



# TOEBI Newsletter

TEACHERS OF OLD ENGLISH IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

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## TOEBI CONFERENCE AND AGM 1997

TOEBI met at Emmanuel College, Cambridge on 22 November 1997. Among the presentations were papers by Richard Dance, Christine Rauer and Jennifer Neville (a portion of the latter is reproduced below). Warm thanks were given to Andy Orchard for his organisation of a very stimulating and entertaining annual conference and to Emmanuel College for its hospitality.

### Elections

Mrs Ann Squires was re-elected as secretary for three years. Dr Mary Swan of the Centre for Medieval Studies, Leeds University, and Dr Peter Lucas of the Department of English, University College, Dublin were elected as committee members for three years. The retiring committee members, Professor Jane Roberts and Dr Hugh Magennis were thanked for their work. Dr Elaine Treharne replaces Dr Stuart Lee as the editor of the Newsletter and it was agreed that the Newsletter should be issued three times a year if appropriate material could be found. Members were urged to contribute and Dr Lee was thanked for his work for TOEBI.

### Financial Statement

TOEBI currently has a balance of £650 (which includes the majority of subscriptions for the coming year).

### Sixth-Form Conference

It was agreed that the Secretary and any interested members should explore the possibility of setting up an Anglo-Saxon weekend for sixth-formers. Classics' Departments have long held successful summer schools for those intending to read the subject at university and for other interested participants. These tend to be substantial courses of a week's length, demanding considerable teaching commitment for those involved. TOEBI does not envisage anything

as ambitious, but it seems worth exploring the idea of a trial weekend involving a one-night stay in a college (at Oxford or Durham, for example). The intention would be stimulate interest across the range of Anglo-Saxon studies so that prospective university entrants might be encouraged to choose courses which offered Old English options rather than seeing these as potentially boring or difficult or threatening or irrelevant (depending on which of the myths about Old English they have encountered). At least one Classics course of this type had been sponsored by its university Adult Education Department. If anyone knows of a similar university department that would be willing to be involved with Anglo-Saxon studies in this way, we would be keen to know about it. The Secretary would also be very pleased to receive suggestions and ideas from members, and to hear from anyone with an interest in contributing to the success of this venture. See page iv for the address.

### 1998 Conference and AGM

The 1998 conference will be held on Saturday, 14th November in St Edmund's Hall, Oxford. Further details will appear in the next Newsletter but members should send suggestions for topics or proposals for papers to the Secretary as soon as possible.

### IN MEMORIAM: LYNNE GRUNDY

*By Julie Coleman, University of Leicester*

Readers will be saddened to read of the death of Lynne Grundy, a fellow TOEBI member. After an apparent recovery from the lung cancer that was diagnosed at the beginning of 1997, Lynne died on the thirteenth of October, 1997, at the age of forty. The funeral service was at Lynne's own church, where she was also a member of the choir. The large congregation, of family, friends, colleagues, and students, was a moving demonstration of the affection that all those who came into contact with her felt for her. The healthiness of her life-style, her determination to survive her illness, and her love of swimming and yoga, make her death seem all the more unjust.

Lynne was a meticulous scholar, an inspiring teacher, and a caring friend. Her PhD thesis was published as *Books and Grace:*

*Ælfric's Theology*, and demonstrated her clear and thorough knowledge of both theology and Old English. She also worked on the *Thesaurus of Old English*, and has taught at King's College, London, Queen Mary, Royal Holloway, and University College, London. Her students, as well as her colleagues and friends, will miss her greatly. Our sympathies go to Martin and to her family.

### IS THERE LIFE AFTER A PHD?

*By Dr Jennifer Neville, Royal Holloway and Bedford New College*

I have recently graduated from my PhD and even more recently been appointed to a teaching post at a university. It will come as no surprise to hear that my PhD training did not really prepare me for the rigours of university lecturing, not to mention administrative responsibilities. And you will also no doubt be unsurprised to hear me complain about the plight of people hired for short-term contracts. I believe that established teachers can help those of us starting new jobs in very specific, practical ways.

A PhD may teach us how to research and write in the scholarly idiom, but it tends not to include professional training; perhaps this should be changed. In the meantime, academia tends to expect its members to pick up even the essentials for themselves, so please drop some of your practical experience in the way of your new colleagues: explain departmental bureaucracy, talk about the preparation of lectures, discuss the details of student assignments, reveal the nature of students in your particular institution. Above all, don't leave us alone!

The government is planning to implement rules for teacher-training at universities. In some ways it is astounding that this should have to be suggested from the outside. If your university does not already have 'induction seminars' for new staff, please rouse your department to create some. More difficult to address is the problem of short-term contracts. Everyone accepts that people hired for short-term contracts are exploited, but why are we so comfortable with this fact? Short-term appointments are counterproductive. The end result of new scholars having to live hand-to-mouth, other than the wear and tear on the individuals themselves, is deterioration in the quality of both research and teaching in our field. I believe that the departments that offer these kinds of contracts end up suffering as well, for, having imported people with the capacity to bring new ideas and positive

changes, these departments don't allow these new 'resources' to feel any sense of loyalty. The disillusioned and exhausted new lecturer thus thinks, 'Why should I bother to work on a course structure that will attract a flood of new students to Old English studies when I won't be here to teach it?' How are Old English studies going to thrive without this kind of development, without these new ideas and changes?

But what can you do about it? Don't let your department indulge in short-term contracts without an argument. Think about the cumulative effects of not paying scholars for the time when they do research. And if you do have short-term faculty in your department, don't treat them like second-class citizens or gypsies. They are contributing to the health of your department, even if only for a short time: be grateful; be helpful. In my case there is a happy ending: my nine-month contract has been extended. But we need to be strident in opposition to the increasing use of non-permanent staff. As a field under threat, we cannot afford to allow the vitality of our research and the effectiveness of our teaching to be undercut by this tendency to replace professional lecturers with over-worked labourers.

### DECISIONS, DECISIONS

*By Elaine Treharne*

Modularization and semesterization heralded the arrival (in Leicester, at least) of the short, fat module lasting twelve weeks and consisting of twenty-four hours teaching. We introduced compulsory short, fat Old English for one hundred second years in 1996. Teaching Old English in such a short length of time and to groups of ten or twelve brings with it two main problems, the first of which is well rehearsed: the students' lack of knowledge of grammar, and the issue of assessment.

The undergraduate's lack of grammatical understanding is a phenomenon in all Departments of English on both sides of the Atlantic (judging by recent debates on ANSAXNET). At Leicester, we teach basic grammar in the first year language module and this theory is put into practice and reinforced by the subsequent Old English module. Still, many of the students are insufficiently equipped to deal with parsing. It seems that the only solution is to spend extra, voluntary hours teaching the basics of grammar — something that we cannot do — or to encourage the students to undertake self-study with an electronic grammar. The real test of the

student's grasp of grammar comes in the translation exercise that has formed part of the assessment process. It is here that we discover that the (notional) student is able to use Mitchell and Robinson's glossary competently, but is sometimes unable to convert an Old English indicative preterite third person singular verb form into its modern equivalent. It is not enough, then, that the students know the rules, are familiar with the paradigms and declensions, can read the glossary; they must also be able to apply this knowledge to create an accurate Modern English translation. In a few cases, it is wonderful indeed to see the (miraculous) transformation from the stilted, literal, word-for-word translation to the fluent, poetic, modern versions.

We decided that this form of assessment, one translation exercise and one essay, was not providing a sufficient test of the extent of the students' knowledge, or their ability to think for themselves outside of the set texts. So it is that we are now considering the introduction of a three-hour examination. This is hardly revolutionary, perhaps, but modularization has tended to emphasise written assessed work at the expense of the examination. The design of the examination will in itself be vexing considering the relative amateur status of these students. The question is, then, what kind of examination performance can we expect from students whose total exposure to tutor-led Old English study is twelve hours, backed by twelve lectures?

If members have had similar experiences or would like to write about their courses and procedures for the Newsletter, please let the editor know (see page iv).

#### AND TALKING OF STUDENTS...

*The Times Higher* pointed out that in its 'Howlers' competition where lecturers write in with examination gaffes, it is almost always the medievalists who offered the winning entry. Why might that be? In an essay on Anglo-Saxon female saints offered by one a student recently, it turns out that 'Female saints valued their virginity most of all and wished to remain chastised.' Any others?

#### BOOK REVIEW

By WD

*Reading Old English Texts*, edited by Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, Cambridge University Press, 1997, £13.95, ISBN 0 521 46970 8 (pb).

This recent publication is a valuable addition to the general reference works available for the teaching of Old English to undergraduates and graduates. The volume contains nine new essays, plus the introduction by the editor, that aim to describe and illuminate different approaches to reading Old English texts. Michael Lapidge discusses 'The Comparative Approach' which looks at motifs, genres, and other presuppositions forming part of the comparative analyst's arsenal. D. G. Scragg examines the role that 'Source Study' plays in the critical investigation of Old English, showing how source hunters go about their research, what tools are available, and the importance of the work. Scragg shows how it is an approach at the cutting edge of modern scholarship. Daniel Donoghue talks about why 'Language Matters'; Nicholas Howe provides an analysis of 'Historicist Approaches' and Andy Orchard tackles the 'Oral Tradition'. Paul E. Szarmach offers an interesting discussion of 'The Recovery of Texts', while Clare A. Lees's 'At a crossroads: Old English and Feminist Criticism' includes a reading of *Elene* that shows how both 'gender and genre intersect in her representation as a Christian figure'. In her lucid essay, Carol Braun Pasternack takes us through 'Post-Structuralist Theories: The Subject and the Text', and Peter S. Baker closes the volume with 'Old English and computing: A guided Tour'. The collection contains, then, a good selection of contemporary approaches to Old English with a useful survey in Baker's essay of the electronic tools available currently.

All university libraries should have this volume in multiple copies, but wisely, CUP has made it cheap enough to be accessible to most students as background reading to their Old English modules.



### **TOEBI COMMITTEE**

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### **Action points for Members:**

- Send suggestions and offers of help about the potential sixth-form conference to the Secretary
  - Send topics or proposals for the November TOEBI meeting to the Secretary
- Contribute to the Newsletter: responses to this issue; book reviews; short articles on your Old English courses or assessment procedures; material about professional practice; student howlers
  - Please send information about the following items for inclusion in the Newsletter:
    - Conferences on Anglo-Saxon Studies
    - Special Lectures by Anglo-Saxonists
    - News about promotions, or general news about lecturers in your Department
    - The publication of new books or articles useful for teaching Old English