Our digital project uses TEI encoding to assess, quantify, and classify the decisions Robert Southey made when he translated *Amadís de Gaula* into English. Along the way, we are producing the first machine-readable critical editions of both Southey and Montalvo’s texts. We are at the beginning stage of this project, but already we have been able to ask questions grounded in literary and translation studies and answer them with our code. *Amadís* has an enormous cultural significance for Spain and France, but its impact on England has been less studied. Southey’s version is particularly interesting to us because it articulates its own translation theory. Southey has a scholarly orientation, and he appears to be aware of trends in translation from antiquity through the eighteenth century. Where he innovates is in bringing the aesthetic of the Romantic period to bear on the text. The result is a translated *Amadís* that is “improved,” in terms of art and readability, for its target audience, monolingual English speakers of the early nineteenth century.

Southey based his 1803 *Amadis of Gaul* on the Sevilla edition of 1547, which is nearly identical to the first extant Castilian edition, the Zaragoza 1508. [show image 1] There is no “original” *Amadís*. The romance as we know it descends from a medieval legend modeled on the Vulgate *Lancelot.* A “primitive” *Amadís* may have been composed as early as 1290, and the earliest references to the story date to 1350 (Avalle-Arce 101; Riquer 13). The earliest surving text is a fifteenth-century manuscript fragment in Castilian, discovered in 1955 (Rodríguez-Moñino 15–24). In the last two decades of the fifteenth century, Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo, a minor nobleman and city official from Medina del Campo, copied Books I-III from an existing manuscript, changed the story’s tragic ending, and added a new Book IV*.* Montalvo’s *Amadís* became one of the greatest publishing successes of the early modern period, and it was soon translated into French, Italian, English, German, Dutch and Hebrew (Cacho Blecua 86). Marian Rothstein estimates that there were 500,000 readers of the French *Amadis de Gaule* alone*,* and José Manuel Cacho Blecua counts 527 editions of *Amadís* printed before 1694.[[1]](#footnote-1)

*Amadís* presents an attractive opportunity for translators in part because it is unmoored in time, space, and authorship. The *Amadís* of the sixteenth century, for all practical purposes, had no author. Sixteenth-century Spanish editions, including the 1547 Sevilla, misreported the author’s name as Garci Ordóñez de Montalvo. Translations either referred to Montalvo as “the Spanish author” or attributed authorship to the first French translator of the text. Until the twentieth century, translators and scholars alike imagined a French or Portuguese origin, deep in the medieval past, for *Amadís*. Nicolas de Herberay des Essarts, who translated *Amadís* into French in 1540, claimed that “our Amadis” simply *must* be French because the character hails from Gaul. The Portuguese thesis, to which Southey ascribed, attributed the text to fourteenth-century courtier Vasco de Lobeira. Twenty-first century scholars have traced the roots of *Amadís* to medieval Castile. This is as close as we are likely to get to the text’s real origin.

The text itself is just as complex as its transmission history. [show image 2] *Amadís* is a romance of chivalry in prose in four, eleven, or fourteen volumes, depending on how one counts the sequels by different authors. It loosely duplicates the story of Lancelot and Guinevere, with a happy ending in which Amadís and Oriana marry and jointly rule the kingdoms of Britain and Gaul. The 1547 *Amadís* looks like a block of undifferentiated text, but it does have some internal divisions, which we are referring to as pseudo-markup. This early print book contains numbered chapters with summaries at their head, punctuation marks, and occasional paragraph marks. [show image 3] The punctuation is quite different from modern Spanish or English. The three marks appear to be non-hierarchical, and the punctuation mark after *dixo* or *dezía* [show Image 4] takes the place of the em dash or quotation mark for dialogue attribution. For those of you who read Spanish, you might notice that the orthography is quite different from modern use. In order to produce our version of the Montalvo, we have transcribed the text as we would for a critical edition. [Image 5 gitHub page for editorial declaration] In general terms, we modernize those orthography choices that are different from modern use in the 1547 due to printing conventions, and we preserve the 1547 orthography when differences from modern Spanish can be attributed to sound. Our editorial declaration is based on best practices in the field, and the orthography of our Montalvo edition comes very close to that of other modern critical editions of *Amadís*.

The most important part of our project is aligning the Southey to the Montalvo, and once we established edition criteria, we had to decide how to code comparable units across texts. We rejected the idea of comparing sentence-like units to sentence-like units. While the Southey has clear sentence boundaries, the Montalvo does not. One of the tasks Southey undertook for his translation was to add internal divisions to the text. [Image 6] Southey is doing the work of a critical edition as well as a translation, and to retrace that in our code, we decided that the best unit of comparison between the two texts is the clause-like unit with the <cl> tag. It’s only a clause-*like* unit, because in the Montalvo, punctuation marks do not always correspond to grammatical units. It’s better to think of them as breath marks, places where an out-loud reader would take a pause. [Image 7] Each clause-like unit in the Montalvo, measured from punctuation mark to punctuation mark, gets its own xml id based on its chapter, paragraph, and clause number. They are sequential rather than nested because we wanted to be able to reveal when Southey reverses clause order, weaves two of Montalvo’s units together, or jumps ahead or back in Montalvo’s text. We use a self-closing <anchor> element in the Southey chapters to align Southey’s translation to the source. We also encode other types of information in the anchor tags, including additions and shifts between direct and indirect discourse. [ Image 8]

Southey could be considered either a good or bad translator depending on the theory one uses as a standard. In his preface, Southey elaborates a scholarly thesis, that *Amadís* is a medieval text, originally Portuguese rather than Castilian, and he uses a balance of strategies to develop this thesis into a translation. The result is a text that, for Southey, is both “better” in artistic terms and closer to an imagined medieval original than Montalvo’s version. Susan Bassnett talks about the history of translation from ancient Rome to the end of the nineteenth century as a tension between word-for-word translations versus sense-for-sense translations. Horace in *Ars Poetica* famously argues for the sense for sense approach, which allows the translator to take small liberties with the source text. Etienne Dolet, a French Humanist, printer operating in Lyon, and contemporary of the first French translator of *Amadís*, advocated for sense-for-sense translation. Alexander Tytler, writing closer to Southey’s time in 1790, favored a balance of the two strategies that preserved as much as possible of the source author’s diction and style. The Romantics, according to Bassnett, were firmly on the sense-for-sense side of the debate. What we would expect from Southey is a translation that alters the source text for reasons of literary taste. Southey’s preface leads us to anticipate dramatic changes: “To have translated a closely printed folio would have been absurd. I have reduced it to about half its length, by abridging the words, not the story […] There is no vanity in saying, that this has improved the book, for what long work may not be improved by compression?” (xxi).

Our code reveals that Southey is not quite what we expected. For the most part, we have what the twenty-first century would recognize as a “faithful” translation. Southey employs word-for-word translations when the Spanish syntax is comparable to English and sense-for-sense translations when it is not. Southey’s translation choices appear to be, at least in part, a reaction against prior translators Herberay, Munday, and Tressan, all of whom he criticizes in the Preface. Southey prefers non-archaic, matter-of-fact diction, and he makes makes a number of brief additions to the text for reasons of readability, including adverbs of time and proper names to resolve unclear antecedents. Southey’s omissions are of much greater extent than the additions. [Image 9] First, Southey eliminates repetitive passages, which have long been seen as a defect in Montalvo’s style. Second, Southey omits Montalvo’s narrating voice, which appears in frequent first- or second-person verb forms that allude to orality. The sermons and sex scenes of the Montalvo *Amadís* are likewise missing in the Southey. In trying to restore the text to the imaginary state in which apocryphal author Lobeira created it, Southey in effect cuts fifteenth century Montalvo out of the text. Southey omits Montalvo’s prologue, Montalvo’s references to real and apocryphal manuscripts, and all appearances of the persona of the author. Southey’s extensive footnotes, on the other hand, restore narrative complexity and authorial intrusion. The notes cite Spanish words and phrases, comment on the source text, mark large omissions or changes to the order of events, orient English readers to concepts in Iberian culture, and reference previous translations. [Image 9] In a sense, Southey is duplicating Montalvo’s fifteenth-century project of editing and improving the *Amadís* for the nineteenth century. He is not merely a translator working in service to the source text; Southey’s *Amadís* is both a reading of the Castilian *Amadís* and a new work in its own right.

1. Cacho’s number includes sequels to the *Amadís* by other writers. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)