percyvell has made up his mind to leave home and seek knighthood, his mother again supplies an indicative abstract of the kind of social and moral instruction such a youth would have learned from courtesy books:

'Lyttill thou can of nurtoure:
Luke thou be of mesure

Bothe in haulle and in boure,
And fonde to be fre.'

Than saide the lady so brighte,
'There thou meteste with a knyghte,
Do thi hode off, I highte,
And haylse hym in hy.'
'Swete moder,' sayd he then,
'I saw never yit no men;
If I solde a knyghte ken,
Telles me wharby.'
Scho schewede hym the menevaire -
Scho had robes in payre.
'Sone, ther thou sees this fare
In thaire hodes lye.'
'Bi grete God,' sayd he,
'Where that I a knyghte see,
Moder, as ye bidd me,
Righte so schall I.' (397-416)

There is obvious comic potential in the situation of the young Percyvell, ignorant of the most elementary teaching a boy of his rank would normally receive, except general advice to be moderate and generous, and this one apparently random lesson on greeting a knight properly. But the mother's choice shows practical understanding of the principles underlying the courtesy curriculum - that it is essential to give and to receive the honour due to each degree in society, and that dress is a coded expression of social hierarchy. These anxieties are clearly represented in the details of the children's own attire in both this romance and in *Sir Isumbras* - young Percyvell is dressed in a goatskin, and Isumbras's children are naked, expressing the fact that in neither case can they be expected to take their proper place in society while in their present state of ignorance or poverty.

Indeed, the narrative of *Sir Percyvell* consistently uses comedy to teach lessons in social conformity. The young hero's ignorance exposes him to the ridicule of those he seeks to join, knights and members of Arthur's court, whether through his use of the wrong terminology (misnaming a horse a 'mare', and also failing to know that a knight would not ride a mare), or his uncivilized readiness to kill anyone who crosses him, from King Arthur to a witch. But the reader is also more subtly directed to smile knowingly at Percyvell's well-meaning but misguided attempts to follow his mother's instructions and behave like a knight, when each time the narrative voice comments humorously on his lack of experience (462; 738; 1353; 1676).

The romance of *Sir Beves of Hamtoun* similarly imagines a young hero handicapped by his lack of education. Beves is fifteen when a Saracen knight asks him on Christmas Day if he knows what the day is called, and as Beves replies that he does not,

having been taken from Christendom when he was only seven, the Saracen instructs him that it is the day on which his God was born, shaming Beves for his elementary lack of religious knowledge. Before he was sold into slavery, the seven-year-old Beves's guardian had planned his future according to the stages of any noble child's education, indicating the importance of his learning the lessons of the courtesy manuals (texts which were, indeed, provided for the young boys educated in aristocratic households) before taking his rightful place in society. Beves would be sent:

'To a riche erl þat schel þe gie
And teche þe of corteisie
In þe 3ouþe.
And whan þow ert of swich elde
Pat þow miȝt þe self wilde,
And ert of age;
Panne scheltow come inte Ingelonde,
Wiþ werre winne into þin honde
Pin eritage.' (364-72)¹⁵

Many other romances testify to the importance of the theme of education. W. A. Davenport, for example, shows that the narrative of the Middle English *Chevalere Assigne* reflects not only the content but also the formal procedure of medieval teaching practice.¹⁶ In *Horn Childe and Maiden Rinnild* and the related romance known as *Sir Tristrem*, emphasis is laid on the fact that the young heroes receive teaching for fifteen years, in a curriculum that covers all aspects of courtly accomplishment, including riding, hunting, music, chess and other games. The importance of teaching gentle learning to the young is thus firmly embedded in the fictional worlds created by the romances.

Some interesting evidence about how romances might actually be used to teach is to be found in a pair of unique short texts: *Roland and Vernagu* and *Otuel*, both preserved in the Auchinleck manuscript (Nat. Lib. Scot. MS Adv. 19.2.1), an early household book (c.1340) with a large collection of Middle English romances.¹⁷ One centres on the confrontation of Roland and Vernagu, champions of the Christian and Saracen faiths, and involves a lengthy verbal exchange in which Roland expounds the articles of the Christian faith; as Thorlac Turville-Petre observes, this episode offers 'doctrinal instruction basic enough for any child'.¹⁸ The following romance of *Otuel* offers a parallel combat between Roland and Otuel (nephew of Vernagu) as Christian and Saracen champions. However, in both texts, passages have been added to the source material with the apparent purpose of teaching lessons about the courteous behaviour proper to a gentle upbringing.

Roland and Vernagu amplifies an incident in the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, when Roland demonstrates his knightly courage by approaching the sleeping giant and putting a stone beneath his head, by adding a response from Vernagu on waking from his sleep:

Vernagu asked anon

'Who leyd þis gret ston
 Vnder min heued so?
 It no miȝt neuer be,
 Bot ȝif he were a kniȝt fre. [...]
 Wist ich who it were
 He schuld be me leue & dere
 Þei þat he were mi fo.' (641-9)

The English romance thus exploits the incident as an opportunity to teach a lesson in chivalrous behaviour, and equally to demonstrate the civilizing effect of courtesy in Vernagu's response.

Otuel also shows a concern with chivalrous behaviour by expanding on its source (the *chanson de geste*, *Otinel*) in order to exemplify aspects of knightly good manners. In an extended scene, for example, the text explores the role of the squire. Otuel arrives at court 'ful of rage' (71), but nevertheless conducts himself with impeccable courtesy towards the squire who greets him. The squire responds according to the rules of etiquette:

& for he was in message come,
 Bi þe hond he haueþ him nome,
 & ladde him into þe halle,
 Among þe grete lordes alle,
 & þere þei stoden oppon her feet.
 He schewede him where þe king seet
 & tauȝte him hou he scholde knowe,
 Pere þei seten oppon a rowe,
 Roulond & Olyuer
 & þe godde kniȝt Ogger. (89-98)

It is not hard to see this scene as aiming to teach the same kind of lesson as may be found in conduct books, but with the superior appeal (as Spenser recommends) of fiction.¹⁹

How can these various observations be drawn together? A couple of themes emerge: first, and most predictably, education is seen as a guarantee of gentle values – this is clear from the persistent stress on 'nurture'. As Felicity Riddy and others have argued, there is a strong aspect of aspirational values here for the upwardly socially mobile, as well as of cultural formation and the consolidation of inherited values for gentry children. In this respect, romance is the natural medium for lessons on knightly conduct of all kinds, as indicated by Milton's response. Secondly, the basic structures of romance are very adaptable, so a typical one-to-one encounter can easily accommodate lessons on basic religious doctrine, as shown in *Roland & Vernagu*, and patterns of trials and quests can be figured to provide teaching on penitential discipline, as seen in *Sir Isumbras*, for example.

Finally, however, there are occasional hints suggesting a less comfortable – even subversive – relationship between romance and education. In *Emaré*, the heroine is left motherless at a very early age and is sent away to be educated:

The chyld, that was fayr and gent,
To a lady was hyt sente,
That men kalled Abro.
She thawghth hyt curtesye and thewe,
Golde and sylke for to sewe,
Amonge maydenes moo.

Abro tawghte thys mayden small,
Nortur that men useden in sale,
Whyle she was in her bowre.
She was curtays in all thyng,
Bothe to olde and to yynge,
And whyte as lylke-flowre.
Of her hondes she was slye;
All her loved that her sye,
Wyth menske and mychyl honour. (55-69)²⁰

Emaré thus learns, in the privacy of her chamber, the same lessons in courtly behaviour that boys would learn and put into practice in the hall (lessons which she is later able to teach her own son), but the narrative focuses particular attention on her learning the special female art of fine needlework in which she is notably skilful – ‘Of her hondes she was slye’. Her accomplishment is immediately echoed in the elaborate description of a wonderful cloth presented to Emaré’s father, which had been worked by another skilful needlewoman, the daughter of the Saracen Emir.²¹ This cloth plays a mysteriously powerful role in the story, bringing with it ambiguous effects, possibly of enchantment, drawing on the exotic associations of the Saracen princess as ‘Other’, but also of protection for Emaré, creating a potential relationship of female solidarity between the two royal daughters. Exiled by her father, Emaré uses her skills to make herself beloved in a new country:

She tawghte hem to sewe and marke
All maner of sylkyn werke;
Of her they wer full fayne.
She was curteys yn all thyng,
Bothe to olde and to yynge,
I say yow for certeyne.
She kowghthe werke all maner thyng
That fell to emperour or to kyng,
Erle, barown or swayne. (376-84)

It is notable that Emaré's 'nurture', her teaching of courtly skills, is always mentioned in combination with her practice of the female art of needlework. Her new patron explains:

'I sente aftur her certeynlye
 To teche my chylderen curtesye,
 In chambur wyth hem to bene.
 She ys the konnyngest wommon,
 I trowe, that be yn Crystendom,
 Of werke that y have sene.' (424-9)

However, the phrase 'konnyngest wommon' focuses the ambivalent force of Emaré's special knowledge – for it can also denote a wise woman in the sense of bordering on witchcraft. The OED defines *cunning woman* as one possessing magical knowledge or skill, a fortune-teller, conjurer, 'wise woman' or witch.²² In this context, education can be seen as conferring quasi 'magical' power, paralleled in the romance by the repeated effect the mysterious cloth has on those around Emaré – but is it a good or a dangerous power? Certainly, Emaré teaches her son Segramowre to exercise his courtly skills in such a way that all who meet him are as if were enchanted, and a general reconciliation is brought about, which suggests a power for good. But with reference to the way Morgan le Fay's education is described in Malory's *Morte Darthur*, it seems that the very idea of a learned woman comes perilously close to the idea of witchcraft: 'The thyrd syster, Morgan le Fey, was put to scole in a nonnery, and ther she lerned so moche that she was a grete clerke of nygromancye';²³ this is black magic, and definitely dangerous. The image presented in *Emaré* of the nurturing woman providing education for young boys and girls reflects real-life practice and gives a positive reversal of the eccentrically negative example in Percyvell's mother's behaviour. But might one suspect that the give-away phrase 'konnyngest wommon' actually reveals an underlying ambivalence about the power conferred by education? It is notable that in the *Life of St Katherine*, a text that often accompanies secular romances in household manuscripts, the young heroine's extraordinary learning in the seven arts is the product of an education received when she is still pagan, before 'sche was convertyd to þe faythe' (Heege MS, fol. 30r), and is to her no more than 'darkness' and 'clouds of ignorance' (fol. 35r) by comparison with the revelations of grace and faith. A humorous reflection of this view can be seen in Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*, when the carpenter, fearing that the young clerk's learning has sent him mad, thanks God for the blessing of pious ignorance (3455-6).

This takes the argument back to *Cursor Mundi*, and its anxiety about the lessons taught by romance – are these stories of knightly strife and courtly behaviour likely to encourage worldly vanities, and should they therefore be discarded in favour of religious instruction? Or are the virtues of the heroes and heroines apt to stir the reader to emulation – like the young Milton? To return to Sir Isumbras – if the exemplary virtue he represents is humility, it is well portrayed in his low status and poverty during most of the narrative, but the lesson seems somewhat compromised by the typical romance conclusion, in which

Isumbras not only lives happily ever after, but is explicitly restored to even greater wealth and power than before. This is perhaps the point: educationalists may be right to distrust these texts, for romance has its own agenda, and it is not always compatible with learning lessons.

Notes

¹ *Cursor Mundi*, ed. Richard Morris, 7 vols, EETS OS 57, 59, 62, 66, 68, 99, 101 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1874-93).

² Roger Ascham, *English Works*, ed. William Aldis Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904).

³ *The Heege Manuscript: A Facsimile of National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.3.1*, intro. Philippa Hardman, Leeds Texts and Monographs, n.s. 16 (Leeds, 2000).

⁴ For discussion of the penitential theme in *Sir Isumbras* in relation to contemporary crusading, see Lee Manion, 'The Loss of the Holy Land and *Sir Isumbras*: Literary Contributions to Fourteenth-Century Crusade Discourse', *Speculum*, 85 (2010), 65-90; Philippa Hardman and Marianne Ailes, 'Crusading, Chivalry and the Saracen World in Insular Romance', in *Christianity and Romance in Medieval England*, eds Rosalind Field, Philippa Hardman and Michelle Sweeney (Cambridge: Brewer, 2010), pp. 45-65 (p. 56).

⁵ Dieter Mehl, *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968); Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights: A Study of Middle English Penitential Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990). See also Raluca Radulescu, 'Pious Middle English Romances Turned Political: Reading *Sir Isumbras*, *Sir Gowther*, and *Robert of Sicily* in Fifteenth-Century England', *Viator*, 41 (2010), forthcoming.

⁶ In *An Apology Against a Pamphlet call'd A Modest Confutation of the Animadversions upon the Remonstrance against Smectynus* (1642), quoted in *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), pp. 598-9.

⁷ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, Longman Annotated English Poets (London: Longman, 1977), pp. 737-8.

⁸ For accounts of such occurrences see, for example, Ad Putter, 'A Historical Introduction', in *The Spirit of Popular Romance*, eds Jane Gilbert and Ad Putter (Harlow: Longman, 2000), pp. 4-7; Felicity Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory* (Leiden: Brill, 1987), pp. 14-30.

⁹ For instances of romances and other narratives describing the educational upbringing of the hero or heroine, see Nicholas Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry: The Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy, 1066-1530* (London: Methuen, 1984), pp. 82-5.

¹⁰ *Le Bone Florence of Rome*, ed. Carol Falvo Heffernan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976).

¹¹ *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, rev. 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹² See Felicity Riddy, 'Temporary Virginity and the Everyday Body: *Le Bone Florence of Rome* and Bourgeois Self-making', in *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance*, ed. Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 197-216, for a reading of *Le Bone Florence of Rome* as a bourgeois narrative focused on the issue of female chastity, seen through the lens of its identity as a 'family' romance in which the young daughter reads a 'parental fantasy' of her future: to be chaste and honourable as a maiden, and in due course as a wife.

¹³ *Sir Perceval of Galles and Ywain and Gawain*, ed. Mary Flowers Braswell (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).

¹⁴ Salisbury further notes: 'Children were imagined to reach an age of reason by their seventh year. Romance heroes experience significant changes in the course of their lives at these ages (e.g., Bevis of Hampton, Eglamour, Gowther, Amis, Amiloun, and Horn). Female saints also undergo a significant challenge at age fourteen or fifteen.' *How the Goode Man Taght Hys Sone*, note to line 10, in *The Trials and Joys of Marriage*, ed. Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002).

¹⁵ Quoted from the text in the Auchinleck MS, Nat. Lib. Scot. MS Adv. 19.2.1, available on the website <http://digital.nls.uk/auchinleck/>, eds David Burnley and Alison Wiggins (2003).

¹⁶ 'Abbreviation and the Education of the Hero in *Chevalere Assigne*', in *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance*, ed. Phillipa Hardman (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), pp. 9–20.

¹⁷ See the website cited above, n. 15.

¹⁸ *England the Nation: Language, Literature and National Identity, 1290–1340* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 135. For a different reading of this episode, see Diane Vincent, 'Reading a Christian-Saracen Debate in Fifteenth-Century Middle English Charlemagne Romance: The Case of *Turpines Story*', in *The Exploitations of Medieval Romance*, eds Laura Ashe, Ivana Djordjevic and Judith Weiss (Cambridge: Brewer, 2010), pp. 90–107 (pp. 94–5).

¹⁹ For fuller discussion of these two texts, see Phillipa Hardman, 'Popular Romances and Young Readers', in *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance*, eds Raluca Radulescu and Cory Rushton (Cambridge: Brewer, 2009), pp. 150–64 (pp. 156–9).

²⁰ *Emaré*, eds Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, in *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).

²¹ For discussion of the significance of the cloth in the narrative, see Amanda Hopkins, 'Veiling the Text: The True Role of the Cloth in *Emaré*', in *Medieval Insular Romance: Translation and Innovation*, eds Judith Weiss, Jennifer Fellows and Morgan Dickson (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), pp. 71–82.

²² Oxford English Dictionary, *cunning*, a. sense †3; instances from fourteenth to nineteenth centuries.

²³ Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. Stephen H. A. Shepherd (New York: Norton, 2004), pp. 5–6.