

TOEBI *Newsletter*

2020 Volume XXXVII

Welcome to the 30th anniversary edition of the TOEBI newsletter! What ought to have been a year of celebration for the society has in fact been a year of unprecedented challenges for our members and their students. In these circumstances, the support and the collegiality of our society is more important than ever, and we hope that this issue of the newsletter will inform and inspire members, and reinforce that sense of community among teachers of Old English. We are immensely grateful to everyone who has contributed to the newsletter in these difficult times.

This anniversary edition looks back to the origins of TOEBI, reflects on the current environment of teaching, and looks ahead with hope to the development of new tools, texts, initiatives and methodologies which will help us to pass on a love of Old English literature to new generations of students. Hugh Magennis opens the newsletter with a retrospective on

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TOEBI, and it's development since the first meeting in 1989. To get a sense of where our society's members stand today, the editors have conducted a survey of the landscape of Old English teaching practice, and present here a forward-looking report on the challenges and opportunities our field faces. Three articles present the authors' creative engagements with Old English verse: Alison Killilea writes about her Corkonian translation of *Beowulf*; artist and art historian Amy Jeffs describes her work with printing and the Old English elegies; Eleni Ponirakis presents the results of a riddle-composition competition at the University of Nottingham. The challenges and opportunities of teaching with and through digital tools are the focus of articles by Tom Birkett (on teaching during the Covid pandemic) and Susan Irvine (on 'The Electronic Corpus of Anonymous Homilies in Old English'). Members will also enjoy an excellent selection of conference reports and book reviews, illustrating present and forthcoming work in Old English and related fields.

It has been a most unusual time to take up production of the newsletter, and as editors we extend our heartfelt thanks to both our contributors and our readers. A community dedicated to the interests, needs and development of our teachers and their students is a most welcome thing in difficult times. If you would like to contribute to next year's newsletter, we are always looking for reviewers and for feature articles – do get in touch!

Rachel Burns
University of Oxford

Niamh Kehoe
University of Liverpool

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TOEBI *at 30*

Thirty years later: reflections on TOEBI

As one of the people at the beginning of TOEBI, it is interesting to me to reflect on how the association has developed and changed over the years. I have also attended 26 of the 30 TOEBI meetings (a record, I think), so have been a first-hand witness to the story of the association.

As I outlined in more detail in an earlier contribution to *TOEBI Newsletter* (vol. 28, 2011, pp. 1–4), the conception of TOEBI can be dated to a meeting of Old English teachers in December 1989, convened by Don Scragg at Manchester, on the ominous-sounding topic ‘W(h)ither Old English’, a title that picked up on the anxiety about the future of Old English teaching widely felt among colleagues at the time. Those early days were characterised above all by a feeling among teachers that their subject was under siege: they felt

beleaguered and vulnerable to unsympathetic colleagues, to new trends in English studies and to harsh financial realities in the sector. TOEBI (as it came to be known in 1990, after a follow-up meeting that November) established itself as a mutual support association and as a forum for the exchange of ideas, thereby building up confidence and a sense of valued identity among members. Annual meetings were instituted and became increasingly popular. Teachers shared experience and learned from one another. Meanwhile, Old English studies were seen to be flourishing in many ways (while still existing precariously in some places). A major contrast with thirty years ago compared to the present is the sheer number of doctoral students and post-docs now at work and presenting at TOEBI and in other venues. Graduate students were among those who attended the very first meeting but the importance of postgraduates and postdocs to

TOEBI has increased greatly over the years, to the extent that they now have major roles driving the association (though gaining representation on the committee only in 2016).

Another early aim of TOEBI was to promote Old English more widely outside the core community of specialists, an endeavour that might nowadays be referred to as ‘impact’ or ‘outreach’. This aim was expressed at the follow-up meeting in 1990 as being ‘to raise the profile of the subject as something worth doing, among students, non-Anglosaxonist colleagues and the wider community’ (minutes), and is still proclaimed on the home page of our website. The aspiration to promote the subject never achieved significant results, however, as the main interest of members has been in talking to ourselves rather than to others; occasionally non-Old-English invitees have spoken at TOEBI meetings, offering outside perspectives, but the society has not really been proactive in spreading the word.

In the 1990s as the association got going, arrangements concerning TOEBI were informal and ad-hoc. Communication was by snail mail and much depended on the enthusiasm and effort of the chair (Don Scragg) and early secretaries (Jeremy Smith and Ann Squires). TOEBI steadily became more professional looking, however, especially in more recent years. A committee structure was established early on (1990) but TOEBI’s formal constitution dates only from 2014.

As TOEBI found its feet, support structures evolved, notably newsletters, grants, the website and online resources, and of course the annual meetings. These were at first on narrow topics of concern, such as textbooks and teaching methods, but soon became organised around specific themes. For me, TOEBI meetings became the academic gatherings I most looked forward to and enjoyed, and after a few initial consecutive outings at Oxford they began to spread out across Britain and Ireland, a healthy policy. The annual

meetings have fostered collegiality, friendship and the sharing of ideas. Some in the Old English community who are not keen on going to other conferences have been faithful attenders at TOEBI. A strength of the association, in my experience, has been that members of all levels of experience interact in non-hierarchical ways: a communal relationship rather than an institutional one.

TOEBI meetings continue to foster these desirable things, and TOEBI continues to be greatly valued by its members. Recent developments in our subject (beyond TOEBI), however, have introduced an element of incivility into some discourse in early medieval studies. ISAS has become ISSEME amid acrimonious debates about racism and also about gender and power. Such issues need to be attended to in TOEBI, as they are being, but it is essential to the continued health of the organisation that they be handled respectfully and with the collegiality that has defined TOEBI so far. If they are, TOEBI can be

appreciated by future generations as much as it has been in the past and present.

Hugh Magennis

Queen's University Belfast



List of participants attending the 1989 meeting:

Joy Anderson (Manchester)
Betty Coatsworth (Manchester)
Wendy Collier (Manchester)
Marilyn Deegan (Oxford)
John Erskine (Cardiff?)
Anthony Faulkes (Birmingham)
Tony Gilbert (Lancaster)
Malcolm Godden (Oxford)
Lynne Grundy (QM)
Martin Grundy (QMW)
Ivan Herbison (QUB)
Joyce Hill (Leeds)
George Jack (St Andrews)
Judith Jesch (Nottingham)
Hansi Kingston (UCL)
Amanda Lacy (Bangor)
Margaret Locherbie-Cameron (Bangor)
Hugh Magennis (QUB)
L H Malmberg (Durham)

Gordon Neal (Manchester)
 Richard North (UCL)
 Gale Owen-Crocker (Manchester)
 Elizabet Palmer (UCL)
 Jocelyn Price (Liverpool)
 Barbara Raw (Keele)
 Jane Roberts (KCL)
 Ian Robinson (Swansea?)
 Alex Rumble (Manchester)
 Don Scragg (Manchester)
 P M Simcock (Hull)
 Jeremy Smith (Glasgow)
 Ann Squires (Durham)
 Mary Swan (Leeds)
 Keith Swanson (Manchester)
 Meg Twycroft (Lancaster)
 Diana Whaley (Newcastle)

(This list, supplied to participants at the time, has 36 names, but Don Scragg's filenote on the meeting records that 38 teachers attended: two names missing from the list.)



TOEBI general meetings

1989 Manchester, 2 December:
 'W(h)ither Old English?'

1990 Meeting to set up TOEBI,
 Manchester, 17 November
 1992 Oxford (Oxford University
 Computing Services), 8 February
 1993 Oxford (English Faculty), 29 May
 1994 Oxford (CTI Centre), 26
 November
 1995 Durham, 11 November
 1996 Leicester, 9 November
 1997 Cambridge (Emmanuel), 22
 November
 1998 Oxford (St Edmund Hall), 14
 November
 1999 Bangor, 13 November: 'The
 Canon and Translation'
 2000 Nottingham, 18 November
 2001 Leeds, 17 November
 2002 Glasgow, 19 October
 2003 Royal Holloway, 1 Nov:
 'Metamorphoses: Teaching OE in
 Multicultural Contexts'
 2004 Manchester, 30 October: 'Why are
 We Here?'
 2005 Belfast, 22 October: 'TOEBI
 Now: Fifteen Years On'
 2006 Leicester, 28 October:
 'Collaboration'

2007 Cambridge (St Catharine's), 20
October: 'Materials'

2008 Nottingham, 25 October:
'Contexts'

2009 St Andrews, 24 October: 'Learning
Old English: Past and Present'

2010 Leicester, 23 October: 'Narrating'

2011 Cardiff, 22 October: 'Nationalities'

2012 Hull, 20 October: 'Encounters'

2013 Belfast, 26 October: 'Challenges'

2014 Nottingham, 18 October:
'Opportunities'

2015 Dublin (TCD), 10 October:
'Values'

2016 London (KCL), 20 October:
'Performance, Pedagogy and the
Profession'

2017 Cork, 21 October: 'Old English
Across Borders'

2018 Oxford (Saint Peter's), 20
October: 'Contacts'

2019 Manchester, 16 November: 'Work
and Play'



TOEBI Principal Office-Holders

President

Barbara Raw (Keele/Oxford): 1994-1997

Bruce Mitchell (Oxford): 1997-2000

Eric Stanley (Oxford): 2000-2003

Don Scragg (Manchester): 2003-2010

Hugh Magennis (QUB): 2010-2016

Clare Lees (KCL): 2016-2017

Susan Irvine (UCL): 2017-

Chair

Don Scragg (Manchester): 1990-1998

Peter Lucas (UCD/Cambridge): 1998-

2004

Elaine Treharne (Leicester): 2004-2007

Hugh Magennis (QUB): 2007-2011

Clare Lees (KCL): 2011-2014

Christina Lee/Philip Shaw: 2014-2020

Mike Bintley: 2020-

Secretary

Jeremy Smith (Glasgow): 1990-1994

Ann Squires (Durham): 1994-2000

Elizabeth Okasha (UCC): 2000-2006

Jayne Carroll (Leicester/Nottingham):
2006-2012

Richard Dance (Cambridge) acting
secretary 2007-2008

Marilina Cesario (QUB): 2012-2018

Frances McCormack (NUIG): 2018-

TOEBI *Survey Report*

Introduction

To mark the occasion of TOEBI turning 30, the editors sent out a short questionnaire to members with the objective of gathering information on the landscape of teaching in the field of Old English. Twenty-five respondents detailed various aspects of their pedagogic practices, as well as the challenges they and their students face, and their thoughts on the future of the field.¹ In the below report, we will share some of the key trends and issues raised by these responses, with the intention of showing both how the field is developing, and where gaps exist in the support and resources given to teachers and students. It is our hope that by sharing this data, as well as some of the suggestions, requests and tactics made by respondents, that members of TOEBI may feel inspired to adopt some of these

approaches in their own teaching, or even to create resources to support teachers.

The last survey of a similar nature, commissioned by Dr Christine Rauer, took place in 2009. One notable similarity between the two survey responses is concern regarding the decline of foreign-language learning and linguistics among students, which proves to negatively impact students when beginning their studies of the Old English language. As a partial remedy to this, a number of respondents suggested that TOEBI be involved in some way in the introduction of Old English at school level. Perhaps responding to the changing learning needs of students (as well as being an inevitable consequence of the new digital age we live in), the most significant development from the 2009 survey is undoubtedly the widespread engagement with digital tools

¹ On the makeup of the respondents: the vast majority were members of TOEBI (24/25); most currently teach Old English, while about a fifth drew solely on past

experience; over half were permanent staff, just over a quarter were fixed term staff, and the majority of the remainder were postgraduate students.

and websites to aid with teaching and learning Old English. While the 2009 survey results betrayed a note of reluctance to engage with digital tools, such resources were among the most highly recommended from this survey's respondents.



Teaching responsibilities and approaches

A review of teaching areas showed that our respondents each have diverse responsibilities, with clear areas of alignment as a group. All respondents taught Old English literature, with only three not also teaching Old English language. All respondents teach or have taught areas of study outside of Old English, the most common of which was Middle English literature (20/25 of respondents). Six respondents taught manuscript studies, and seven respondents taught early modern literature. Six respondents taught aspects of English language, whether historical, modern, or cross-period. Medievalism

(1), critical theory (1) and Old Norse literature (2) were also taught by a minority of respondents, though it's worth noting that some respondents named these areas as 'approaches' taken in their teaching of Old English. The vast majority of respondents make significant

Our respondents also shared a variety of other methods and approaches that they use in the classroom:

We compare the Old English to modern English translations and discuss how the contexts of translation affects the translation.

*Material culture (archaeology) [;]
Medievalism (reuse of Anglo-Saxon history and Old English after 1066)*

Contemporary theology and some reference to modern (20th & 21st century) philosophy

Rhetoric, patristics, Germanic heroic tradition, Middle English alliterative verse

Creative Writing

Poststructuralism [;] Reception

Material theory (e.g. thing theory), the global middle ages

use of Old English verse (24/25), while most respondents made significant use of Old English prose texts and/or grammatical worksheets and paradigms (21/25 in each case). As was expected, most permanent staff teach at undergraduate, masters and PhD level (12/14), while postgraduate and fixed-term staff generally teach at undergraduate level, with some respondents having taught at masters level.

We asked respondents about the approaches they used to teach Old English. Traditional areas of study with a less overtly theoretical aspect were engaged with by almost all respondents (manuscript texts, Old English grammar, early medieval history, poetic style / form). Latin texts (14/25) and Old English metre (17/25) were also popular with respondents. High levels of engagement with an approach did not necessarily correspond with confidence: numerous respondents expressed a desire for better resources for the teaching of Old English metre, suggesting that for

some teachers, metre is a subject they teach with insufficient resources.

Engagement with different regions of critical theory varied: feminist criticism influenced the teaching of 18 respondents, while disability studies (4/25) and queer theory (6/25) garnered low levels of engagement. This disparity highlights the now-established position of feminist literary criticism, and perhaps demonstrates an opportunity to utilise that position to increase engagement with yet-emergent regions of critical study (i.e. by encouraging intersectional approaches within feminist criticism). We saw a number of free text comments from respondents referencing a desire to diversify the field of Old English, to engage with a more varied programme of teaching and to link the study of Old English with modern texts.



Migration and Identity - esp in connection with Scandinavian migrants.

Trips to museums and sites

Historical fiction and adaptation

Old English sound changes and dialects; language contact and loanwords; material culture

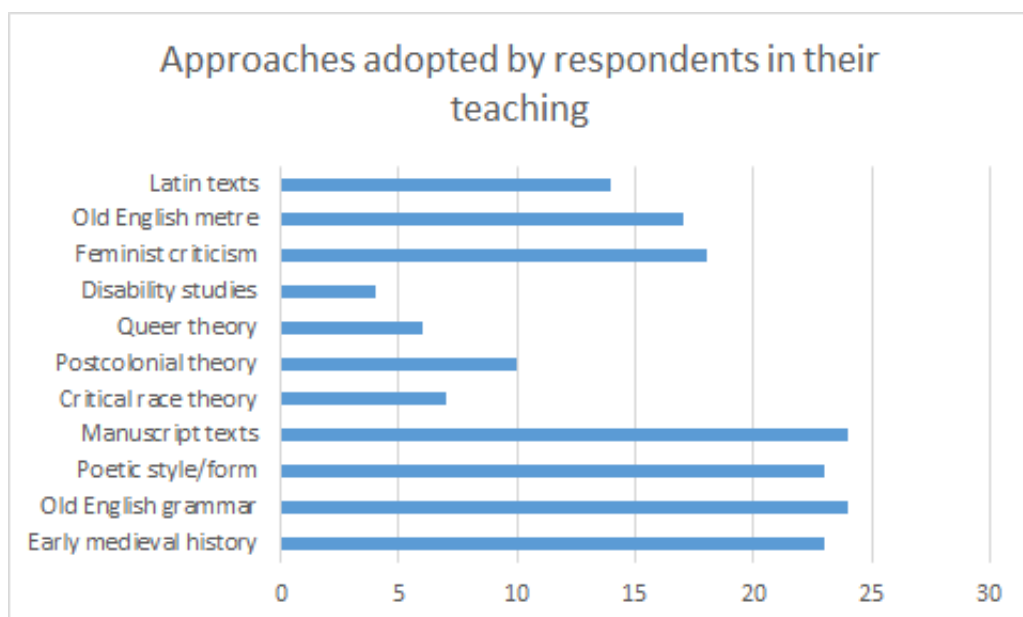
Psychoanalytic - Julia Kristeva

Textbooks and Recommended Sources

We asked respondents to tell us what textbooks they use across their teaching. A wide range of titles were put forward,

with Peter Baker's *Introduction to Old English* and Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson's *A Guide to Old English* proving clear favourites in the group (Baker's associated 'Old English Aerobics' website and Magic Sheet were also mentioned). Richard Marsden's *The Cambridge Old English Reader*, Elaine Treharne's *Old and Middle English: An Anthology*, Carole A. Hough and John Corbett's *Beginning Old English*, Mark Atherton's *Complete Old English* and Duncan Macrae-Gibson's *Learning Old English* (recently revised by Dr Aideen O'Leary and Zhanfeng Xu, see below) were also used by multiple respondents.

However, most titles were named by only



one respondent each, showing a great deal of diversity and independence between teachers. This is particularly interesting in the light of requests made by respondents for a new Old English reader, to cater to students with little or no grammatical or historical knowledge, on which see further below.

Notably divergent from the 2009 survey results, many of the resources recommended by the respondents to this survey are digital or online. While they supplement rather than replace textbooks when it comes to teaching, their use (and existence) reflects both the speed at which online advancements are being made and the willingness of those in our field to use them. Online dictionaries were recommended by almost everyone, including the Toronto [*Dictionary of Old English*](#) (DOE, currently includes A-I), and Bosworth-Toller's [*Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*](#). Other recommended websites were [*A Thesaurus of Old English*](#), Toronto's [*Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*](#), and Peter Baker's [*Old English Aerobics*](#). Other resources include the

website Wordloca, a University College Cork and University College Dublin joint initiative (although sadly password protected). A more recent initiative, again from University College Cork, is [*Old English Online*](#), which was built by Victoria Koivisto-Kokko and was this year trialled by Dr Tom Birkett (see below).

In addition to websites, respondents have noted success in supplementing more traditional teaching with the use of blog posts and YouTube videos. Of particular note were Dr Alaric Hall's series of short YouTube videos 'Introducing Old English', and Dr Thijs Porck's YouTube 'Grammar Bytes' (for more on using YouTube to teach Old English see [here](#)). Websites of note include Dr Megan Cavill's '[The Riddle Ages](#)', as well as the British Library [*Medieval Manuscripts Blog*](#). Also noted was the digitised manuscript section on the British Library website, as well as their [articles](#) on aspects of the Middle Ages. Not mentioned but also worth a note here

(particularly for undergraduate students of both Old and Middle English literature) are the relevant podcasts on BBC 4's *In Our Time*.

Resources on your wish-lists

High up on our respondents' wish-lists for textual resources include student- (and teacher-!) friendly textbooks on Old English metre, perhaps something that was more “exercised-based” than existing resources, as well as student textbooks that offer an integrated approach to learning language and literature – including how to recognise themes, motifs, and poetic style. On this latter point, one respondent observed that “it would be good to have something where grammar explanations and text translation/analysis were a bit more closely integrated”, while another desired “a coursebook that contains essays from different approaches but that is written at a level that is accessible to all undergrad students”, while yet another noted that they “struggle to find good introductory material (whether books/articles or

videos/lectures) on the history of the period that is aimed at students of literature rather than history.” Rachel Burns and Rafael Pascual are developing a digital tool to teach Old English metre, as part of the CLASP project (*A Consolidated Library of Anglo-Saxon Poetry*), which will be aimed at beginner and advanced students, and should also prove useful to teachers. The development of this tool follows on from their highly successful Old English metre workshop held at Oxford last year; regarding effective teaching, one respondent claimed that they “always use Rafael Pascual's handouts on Old English Metre since attending the metre conference/workshop”. A need for additional resources to teach Old English dialect was also suggested, as were more translations of Anglo-Latin texts.

In addition to textual sources, there was a call for further free online resources that introduced students to palaeographic and manuscripts studies, online recordings of well-known texts, fully-glossed prose texts and – a wish we

can all empathise with – a completed *Dictionary of Old English*.

Effective Teaching Methods and Activities

An inspiring variety of effective teaching methods were recorded in the survey, reflecting the creativeness and enthusiasm at play in Old English studies. Popular among the respondents was the use of quizzes and flashcards to test student knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. As described by one respondent, useful in this regard is a website called Kahoot.com. This website allows you to design a quiz online, which students then access (with a PIN) via their phones or laptops in class. Another creative and playful teaching method recorded was to ask students to draw poetry and then “use their (sometimes silly, sometimes surreal) drawings to engage them in discussion about literary themes, etc.” A number of respondents wrote that asking students to produce creative translations of Old English texts was highly effective in engaging students,

with one respondent stating that it was also useful “for breaking barriers . . . and teaching them there was not necessarily right or wrong”. In this vein, one response stated that giving their students multiple translations of the same passage “always makes them so much more aware of what gets changed in creating a translation.”

One respondent noted great success in giving students *Cædmon’s Hymn* to translate and asking them to “focus on their word choices, the sound features they wanted to carry across from the Old English and the overall meaning they wanted to convey worked well.” They noted that there was “some real creativity on display, which allowed students to connect with the material more closely and aided their interpretation as well.”

More traditional styles of learning, including memorisation and recitation, remained popular. One participant wrote that providing students with a “grounding on general grammar in Modern English before applying it to Old English” was effective, particularly for the benefit of students “new to inflected languages and/or language study for academic purposes”. Other methods which were noted include asking students to memorise 500 words in Old English in order to make unseen translations that bit easier and out loud recitation and translation. On this latter method the respondent elaborated, “(t)hese are challenging and very demanding tasks, in that in order to do them well students must acquire a significant number of linguistic and literary skills (pronunciation, grammar, rhetoric, poetic rhythm, a sense of narrative pace, etc.). That's precisely why they are so effective.”

Challenges and anxieties

We asked our respondents to discuss the anxieties their students experience, and the challenges they themselves face as teachers. The predominant theme was the fear students have of studying Old English due to insufficient knowledge of a) grammar, and b) early medieval history and culture. Almost every respondent addressed students' struggles with

Reading Old English is often a challenge for beginners, but having staff and students read texts aloud to gain confidence with the language and become more aware of reflexes and cognates helps to identify phonological patterns that allow them to have a more meaningful and engaged relationship with the texts.

grammar, which arose both from their unfamiliarity with grammatical terminology broadly (including the workings of Modern English grammar) on the one hand, and a dislike of the processes of learning grammar on the other. There was a sense among the responses that the cultural and linguistic differences between the early medieval

period now generate a lot of anxiety for students, and many respondents focused on methods of breaking down this sense of distance. Respondents suggested reading aloud, plunging into translation at the earliest opportunity, establishing

connections between words and grammatical structure in Old English and Modern English, and establishing the literary traditions that lead up to and follow the early medieval period, including the use of modern poetry.

It can seem inaccessible to begin with, and some students don't quite see the point in studying it at first, especially when it is positioned in a compulsory area of the curriculum rather than being an active choice. I've attempted to tackle this by making connections between modern and historical events and attitudes, and by making the process of translation into something of a game or form of investigation where possible; the social element was more engaging for some students, so while they might not care much about grammatical paradigms they were interested in the story of Judith and Holofernes, or the representation of the halls and fens in Beowulf and the social fate of the 'exile'. The story of Old English could also seem very 'white' at times, so I've tried to bring in other cultures and countries, as well as looking at what the term 'Anglo-Saxon' has been used to mean. Modern adaptations and interpretations have also been very useful, from Seamus Heaney's Beowulf to Michael Crichton's novel Eaters of the Dead, and film adaptations, a favourite being Gunnarsson's Beowulf & Grendel.

One respondent highlighted some of the particular difficulties faced by early career scholars and postgraduate tutors, for whom both the development of teaching materials and class dynamics are impacted by constant turnover of short-term roles.

[B]ecause I have been thrown into multiple short-term roles and have needed to adapt and generate material from scratch each time, it has been difficult to find the time to offer additional language and translation workshops to students, which I would do in an ideal world. For courses with no prerequisite knowledge of Old English and groups with some students who have learnt the language and some who have no prior experience of it, this is especially frustrating. Because students are so fearful about translating texts (e.g. they worry about getting the grammar or vocab wrong), it helps to have trust with the students, and this is easier to generate when you have taught them in previous years - I have never had the opportunity to teach a student for more than one term.

Some of our correspondents had thoughts on how to carry out effective online teaching, although many had not engaged in online teaching during the pandemic. Answers flagged the way that online teaching involves a very different dynamic from the physical classroom. Suggestions included making sure each individual student is asked a question, and addressing questions to individuals rather than the room. This demonstrates, perhaps, that when a class is dispersed across screens, it is harder to observe and engage with students as a collective group rather than as a group of individuals. Breaking classes into smaller groupings for online classes was suggested, but teachers' ability to do this will be limited by available technology, and by departments' ability or willingness to pay for additional hours

How to Boost Old English Studies: Thoughts and Suggestions

All of the respondents to this survey conveyed a keen sense that much work needs to be done to boost the study of Old English language and literature. A common thread running through many of the suggestions was how to tackle the effects of the decline of language/linguistics at school level. Suggestions included re-thinking how we introduce students to Old English - particularly grammar - at university level, by appealing to students' creativity and by ensuring accessibility to Old English texts through translations early in degree courses. We have provided a representative sample of responses below, which we feel members will enjoy reading and which might spark further discussions and action:

In my previous institution we definitely benefitted from running a first-year introductory module in medieval English which was available to all and dealt with the OE element mostly in translation. This module recruited well, and from that we had good numbers of students carry on to study OE or one of the other historical modules on offer in Y2 and Y3. I think this was because the period and its literature had been demystified, and students had some idea of what texts were available, what literary themes or approaches could be used, what the language looked like (the anthology used had bilingual editions of OE texts), etc. We used to do a shameless plug for our Y2 modules at the end of the semester.

It is surprisingly difficult to find critical essays (apart from on Beowulf, perhaps) which are accessible and engaging for undergrad students, and which open these texts up for them in new ways . . . Sharing effective pedagogy (via forums like TOEBI) is always helpful . . . More public engagement which emphasises OE literature as literature, and not simply as 'language' or 'history'. Expressing (in and beyond the

classroom) the beauty, complexity, wonder and depth of this poetry and prose.

I think we have to make the medieval content that we teach students in their first years as exciting, creative, dynamic and engaging as possible, which just means showcasing the excellent work happening in our field. We need to emphasise inclusivity and diversity in the field and bring students in to the discussions about the problems with our field as well.

I think that it is always likely to be a minority sport, but I think that appealing to poets--to students interested in creative writing--is a promising tactic. The close language work and the alien sounds do appeal to a certain type of writer.

At the university level, I think making sure we're teaching in translation is crucial, and something that certain institutions are quite resistant to - it just makes the literature far more intimidating than it needs to be. When I studied OE as an undergrad, I read lots in translation in first year before going on to learn the language in second year; as it is, I think students often

*face the tricky situation of facing both linguistic *and* cultural barriers when they first encounter the literature. I also think it's important to centre OE as part of a multilingual environment, including translations of ON, Latin and OF as a central part of the syllabus, rather than possible additional extras.*

In an ideal world, the English curricula at A-level would include more medieval works too: there is absolutely no reason why Heaney or Headley's Beowulf can't be taught to 17/18 year olds, for example. However, in the absence of any imagination from the creators of our national curricula, I think we need to be taking more initiative in promoting early medieval literature - what form this takes I'm not sure, but there is surely more work we can be doing. It would be great, for example, to be able to offer week-long summer schools in early medieval literature for A-level students or something similar. Perhaps also thinking seriously about how we utilise resources like YouTube to promote learning is also worthwhile. We're not going to get the support we need from departments and universities in general, so being proactive in our pedagogy/outreach is key.

The popularity of retelling Old English stories in films and other creative works provides a good route into a conversation with students (or any audience) about the 'meanings' of these past narratives and why these concepts and ideas still seem to matter to 'us' now socially in the 21st century; any course that seeks to deepen social and cultural understanding is likely to provoke critical thinking and provide an opportunity to look at the world in a new way, so it has that 'intellectual' kudos. Selling points do include connections to the language of the Lord of the Rings and so forth (sometimes a little 'overplayed' in marketing materials); concepts from Old English literature connect with timeless questions about race, gender, and representation, lending themselves to different types of critical enquiry, so it can also be integrated into cultural studies courses. It's not the most vocational subject, given the dearth of opportunities in historical lexicography, etc., but it has a lot of potential to enrich courses in creative writing, and engages all the usual analytical transferable skills.

I try to establish links between the texts we are studying in class, and the subjects I know my

students love. I speak to or email them individually about their interests at the start of term, and bear this in mind when preparing class material. For many students, the medieval seems completely alien, and they believe they are more interested in studying, say, Shakespeare or 20th C verse. However, once they recognise their own interests in OE lit (protodrama, riddles, existential debate, female agency and material culture being common points of excitement), this early prejudice can be overcome.

Looking forward, there are a few proposals we would like to make on the basis of this survey:

Comparison with the 2009 survey by Christine Rauer and Erika Corradini showed continuing anxieties about students' linguistic exposure and capabilities, but a marked shift towards engagement with digital and online resources. A long perspective on these kind of issues may be helpful in developing solutions and resources in a constantly evolving teaching environment. We suggest that a survey of

this kind could be done every three to five years. This would better allow us to see the impact of initiatives and technological advances

We believe that the accounts given by respondents of their teaching practices may be of enormous benefit to TOEBI members. In order to encourage and facilitate this sharing of ideas, approaches and resources, the editors will explicitly invite short contributions to a segment on teaching practice in next year's newsletter. These articles might describe an online resource which a member found to be effective in the classroom, or lay out a plan for a short series of classes on a particular topic. We hope that the shortform style will allow tutors to contribute who might not have considered writing a full feature article for the newsletter.

Finally, a number of pedagogical projects suggest themselves from the data presented in this survey, to fill resource gaps, to improve online teaching, or to aid students in more anxiety-provoking

subjects, like grammar. If members are inspired to produce materials based on this survey, we would very much like to

hear about these, and where possible, to cover them in the newsletter.

TORC

TOEBI Old English Reading Club

We would like to invite all members to our newest online group, TORC (TOEBI Old English Reading Club). The past year has been a chaotic and isolated time for many Old English researchers and enthusiasts. TORC offers a chance to meet other TOEBI members and discuss an Old English text over a hot cup of tea or even some mead!

Everyone is welcome, whether you are an expert or newcomer, a postgraduate or a professor. Non-TOEBI members will need to join TOEBI first, please visit (<http://www.toebi.org.uk/>) for more details. Our first session took place on the 9th December from 6pm via Google Meet, and we plan to meet every month going forward.

If you have any questions, please contact Abigail.Williams@nottingham.ac.uk or N.J.Mogford@bham.ac.uk. We look forward to seeing you soon!

TOEBI Annual Meeting 2019

16th November

University of Manchester, 'Work and Play'

The annual TOEBI conference took place on Saturday 16 November 2019, in the Christie Room of the John Rylands Library, University of Manchester. The Rylands has a longstanding association with Old English studies, having hosted the annual MANCASS Toller Lecture and published a number of those lectures in the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* for many years. The theme of this year's conference was 'work and play' and we welcomed over 40 delegates from universities across Britain and Ireland, as well as continental Europe and the US. Papers were presented by postgraduate students and early career academics, along with more senior teachers and researchers.

The first session of the day focused on the theme of work and play in early medieval England and continental

Europe. Thijs Porck (Leiden University) opened the conference with a paper on the reception of *Beowulf* in the Low Countries between 1850-1950; Luisa Ostacchini (University of Oxford) spoke next, discussing missionary men at work in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*; and Inna Matyushina (University of Exeter and Russian State University for the Humanities) gave the third paper of the session, examining formulaic wordplay in the poems of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

The second session provided an overview of new tools and digital resources for the teaching and learning of Old English. Colleen Curran (University of Oxford) gave a demonstration of the CLASP project as a teaching tool for Anglo-Latin and Old English poetry; then Berber Bossenbroek (Leiden University) presented a paper on

rethinking the teaching of Old English in the digital age; Victoria Koivisto-Kokko (University College Cork) spoke about her experiences of designing and creating digital resources for medieval language learning.

After this session, we broke for lunch and the TOEBI committee met in the Education Room. The papers in the first afternoon session explored fun ways of teaching Old English. Renée R. Trilling (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) demonstrated a jeopardy-style Old English teaching tool; James Morey (Emory University) highlighted methods of teaching and learning Old English vocabulary: compounds, cognates, and calques; and Aideen M. O'Leary (University of Aberdeen) discussed playful approaches to reviving Old English at Aberdeen.

A round table, organised and chaired by Megan Cavell (University of Birmingham), complemented the previous session by providing a glimpse into a variety of playful pedagogies for

the classroom: Mike Bintley (Birkbeck, University of London), Thijs Porck (Leiden University), Francesca Brooks (University College London) and Jennifer Neville (Royal Holloway, University of London) addressed ways of making grammar memorable, vlogging and visual team play, collaborative teaching with creative practitioners, and teaching through sound and movement.

The conference concluded with the annual Toller Lecture, this year delivered by the President of TOEBI, Professor Susan Irvine (University College London). The lecture was titled 'Image on the Glass: Laurence Whistler and *The Dream of the Rood*' and was followed by a stimulating question and answer session.

At the end of a full day of papers, panels and presentations, delegates walked from the John Rylands Library on Deansgate to the main University of Manchester campus on Oxford Road, weaving our way through the lively Christmas markets. We relaxed with a few drinks at Kro Bar before enjoying some Indian

street food at the conference meal at Mowgli.

My thanks to the staff at the John Rylands Library for hosting the conference and offering support on the day. Special thanks to Abigail Bleach, a PhD student at Manchester, for assisting with the conference administration and chairing a session, and thanks also to the other session chairs, Carl Kears, Francesca Brooks and Megan Cavell, for presiding over thought-provoking discussions and, of course, for keeping to time!

It is customary to look ahead to the next TOEBI conference at this point but, as I write this report, we are experiencing unprecedented times, with the

coronavirus pandemic forcing us to postpone or cancel all in-person conferences and meetings. Consequently, 2020 may see a 'virtual' TOEBI conference in which we present our papers remotely, by video link. None of us would have wished for such a trying situation yet, as we all move to online teaching and learning platforms, perhaps we will also find new opportunities for making the work of Old English playful. As many of the papers presented at Manchester showed, teachers of Old English have always been pedagogically creative and adaptable.

James Paz

University of Manchester

Conference Reports

Following on from last year's Newsletter, we have included below summaries of several papers of the 2019 TOEBI Conference, for the interest of those who were unable to attend. Many thanks to the contributors for taking time to write these reports and submit them.

The Editors.

Beowulf: A Dutch Paper Doll Pirate History (1934)

Overviews of modern takes on *Beowulf*, such as John William Sutton's *Beowulfiana* and Britt Mize's *Beowulf's Afterlives*,² have naturally focused primarily on English-language adaptations of the Old English

poem. As a result, a number of Dutch adaptations of *Beowulf* have gone unnoticed. In my paper at the 2019 TOEBI meeting ('Playing Beowulf on the Continent: The Reception of *Beowulf* in the Low Countries (1850-1950)'), I presented a number of these, including a 19th-century novel focusing on the



² John William Sutton, "Beowulfiana: Modern Adaptations of Beowulf" (Robbins Library, 2005) and Britt Mize, *Beowulf's Afterlives Bibliographic Database*, <http://beowulf.dh.tamu.edu/>

brother of Beowulf and a 1909 sketch about ‘fake news’, called “The history of Beowulf’s sandwich”.³ I also gave all attendees a print-out of a Modern English translation of a Dutch serial adaptation of *Beowulf* that was accompanied by a set of fifteen paper dolls, originally published anonymously in 1934.

This set of paper dolls and its accompanying text appeared as fifteen weekly installments in at least three Dutch newspapers under the heading “Beowulf: Een Zeerooversgeschiedenis” [Beowulf: A Pirate’s History]. The fifteen cut-out paper dolls represent the figures of Hrothgar, Grendel, Beowulf, Grendel’s mother, Hygelac and the dragon, as well as costumes that could be hung over the paper figurines. The cut-out images were accompanied by the text of a serial children adaptation of *Beowulf*, narrating its eponymous hero’s fight against the three monsters.

As noted, *Beowulf: A Paper Doll Pirate History* (1934) is just one of many examples of Dutch adaptations of the Old English poem. In the Netherlands, *Beowulf* became one of those stories (along with Sigurd, the dragon slayer) that was deemed suitable for children to read. As is to be expected, this adaptation alters its early medieval English source to accommodate its youthful readers. For example, while mentions of death and horror are not necessarily shunned, the gloomy end of the original poem (with its repeated reproaches of the cowardice of Beowulf’s men and the impending doom of the Geats) is drastically changed: Beowulf forgives his followers for fleeing on this occasion. The description of Grendel’s mother is also clearly intended for a young audience: “The tenth image is the mother of Grendel: not a very sweet person to look at, eh? And you will soon find out that her appearance is also far from nice.”

³ For a reconstruction of “The history of Beowulf’s sandwich”, see <https://thijsporck.com/2018/04/30/the-history-of-beowulfs-sandwich-a-sketch-about-fake-news-from-1909/>

In the appendix to this note, I have added the paper doll of Grendel's mother and its accompanying text. The full set of Beowulf paper dolls, along with my modern English translation of the fifteen installments of the text, is available on my website and can be downloaded here:

<https://thijsporck.com/2019/12/05/paper-doll-beowulf/>



Appendix: A paper doll of Grendel's mother

The tenth image is the mother of Grendel: not a very sweet person to look at, eh? And you will soon find out that her appearance is also far from nice. Her hair has a red colour, her cloth green, her body light brown and the cudgel black.

Grendel's mother, who soon found out that her son had

died fighting Beowulf, wanted revenge. She did not think about it for very long and the awful being prepared herself to go to King Hrothgar all by herself. It had quieted down in his land, because people no longer feared Grendel and they had all forgotten about his mother.

His mother snuck through the pitch-black night to the great party-hall, grabbed the first person she saw and killed him. Then she departed as quietly as she had come. The next morning, people noticed the accident and bloody tracks made clear that the culprit was hiding out in the marshes.

King Hrothgar once more called to Beowulf for aid. He did not hesitate for a moment and was determined to fight this monster as well. The very same morning, he prepared himself and went to the marshes and fens. Beowulf was armed with a gigantic sword and that was all the weaponry he carried.

Thijs Porck
Leiden University

Missionary Men At Work in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*

At a conference for teachers of Old English, it seems appropriate to consider Ælfric - one of the most renowned Old English teachers. In this paper, through comparison of several saint's lives to their Latin sources and to each other, I considered the ways in which he presented the teaching work of missionaries in his *Lives of Saints* (*LOS*). In doing so, I argued that Ælfric uses depictions of missionaries to highlight the importance of community and cooperation. Moreover, I demonstrated that studying the items from the *LOS* alongside one another rather than individually sheds new light on Ælfric's ideology.

This paper outlined three ways that Ælfric stressed the importance of collaboration and of wide Christian networks. Firstly, Ælfric places great importance on the idea of travel, often rearranging material in order to begin a saint's life with a description of the travel

that they undertook. This travel is often explicitly linked to the idea of teaching and learning. As such, I suggested that for Ælfric, saintly behaviour often starts with participation in a wider community, and with accessing knowledge from foreign locations. Secondly, I showed that Ælfric manipulates his sources to place great emphasis on the idea of secular-monastic cooperation. Finally, I indicated the way that different missionary lives are made to mirror one another through shared vocabulary and structure, and suggested that Ælfric did this to suggest consistent practice between different locales.

I concluded that Ælfric emphasises the importance of belonging to a wider Christian community rather than strictly localised, isolated observances. In the lives of his missionary saints, we see a call to foster networks of Christian praxis between secular and monastic worlds, between geographically distant places, and between items in the *sanctorale*. I ended with the tantalizing image of Ælfric, travelling nearly seventy miles to

the newly (re)founded Cerne, equipped with books from Winchester – embodying the sense of widening community and the importance of non-local knowledge that can be found within his description of missionary activity.

Luisa Ostachinni

University of Oxford

Formulaic wordplay in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle Poem ‘On the Redemption of the Five Boroughs’

The main aim of the paper ‘Formulaic wordplay in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* Poems’, given by Professor Inna Matyushina, was to suggest a new (functional) approach to the study of stylistic wordplay in the poetic annals of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, in the context of revising the theory of oral-formulaic composition. She focused her analysis on the poem ‘On the Redemption of the Five Boroughs’ included into four manuscripts of the *Chronicle* (the Parker, Worcester and both Abingdon

manuscripts) for the year 942. The poem celebrates King Edmund’s conquest of Leicester, Nottingham, Derby, Lincoln, Stamford, which brought back under Wessex rule what had been lost to Óláfr Guðfriðarson, and thus reconstructed the spatial wholeness of the realm.

The redemption of the Five Boroughs is depicted by the creator of the poem as a campaign for the liberation of the enslaved population of Mercia.

Formulaic phraseology depicts Edmund as an active hero: he is an ‘accomplisher of deeds’ (*dædfruma*), ‘defender of warriors’ (*wiggendra bleo*), ‘guardian of kinsmen’ (*mæcgea mundbora*), whereas the Danes are presented as passive subjects, bound by the fetters of heathendom. By going through Mercia, Edmund opens up the space to which the Danes were confined and becomes the protector and the guardian of the redeemed land.

The thirteen lines of the *Chronicle* poem are laden with formulaic denotations of the ruler, which play on models which were productive in skaldic poetry: the

model underlying the formula ‘the ruler of the Angles’, *Engla þeoden* follows the model widely spread in skaldic panegyrics (cf. *Hǫrða konungr* ‘the King of the Hǫrðar’, i.e. people of Hordaland, BI 119, 13 in Einarr Helgason skálaglamm’s *Vellekla*; *Jóta gramr*, ‘the prince of the Jutes’, *Hǫrða dróttinn* ‘the ruler of the Hǫrðar’, BI 306, 1 in the *drápa* for Magnus the Good *Hrynhenda* by Arnórr Þórðarson jarlaskáld). The effect of accumulating formulaic denotations of the ruler is to focus the attention of a contemporary audience on what he has achieved: honorific titles indicate that the king has successfully protected the space he is responsible for.

Formulaic wordplay in the poem ‘On the Redemption of the Five Boroughs’ establishes an association between the Northmen (who forced the Danes to heathendom in the poem ‘On the Redemption of the Five Boroughs’) and their ruler Óláfr Guðfriðarson (Anlaf, who forced by necessity, had to escape from the Battle of Brunanburh), which

was most likely perceived by a contemporary audience. The use of the epic formula *lange þrage* (employed in *Beowulf*, *Genesis A* and in the poem ‘On the Redemption of the Five Boroughs’ in which it is stated that the Northmen, i.e. Óláfr Guðfriðarson, subjected the Danes to heathendom for ‘a long time’) can also be interpreted as an example of wordplay, as according to the chronology of Simeon of Durham Olaf could not have been ruling the Five Boroughs for more than two years. In all three texts the formula *lange þrage* appears in the context of heathendom. In the *Chronicle* poem it is employed in the context of fighting against the heathens (*hæþena*), the Northmen (*Norðmenn*), who invaded England together with Olaf Guðfriðarson and are distinguished from the Danes, the second or third generation of the Vikings who settled in the British Isles and adopted Christianity.

The semantics and the compositional role of the formulaic systems were analysed in the paper in order to show that formulaic wordplay in the *Chronicle*

poems takes on new functions, responsible for conveying additional implications. Formulas are used in the poem 'On the Redemption of the Five Boroughs' in order to unfold images and motifs with the purpose of establishing associations with traditional motifs and imagery of heroic and Christian poetry. The use of individual formulas was shown to bestow on them associations with entire formulaic systems, enabling the creator of the poem to bring into prominence key motifs of their components.

Professor Inna Matyushina

Russian State University for the
Humanities,
University of Exeter

Old English Online: Designing and Creating a Digital Resource for Medieval Language Learning

The primary aim behind Old English Online is to create a comprehensive, interactive platform optimised for

learning medieval languages online. As a first step, the needs of Old English learners and educators were assessed through interviews at multiple institutions, and a design in-line with cognitive theories of learning was conceptualised, prototyped and iteratively tested. In my paper, I presented the following design requirements which my research has established are necessary to meet the needs of the broadest range of users and levels of learner:

- 1) The resource must be device and browser agnostic.
- 2) It must be free to use.
- 3) It must be open-source and web accessibility compliant.
- 4) The environment must require the minimum amount of cognitive processing.
- 5) Elements of grammar should be split into self-contained modules subdivided into topics.

- 6) Topics must only cover a single grammatical point at a time.
- 7) Learners must be free to start at any module they want.
- 8) Navigational aids must assist learners in making rational choices in where to go and what to do.
- 9) Explanatory materials should be accompanied by worked examples.
- 10) Learners should fill-in answers rather than select pre-prepared ones.
- 11) Feedback must be explanatory as well as corrective.
- 12) Explanatory materials must be downloadable in a printer-friendly format.
- 13) Enough practice material must be provided to enable repeated practice.
- 14) Practice questions should only display a maximum of five questions at a time.
- 15) Practice material should be drawn from existing texts as much as possible.

- 16) Every module should finish with an overview that presents its content in a condensed way for quick reference.

To see how we implemented the above requirements, you can view the project at: oldenglish.info.

Development of the project is ongoing.

Victoria Koivisto-Kokko
University College Cork

Verbal Acuity: A Quiz-Bowl-Style Old English Teaching Tool

“Making learning fun” is the goal of most, if not all, teachers. In a class like Old English, where paradigms and vocabulary drills still feature in the most common textbooks, bringing a sense of play into the classroom is a challenge. It can be tempting to shortchange the basics of grammar and philology in favor of more openly engaging activities like translation and discussion of cultural history, but I would like to suggest that

games and competition can both incentivize and solidify otherwise rote memorization. In this paper, I shared one game that I have developed for my Old English classes. The trivia-based format splits the class into teams that race to answer questions of increasing difficulty about conjugation, declension, pronouns, sound changes, and other grammar basics. The game usually functions as a review ahead of a midterm or final exam.

The game, Verbal Acuity, follows a quiz-bowl format. The class splits randomly into teams of four to five people, and they take a few minutes to pick a fun name for their team before play begins. Teams can choose from a range of categories: PRONOUNS, NOUNS, WEAK VERBS, STRONG VERBS, ADJECTIVES, PARSING PARADISE, and GERMAN GRAMMARIANS. Each category contains five questions of increasing difficulty worth correspondingly increasing points. The questions range from general knowledge, such as defining Verner's Law, to specific tasks like parsing a verb or writing out

the paradigm for a noun. Once the board is cleared of all questions, each team bets points on a Final Jeopardy question. Best of all, when reviewing for an exam is this much fun, everyone wins.

Playing Verbal Acuity accomplishes several pedagogical goals. First, it inspires collaborative learning. Teams work together to jog each other's memories and correct one another's mistakes. Second, it functions as exam preparation. The quiz questions tell students exactly what they need to know for the exam. It also functions as a review guide; getting questions wrong lets students know what they need to focus on as they're studying, and getting them right helps to affirm their confidence. Finally, it's a wonderful way to build community. There's always a lot of laughing and joking, and playing together is a way to become comfortable working and studying together, even outside of the classroom.

Incorporating games has helped me to address some of the particular challenges of teaching Old English at a large public

research university. The course, which is open to both graduate and undergraduate students, draws participants from all across campus: a fair number of English majors and a few linguists, but also students in fields like biology, engineering, art history, mathematics, education, and computer science. As a result, my Old English classroom could include students ranging from first-semester freshmen all the way to dissertating graduate students, with tremendous variation in levels of experience with foreign-language learning. Play and competition allow this diverse group to come together in collaboration, learn from one another, and have some fun as they work to master the basic linguistic and grammatical skills necessary to read Old English.

Renée R. Trilling

University of Illinois at Urbana-
Champaign

Learning Old English vocabulary: Compounds, Cognates, and Calques

One of the challenges of any new language, including Old English, is learning the vocabulary. Teachers of Old English have many resources at their disposal: custom glossaries in readers and on websites; word lists (Stephen Barney, Francis Magoun); full scale dictionaries (Clark Hall, Bosworth-Toller, the Toronto DOE). Glossing any text confronts the enduring question of literal meaning versus contextual sense, the letter versus the *andgit*. I have found that most of the teaching materials intended for beginners needlessly obscure the literal meanings of Old English words in favor of context-specific glosses that draw upon unrelated semantic elements. Students then face feats of memorization rather than an organic process of meaning making that a more literal (and fun) approach can provide. This paper reviewed some examples of words and compound words from standard Old English texts that map particularly well onto Modern English

cognates, and that can be rendered into memorable (and fun) calques; that is, a word for word substitution.

A few conclusions as we teach beginners:

- Some Old English words have no modern English cognate, so the gloss is the gloss. E.g. *fæce*, *bryre*.
- Other words have a cognate, but the meaning has shifted. E.g. *mod*.
- Distinctive words should be explained but not translated. E.g. *nyrd*. *hwæt*. *Scop*.
- Cruces should be acknowledged as *loci desperati* and should not take up too much class time. E.g. *anhaga*.
- Compounds should be split and roots should be identified. Compounds should then become calques. Old English poetry in particular is full of nonce words and *hapax legomena*. Compounds also comport with the Old English

poetic practice of variation and doubling.

Therefore, when it comes to translating poetry, we should honor the imaginative leap taken by the poet, and our students should arrive at the meaning via a comparable route.

James H. Morey

Emory University

Playfully Reviving Old English at Aberdeen

This presentation demonstrated the new plans for teaching Old English at the University of Aberdeen. We have revived and adapted the original Aberdeen language course for a new generation. The book *Learning Old English* and the accompanying three cassette tapes were originally created by the late Dr Duncan Macrae-Gibson, who taught Old English and Old Norse at Aberdeen for many years. Zhangfeng Xu and I have designed a new, multimedia edition of the course, comprising a book with an audio-visual

CD included in the back cover. This has now been published by Aberdeen University Press.

How did we re-edit the original course for the users of today? We retained the existing structure of the book: eight lessons including text, pronunciation points, idioms from the text, a grammar section, and written exercises. We created an audio-visual CD to accompany the book; the CD files are downloadable to a device of the user's choice. These PowerPoint files incorporate the original spoken recordings from the original cassette tapes, to which the English Faculty Library at Oxford kindly provided access. The slides also include the text of each lesson, audio-visual pronunciation practice and idiom practice, expanded from the book, and the main points of grammar of each lesson with additions as needed. We obviously retained the fun questions and quizzes, and Dr Macrae-Gibson's challenging grammar drills at the end of each lesson. Zhangfeng Xu worked on the design of the CD files and integrated

the sound recordings, thanks to a grant from the Lynne Grundy Memorial Trust.

While the project was ongoing we sent material to a test panel of students and colleagues, who provided useful feedback; some even tackled the written exercises also. In this presentation I passed around the prototype of the new course book, and demonstrated PowerPoints from the audio-visual CD: for example, the introductory advice to the user, and examples to illustrate the variety in presentation and structure of the course lessons. The book and the CD are designed to complement each other. The course is suitable for classroom settings or independent study, and will form an essential part of our degree programme.

Questions or suggestions from users or teachers are very welcome and will be incorporated into future editions of the course.

Aideen M. O'Leary
Aberdeen University

Let them be vlogged! Video assignments for the Old English classroom

In my third-year, advanced Old English literature course, I have students make team videos (vlogs) as a replacement for traditional in-class presentations. I started this practice some five years ago, when I had students participate in ‘the Norman VlogQuest’ – rather than giving a lecture on the events leading up to the Norman Conquest and its aftermath, I would give each group of students one aspect of the Norman Conquest to work out in a video.⁴ One group would introduce the Bayeux Tapestry, for instance, while others would tackle such subjects as William the Conqueror, the Domesday Book, the Three Battles of 1066, the Harrowing of the North, Edward the Atheling and so on. Our class on the Norman Conquest would consist of watching and discussing the videos made by the students. Since the format of the

videos was entirely free (apart from a length limitation of six minutes), the class stood out for its eclectic nature: some groups would have made informative PowerPoints with a voiceover, while others spoofed such reality shows as *Keeping up with the Kardashians* as *Keeping up with the Godwinsons*. The students rated this class very highly: they learned a lot and were happy to experiment with a new form of presenting information (often, students dread having to stand in front of a group, with only a PowerPoint presentation to back them up). As their tutor, I too enjoyed this class immensely and was particularly happy to have more in-class time in the other weeks of the course, since I did not need to incorporate a weekly student in-class presentation. However, I found it hard to judge the quality of the videos, in particular because most of them dealt with factual information (dates, names, events) and did not necessarily need to incorporate secondary literature of a

⁴ For a description of this practice and the rationale behind it, see Thijs Porck & Jodie Mann, “Blanded leorning: Three Digital Approaches to Teaching Old English”, *TOEBI Newsletter* 34 (2017), 5-13, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17613/M6WH2DD8B>.

more interpretative nature and/or analysis of primary material. Often, what distinguished the various videos was the ability of the groups to work with video-editing software, rather than their appropriate handling of available source material and existing scholarship.

Therefore, to improve my video assignment, I decided to go down a different route in subsequent years, focusing on the Exeter Book Riddles rather than the Norman Conquest.

In the new format, each group was assigned an Exeter Book riddle and they were tasked to make a video outlining the argumentation for at least two or three different answers, on the basis of existing scholarship; at the end of the video, they had to make a case for the answer that convinced them most. To ensure that they had an appropriate amount of material to work with, I selected a number of the shorter riddles for which multiple answers have been suggested. The following nine riddles made the cut:

Riddle 13: Butterfly cocoon; Alphabet; Moth; Fingers and gloves; Ten chickens; Ten pheasants

Riddle 17: Ballista; Fortress; Oven; Town; Forge; Inkwell; Phallus

Riddle 52: Buckets; Broom; Flail; Yoken oxen led into barn by servantress

Riddle 54: Baker's boy and oven; Churn; Intercourse; Phallus

Riddle 64: Ringtailed peacock; Snake eating a bird; Horseman and hawk; Horseman; Horseman hawk servant; Falconry; Writing; Hunting; Ship

Riddle 70: Shepherd's Pipe; Rye flute; Harp; Hurdygurdy; Organistrum; Shuttle

Riddle 74: Cuttlefish; Siren; Water; Swan; Soul; Rain; Writing; Sea eagle; Ship's figurehead; Not a riddle

Riddle 81: Ship; Visored helmet; Weathercock; Man

Riddle 91: Key; Sickle; Keyhole; Phallus

The numbers are those of the ASPR edition by Krapp and Dobbie and the answers are those provided by Donald K. Fry in his "Exeter Book Riddle Solutions", *Old English Newsletter* 15 (1981): 22–33, who also links to literature

for these solutions.⁵ Of course, students were also told to look for more recent scholarship on the riddles and many of them did, especially since more recent monographs on the riddles by Mercedes Salvador-Bello, Dieter Bitterli and Patrick J. Murphy are available online via Leiden University Library's catalogue.⁶ Students were also directed to the very rich and informative *Riddle Ages* blog and they were all asked to read an introductory chapter by Jonathan Wilcox to make sure they each had the same amount of background information about the riddles more generally.⁷

The form of the video assignment was still free, barring the length limitation of six to seven minutes, and the group entries were therefore still highly varied. Some took the form of PowerPoint slides with voice-overs, others used animations or stopmotion capture to

make their vlogs, while one group made a spoof panel show *Riddle Solvers* with a variety of stuffed animals in the role of various riddle scholars arguing for their own solutions (see figures 1-4 for examples). For me as a teacher, this variety in form had a much smaller impact on how I could grade the contents of the videos than with the Norman VlogQuest, since each video, in its own unique way, had to incorporate secondary scholarship and demonstrate the arguments that scholars made (e.g., how they interpreted a particular word or phrase). The stuffed animal panel show, in fact, did this remarkably well, despite using an awkward 'Allo 'Allo!-like accent for the plushy owl that purported to be a German scholar. I could grade their videos on the basis of how accurately they treated existing scholarship and how they handled the primary source material

⁵ Fry's article is available at http://www.oenewsletter.org/OEN/archive/OEN15_1.pdf

⁶ Mercedes Salvador-Bello, *Isidorean Perceptions of Order: The Exeter Book Riddles and Medieval Latin Enigmata* (Morgantown, 2014); Dieter Bitterli, *Say What I Am Called: The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book & the Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition* (Toronto, 2009); Patrick J. Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles* (University Park, PA, 2011).

⁷ *The Riddle Ages: Old English Riddles, Translations and Commentaries*, ed. by Megan Cavell, with Victoria Symons, and Matthias Ammon (2013-), <https://theriddleages.wordpress.com>. Jonathan Wilcox, "'Tell me what I am': The Old English Riddles", in *Readings in Medieval Texts. Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature*, ed. David F. Johnson and Elaine Treharne (Oxford, 2005), 46–59.

to back up their own solutions. Since each group made a different kind of video and each treated a different riddle, the class in which we watched all of their products was as varied and entertaining as the Norman VlogQuest class and students thoroughly enjoyed it.

While I still value traditional in-class presentations as a way to help students get experience in presenting their own research, the digital video format has a number of advantages. The fact that they had to work together to make the videos, as well as the knowledge that their products would be watched by the whole group, encouraged co-operation and critical reflection among the students. As part of the assignment, they had to fill in a group assessment form in which they had to describe how they had divided the tasks and how they had worked together; they were also asked to write short and balanced reviews of the videos made by other groups. Many found these forms of assessing themselves and the works of

others as enlightening as doing the assignment itself. Most significantly, the multimodal format of making a video forced students to try out new techniques to present their knowledge. The assignment stimulated the students' creativity and gave them a chance to work together and practice new skills, such as animation and digital video editing. Presenting complex material in a video-format prepares our students for knowledge work in the 21st century, during which many people turn to video platforms such as YouTube for educational material.⁸ So, if you are considering incorporating student presentations into your course, but you are not willing to sacrifice in-class time, let them be vlogged!

Thijs Porck
Leiden University

⁸See, e.g., <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/11/07/many-turn-to-youtube-for-childrens-content-news-how-to-lessons/>

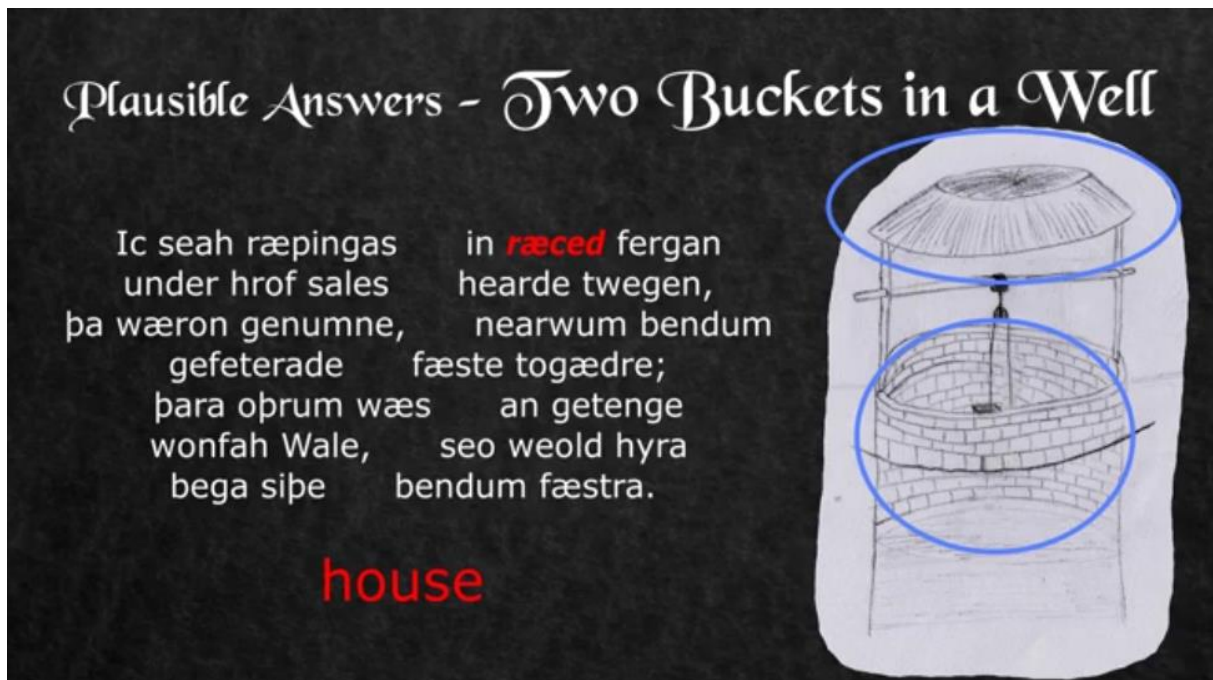


Fig. 1. Still from a vlog about Riddle 17, illustrating the interpretation of *ræced* 'house'.

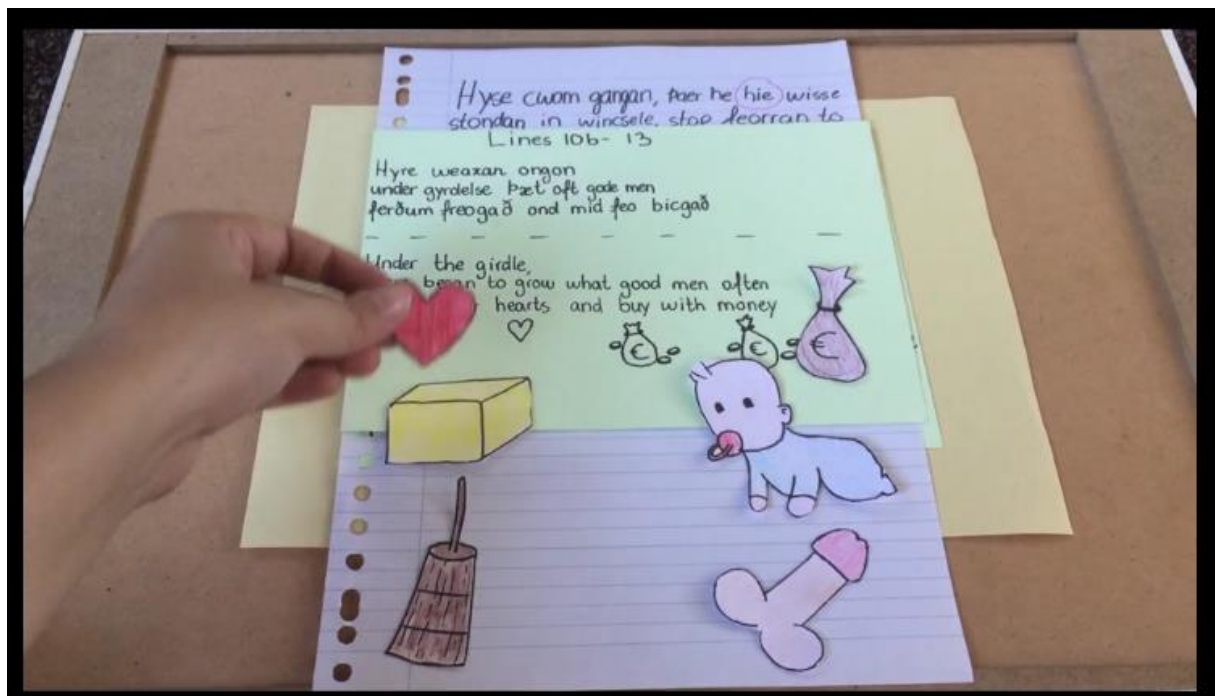


Fig. 2. Still from a vlog about Riddle 54, showing paper cut-outs of possible solutions.



Fig. 3. Still from a vlog about Riddle 13. The gameshow *Riddle Solvers* with among its contestants Franz E.

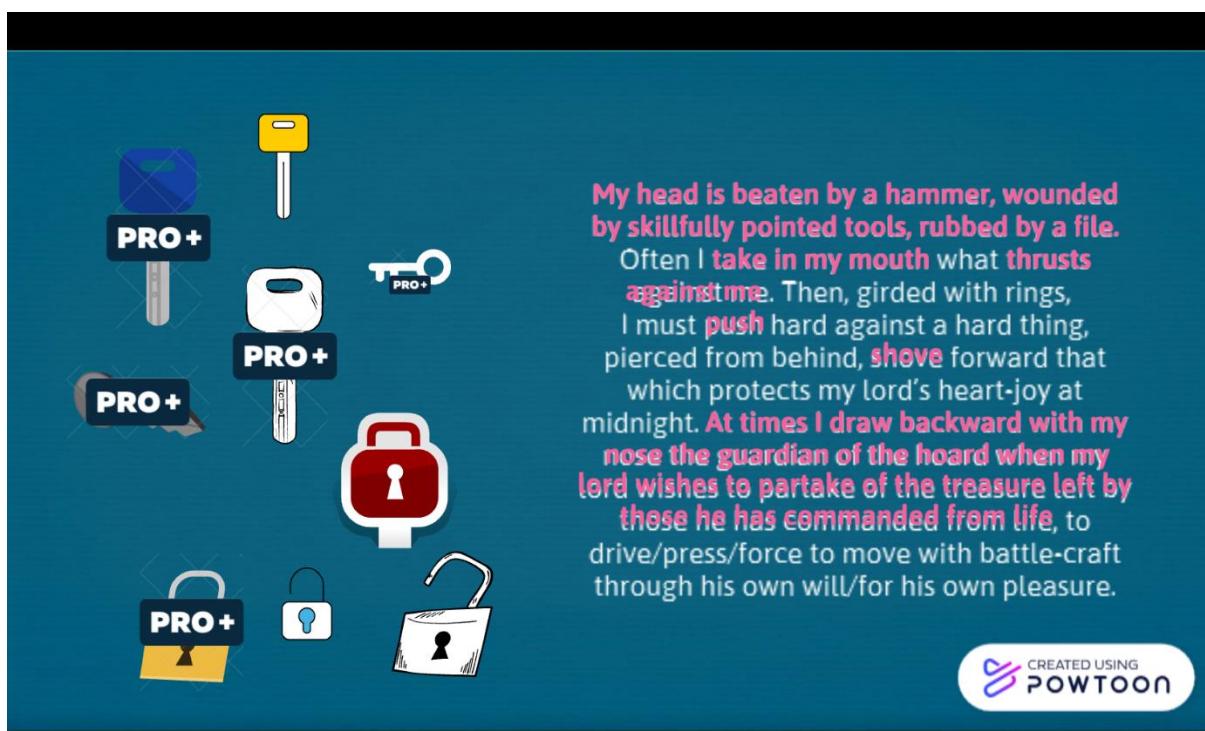


Fig. 4. Still from vlog about Riddle 91, an animation that highlights phrases in the translation that support the solution 'key'.

‘New Old English: Performance, Poetry, Practice’

Last year Megan Cavell kindly invited me to be part of a roundtable on ‘Playful Pedagogies’ at the TOEBI conference in Manchester in October 2019. The paper I gave was on a project that was just beginning, a Creative Fellowship pilot at UCL called ‘New Old English: Performance, Poetry, Practice’. The Fellowship provided funding to bring Rowan Evans and Maisie Newman, who together make two halves of the collaborative, Bristol-based performance company Fen, to UCL to redevelop ‘WULF’, their performance piece produced in response to the Old English elegy ‘Wulf and Eadwacer’.

Since the TOEBI conference the project had progressed a lot (in October it had just launched with a single workshop) and then was brought to a halt by a global pandemic. Rowan and Maisie haven’t let this stop them, however, and the last time I spoke to them over Zoom the purchase of some walkie-talkies had

prompted a revelation about the ways in which ‘Wulf and Eadwacer’ is an ideal poem for thinking through issues of remoteness and distance. This is a poem designed for ghostly voices and the haunting of environmental sounds.

Hopefully in the not-too distant future there will be an opportunity for people to hear, and perhaps also to participate in, this new iteration of ‘WULF’, whether out on the Somerset Levels, at UCL, or online.

In my paper at TOEBI I reflected on the feedback our Old English students had offered in response to the first workshop for the project. This workshop drew on Rowan’s poetic practice and focused on homophonic translation. Participants were given texts in Old English, Old Norse and Old Irish and were asked to choose the language they were least familiar with, producing translations that were based on sounds and aural associations only. The results were free, playful, and often a little nonsensical. In their feedback our Old English literature students wrote about how the workshop

had demonstrated ‘how dynamic the act of translation can be’, suggesting that it had ‘broken down the barriers’ of what they understood ‘legitimate’ approaches to translation to be. This was a positive beginning for our collaboration with Rowan and Maisie: the workshop had provided license to be creative, enabling students to access the pleasures of translation and to understand this pleasure as a ‘legitimate’ response to reading early medieval texts.

As the project developed with more workshops and events centred around contemporary experimental translation, performing writing and writing for performance, as well as performance, ritual and magic, something slightly unexpected happened. Our audience expanded well beyond the Old English students I had initially imagined the project as being primarily for. The workshops were filled with everyone from artists and architects from the Slade and the Bartlett, to undergraduates in literature, languages and even medicine.

‘New Old English’ was suddenly providing an opportunity to think not just about how creative practices might open up Old English texts in new and productive ways for students of medieval literature, but how we might make early medieval texts accessible as a creative resource for people from a range of different disciplinary backgrounds. In the feedback for one of the later workshops, which had participants rolling around the floor of UCL’s theatrical studio space and devising a performance piece in response to ‘Wulf and Eadwacer’, one participant wrote: ‘It made me realise how experimental and exciting Old English literature can be – full of imagination and images’.

Fran Brooks

University College London

Playing with Sound

It takes many years to acquire the philological skills to analyse the metre, phonetics, and poetic skill of Old English poetry, but it is possible to approach the

appreciation of these things from another direction, through play. In a module taught jointly by members of the English and Drama department at Royal Holloway, University of London, students were encouraged to play with the sounds of Old English poetry and to create performances that combined those sounds and structured movements. It would have been perfectly acceptable for these students to have simply taken disjointed noises and created something new from them, but all three groups made a real effort, through their independent research, to create performances that reached back to something 'authentic' (their term) from Old English poetry. At the TOEBI meeting, I played a clip from one of

these performances, in which the group had taken a substantial amount of the text of *The Wife's Lament* and put it to the tune of an old folk song, which they sang while performing dances that enacted the movement of a character who, at first fully integrated in society, found herself gradually alienated and lost in the natural world. The freedom that the instructors allowed to the students encouraged them to pursue the correct pronunciation of the Old English sounds (they were very particular about that!), ideas about oral tradition and performance, well-known scholarship on the theme of exile, and new scholarship on eco-criticism.

Jennifer Neville

Royal Holloway, University of London

Safe is that Island: *Illustrating the Exeter*

Book Elegies

Like most people familiar with the Old English elegies, I met them as an undergraduate. I was in thrall from the moment the narrator of *Wulf and Eadwacer* led me into her world of whelps and weeping. We students were then introduced to *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, men mocked by sea-birds and fate. I pored over *The Ruin*, with its long-dead giants, *The Wife's Lament*, with its watchful midnight sun and *The Husband's Message*. I could hardly believe the ancient poems' emotional force.

In my second year I left the elegies and Old English behind to become an art historian of later medieval illuminated manuscripts. By the time I had finished my thesis, I had migrated to the fourteenth century, to the literary landscapes of Arthur, Alexander and Brutus, to manuscript margins riddled with hybrid creatures and to bellicose narrative miniatures. In late 2018, I thought I'd make some such miniatures myself. I began illustrating Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, among other later medieval texts, in linocut print. In early 2020 when I started to experiment with wood-engraving.

Wood engraving is the technique of carving minute lines into the dense end-grain of slow-growing timbers like box or maple wood. Once the lines have been incised, ink is applied to the surface of the small block and an impression taken on paper. The ink does not enter the incisions, so they appear white on the finished print. Attracted as I was to the aesthetic - the tiny lines, the motif-like quality of the images, the darkness of the traditional black ink - I had not yet decided what subject would suit the medium best.

I graduated from my PhD in the first month of lockdown and it was about the time that I found my thoughts wandering back to the very first texts I had studied as an undergraduate: the Old English elegies. Their themes of transience, isolation and exile seemed to reflect society's mood in these strange times. It was then that I knew what to depict. I fetched my maple-wood blocks.

I began with *Wulf and Eadwacer*, as I had a decade earlier. The scene shows two figures watching each other, each on an island, one near, one far:

*Wulf is on eglond ic on opere,
Fæst is þæt eglond fenne biworpon.*

Next, I turned to *The Wife's Lament*, in which the narrator must sit all the summer-long day in a cave under an oak tree:

eald is þes eorðsele eall ic eom oflongad.

An image inspired by *The Seafarer* followed soon after. The figure is just visible through the mist and ice-sheets breast the water before him:

winter wunade nræccan lastum.

Finally came *The Husband's Message*, that ode to togetherness narrated by a block of wood. I copied the design for *Wulf and Eadwacer*, except now the couple is united:

*Ne læt þū þec sippān sipes getwæfan,
lade gelettan lifgendne monn.*

The four engravings trace a narrative from separation to the promise of reunion and their Modern English titles are, I hope, true to the emotional sense of the original text:

*Wulf is on an island, I am on another
Safe is that island, surrounded by fens*

*Old is this earth-hall, I am all longing
I dwelt for a winter in paths of exile*

Let no-one deter you from the journey

While these will always be for me a memento of those first months of global existential angst, I fear that, in mining the Exeter Book poems for consolation, I missed the most important words of all:

*Þæs ofereode,
þisses swa mæg*

*That passed
So may this*

Amy Jeffs

To see all four Elegy prints, please visit amyjeffshistoria.com/medieval-poetry



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From Old English to Old English Online

It seems that most teachers in higher education could see what their institutions apparently could not: that committing to in-person teaching in this autumn semester of 2020 was at best wildly optimistic about the course of the pandemic and at worst a little reckless when it came to their duty of care to staff and students. Some universities seem to be soldiering on with a 'blended' approach of some face-to-face meetings and some online teaching, whilst others have been forced into virtual lockdown. UCC perhaps fared better than most: even though the decision to move online was not taken until the Friday before term started, the administration responded to the reality of the situation quickly. Now all undergraduate teaching is likely to be online for the remainder of the semester.

Many of us have struggled with this sudden (though predictable) 'pivot' from in-class teaching to online

delivery. As colleagues in modern languages have reminded us, it is a transition that is particularly hard to make when it comes to language classes. Traditional language-learning pedagogy relies on a great deal of contact and interplay between teacher and students, and the ability to give 'real time' feedback. On the other hand, when it comes to Old English, the ideal situation of small language classes is no longer compatible with the ratio of students to instructors: at UCC we regularly have over 100 students taking 'An Introduction to Old English' in second year, and accommodating some six or seven tutorial groups has become increasingly hard to justify and increasingly difficult to deliver. For this reason, a decision to move Old English 'online' was taken several years ago, with the aim of using the superbly designed <http://www.wordloca.com/> developed by Juliet Mullins and Katie Long initially, but transitioning

eventually to an open-source tool devised by Victoria Koivisto-Kokko. In the event, that transition came about more quickly thanks to a small grant from Ireland's National Forum for the Development of Teaching and Learning. For the past year – and long before Covid was on the horizon – Victoria and I have been working to develop an online introduction to Old English suitable for a single semester module.

Victoria's *Old English Online* site, which many of you would have seen presented at TOEBI 2019, grew out of her MA dissertation in Digital Humanities, and applies best practice in cognitive science of language acquisition and online pedagogy to learning Old English, with the aim of making an introductory course that was easy to navigate, open-source, and extensible to other medieval languages. We have collaborated on the latter stages of www.oldenglish.info – working frantically through the second half of the summer to get it 'oven

ready' for the start of term – in order to produce what we hope will come to be an important new tool for self-study of Old English. The structure of the site is straightforward. Students progress through discrete online modules, and complete translation and grammar quizzes (based on a selection of sentences from a larger question bank) at the end of each page. Some more difficult material is 'gated' by the use of drop down tabs and terminology is explained with a hover function, with the aim of accommodating the vastly different levels of language experience in the typical second year intake. My role as instructor isn't made obsolete by the online course: I am supplementing each module with short videos explaining key concepts and responding to student questions, as well as running discussion fora and setting assessments. It is hoped that this format will enable us to keep large numbers of students learning the basics of Old English in Cork, but in a more interactive format than a twice weekly

lecture. Whilst it is tailored particularly to our needs at UCC – Victoria was herself a student of the Old English language module as an undergraduate – we hope that after its testing and refinement this year, oldenglish.info will eventually be used as a resource at other institutions (particularly those that also have large intakes of students relative to staff) and that those people

interested in the language but without access to higher education will also be able to benefit. We'd welcome any feedback on this 'beta' version of the site from TOEBI members, and particularly suggestions for additional features.

Tom Birkett
University College Cork

Learning Old English: A Course with Audio-Visual CD and Exercises

Edited by Aideen M. O'Leary and Zhangfeng Xu

A new multimedia edition of the University of Aberdeen language course created by

Dr Duncan Macrae-Gibson

Published November 2019

Available from Aberdeen University Press

The Electronic Corpus of Anonymous Homilies in Old English (ECHOE) and the Teaching of Old English

Currently in preparation, under the aegis of the ECHOE project, is an online and interactive digital corpus that will make available all the individual manuscript versions of the surviving Old English anonymous and Wulfstanian homilies and saints' lives. The central aim of the project is to enrich our knowledge of the anonymous preaching texts composed in early medieval England and their European source tradition. Based at the University of Göttingen, the ECHOE project was initially established with the support of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (which generously awarded me an Anneliese Maier Award for 2015-20), and is now funded by a European Research Council grant awarded to Professor Winfried Rudolf at Göttingen.

A digital corpus is better suited than a print one to a study of the homiletic genre. For practical reasons editors of print editions of homilies generally choose a base text, from which they produce an idealised text by collating that base text with variant readings in a critical apparatus. There are some exceptions to this practice of course, such as Donald Scragg's parallel printing of related Old English textual units in his 1992 edition of *The Vercelli Homilies* (Early English Text Society o.s. 300). But the print medium does not lend itself to this kind of edition. Print editions of homilies can end up presenting a distorted picture: not only does their main (idealised) text often differ from any existing manuscript copy, but also, by relegating the numerous variants to an apparatus, they obscure the complex network of

interactions amongst the different versions. Seeing how this network of interactions works in the homilies is, however, vital for understanding the significance and popularity of the preaching tradition.

A new digital Old English homiletic corpus will provide the opportunity to explore the complex textual interrelationships of the homilies, and also to analyse the ways in which vernacular preachers adapted their sources. As well as presenting all the extant versions of the anonymous and Wulfstanian homilies, ECHOE will identify particular thematic units within the corpus and mark up important differences across parallel manuscript versions. Tools will be provided through ECHOE to help scholars analyse strategies of composition, variation, and revision by homilists. These features will facilitate the unravelling of the intricate patterns and layers of textual overlap that so characterise the homilies' transmission. ECHOE will shed light on wide-

ranging questions such as how preaching texts were composed in early medieval England, and how authors responded to the constantly changing political and social circumstances that confronted them and their audiences.

ECHOE will be an invaluable resource not only for scholars but also for teachers of Old English. First of all, it will open up a whole range of texts for teaching which have not hitherto been easily accessible. Homilies – especially anonymous ones – tend to be marginalised in the teaching of Old English, despite the fact that a fifth of the surviving Old English corpus consists of anonymous homilies. Ready on-line availability of these texts (to be accompanied in due course by translations) makes them a more attractive prospect for teaching. Secondly, ECHOE will lend itself to demonstrating the textual instability inherent in early medieval manuscript culture. So, for example, it will be possible to take a particular thematic unit – whether it be the Signs of

Doomsday, or the Five Forms of Hell, or the Devil's Account of the Next World – and use the marked up variants across parallel manuscript versions to illustrate how texts are adapted in transmission to fit their changing reception in different historical contexts. Thirdly, ECHOE will provide a useful resource for teaching how early medieval writers exploit genre and form, through its marking up not only of the generic and formal conventions of homilies, but also of the points at which generic and formal boundaries can be seen to blur: in these homilies (as elsewhere in Old English) the movement between poetry and prose can be a fluid one, and different genres – dramatic dialogue and penitential, for example, or prayer and encyclopaedic list – can sit more or less comfortably alongside one another. ECHOE will be helpful, too, in teaching how vernacular homilists have adapted Latin sources in composing their texts, and the importance of consulting such sources for

understanding both the works themselves and the intellectual and pastoral priorities that prompted their production. Furthermore, ECHOE will make a significant contribution to the teaching of palaeography. Wherever possible, links to digital images of the relevant manuscript pages will be supplied, enabling analysis of individual hands or changes in script across different times and places, and allowing the plethora of editorial decisions that intervene between manuscript and modern critical text to be fully evident. Finally, ECHOE will be able to assist in the teaching of the early history and development of the English language. Since any two or more parallel passages can be compared with each other, it will be possible to select and juxtapose early and late versions for the purpose of demonstrating linguistic change. In pedagogical contexts, then, ECHOE can be used to explore how the distinctive features of Old English – lexical, syntactic, and orthographical – are modified up to and through the

transitional period that leads into Middle English.

ECHOE will be open access, and linked where possible to other relevant digital initiatives such as Oxford's CLASP (Consolidated Library of Anglo-Saxon Poetry). Further details,

with a link to ECHOE, will be available in due course on TOEBI's website: in the words of Cædmon, "Wuton we wel þære tide bidan" (Let us eagerly await that time).

Susan Irvine

University College London

Did you know?

The TOEBI website keeps a curated collection of links to resources for teaching (and studying) Old English, including:

- online courses/exercises
- online dictionaries
- digital editions of OE texts
- digitized manuscripts
- databases in OE studies • blogs
- videos
- Unicode font
- learned societies
- and more <http://www.toebi.org.uk/> resources/

Boyo-wulf

In early 2019, I started the process of translating the Old English epic *Beowulf* into the (often exaggerated) dialect of my home city of Cork, which lies on the southern coast of Ireland. Founded as a monastic settlement by Saint Finbar in the sixth century, later occupied by Viking settlers, Anglo-Norman invaders, and Cromwellian colonisers, and having served as a haven for French Huguenots and Lithuanian Jews, Cork has a rich history, and, consequently, a rich vocabulary. As a place suffering from ‘second city syndrome’, and whose occupants often refer to it as ‘the real capital’, there is a pride surrounding the traditions and distinct dialect found in Cork, and this is only bolstered by the strong-rooted storytelling culture found there and throughout the rest of Ireland.

Beowulf is one of the most popular texts in the early medieval tradition, and a poem that has often served as a

blueprint from which new narratives are laid down, leading to an abundance of translations and adaptations. I, therefore, wanted to add my own voice to a growing history of *Beowulf* reception. Initially begun as a fun project, *Boyo-wulf* has become somewhat more serious – translation, after all, is a lot more complex than it initially appears. How do we translate terms for which we do not have equivalents? How do we translate the work of a culture that we know, relatively speaking, quite little about?

While the first contributors to translation theory, such as Cicero in the first century BCE, debated the merits of word-for-word versus sense-for-sense translation, more recent translation theory deals with cultural, feminist, and postcolonial approaches to the process. As a young feminist living in a 21st century postcolonial Ireland, my translation of *Beowulf*, dialect aside, will no doubt differ in

approach than that by someone else. As Hugh Magennis states, "each translator produces an individual take on *Beowulf* and presents a particular interpretation. All translation, as with reading, is interpretation, by nature always partial and incomplete, and singular."⁹

There is also the issue of how language and dialect affect translation, and how that language subsequently affects how a translation is interpreted and understood by the reader or listener. This is especially the case when translating into an extremely localized dialect – those not familiar with Cork slang may find the experience of reading *Boyo-wulf* quite perplexing. For a Cork native, however, it would be much more understandable, and perhaps even more so than other translations of the poem, of which

William Morris's comes to mind, once described by Nicholas Howe as "an unreadable *Beowulf* written in a variety of English never used by any human being known to have walked on this planet."¹⁰

Much of the translation uses recognisably and uniquely Cork slang, such as feen ("man", borrowed from Shelta),¹¹ gaff ("house"), class ("great"), young fella ("son"), and langer, which has possible origins with the Munster Fusiliers who were stationed in India and had to deal with the long-tailed and annoying langur monkeys.¹² Some of the language used in the translation is not necessarily restricted to the locality of Cork, but has a wider Irish usage. However, one could argue that half of what makes the Cork dialect unique, is not the vocabulary, but the sing-song, often hard to understand, accent.

⁹ Hugh Magennis, *Translating Beowulf: Modern Versions in English Verse* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), 2

¹⁰ Nicholas Howe, "Who's Afraid of Translating *Beowulf*?" *Beowulf at Kalamazoo: Essays on Translation and Performance*, edited by Jana K. Schulman and Paul E. Szarmach (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2014) 32

¹¹ It is important to recognise the large borrowing of slang terms from Shelta (or Cant), a language spoken by the Irish travelling community. A widely ostracised and discriminated against group, it is vital to acknowledge the influence of their culture on other forms of Irish life.

¹² Darach Ó Séaghdha, *Craic Baby: Dispatches from a Rising Language* (London: Head of Zeus, 2018), 75.

As slang tends toward the comedic, this translation has clashed, to often amusing effect, with the gravity with which we attribute the original. Take, for example, lines 111-114:

*þanon untydras ealle onwocon,
eotenas ond ylfe ond orcneas,
swylce gigantas, þa wið gode wunnon
lange þrage; he him ðæs lean forgeald.*

This is translated by Heaney as:

And out of the curse of his exile
there sprang
ogres and elves and evil
phantoms
and the giants too who strove
with God
time and again until He gave
them their reward.

As Ireland has numerous slang terms for undesirable people, such a passage offers ample opportunity to showcase this colourful language. And so, in *Boyo-wulf*, the lines are transformed into the following:

And from him came about all
sorts of gurriers; gombeens and

loolas and absolute gowls, and
also those big lads who, for a
long time, would be startin' on
God – but he paid them a hefty
price for that, y'know what I
mean.

Some words here reflect also the complicated political history of Ireland – “gombeen” comes from Irish *gaimbín* and referred specifically to moneylenders during the Great Famine, who took advantage of desperate people by loaning at unreasonably high interest rates. “Gowl”, particularly popular in Cork and Limerick, seems to be a possible corruption of Irish *Gall*, a term for the Anglo-Norman invaders, and by extension the English, or *gabhal*, a “fork in a road” or a “crotch”. Its current usage refers to any unpleasant person.

There are some surprising links between Irish slang and the medieval. The term “yoke”, for instance, is a Hiberno-English term which can refer to anything at all, particularly a thing which you cannot recall the name of.

The late Terence Dolan suggested that the term comes from Middle English *yokeke*, itself from the Old English *geoc*, a frame worn on the neck of an animal, usually to enable the pulling of a plough.¹³ While this is what the term still means in the wider English tongue, in Ireland it changed to mean “thing”, or even “person”.

Of course, when translating the poem into Cork slang, it is important to avoid overplaying the use of Corkonian lingo, as I wish to avoid the translation turning into a caricature or a spoof and ultimately undermining a culture that was repressed for hundreds of years as a result of British colonialism. Rather, I like to imagine *Beowulf* as if it were still an oral poem, and how it would fare in the mouths of a storyteller or seanchaí (reciter of old lore), or a local patron in a Cork pub.

The translation of such a poem is also, of course, wrapped up in the politics of the field. In the contemporary zeitgeist,

where we see the co-opting and misappropriation of medieval imagery by the alt- and far-right, and where we see debate over the misuse of the term “Anglo-Saxon”, translation of *Beowulf* should become a site of reflection, and one where we can challenge the misappropriations and ideologies of the imperialist societies in which the poem’s translation history was borne.

Then some proud fella asked all the lads about their backgrounds:

“Stall the ball there lads, who the hell do ye think ye are now with all these fancy shields and metal shirts and feckin’ savage helmets on ye** and a big rake of spears? I’m Hrothgar’s messenger and officer, y’know, and never in the life of me have I seen so many foreign lads as brave out as yerselves, and so many of ye, Chrisht! I’d say now that ye lads are here for some prideful business, I doubt ye’ve been fecked out if yeer own gaffs. Nah, ’tis bravery that’s brought ye looking for Hrothgar, I’d say so myself anyway.”*

¹³ Terence Dolan, *A Dictionary of Hiberno-English* (Dublin: Gill Books, 2013), “yoke”.

*The brave man himself answered back, pure
proud head on him, the leader of the Geats,
and let out some words, big husky voice under
his helmet:*

*“We’re some of Hygelac’s clan, there I.
Beowulf is my own name. I’d like to have an
old chat there with good old Healfdane’s son,
the mighty man in charge, your leader, about
why we are here, if he’d be good enough now
that he might greet us.” [lines 331b-347]*

**I chose “savage” here, because it means
“cool” or “impressive” in Cork slang, and it is
also one of the translations of the OE *grim*-!*

***“Ye” is commonly used in Ireland as the
nominative second-person plural, to
differentiate from singular “you”. Interestingly,
this comes from Middle English *ye* or *ȝe*, from
Old English *ge*, but became archaic in most of
the English-speaking world.*

Alison Killilea

Independent Scholar

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Student Engagement: Riddles at the University of Nottingham

At the start of last semester, Paul Cavill and I decided to do more to raise student engagement with Old English. We had planned a few things, not all of which came to fruition, but I wanted to share a couple of the things which did happen and which showed just how much young people really can get into Old English.

We have had an Old English reading group for some years now, and I have written about this before, but this year we offered a reading group for first years right from week one. We thought we would get a handful of students with a bit of luck, but were completely blown away when 30 students signed up. We met every two weeks before lockdown and enjoyed reading poetry and riddles from Richard Marsden's excellent *Old English Reader*. This, I think, created a warm and positive attitude towards Old English and it is

quite clear that there is a core of very keen students who see themselves as medievalists as they go into second year.

Building on this enthusiasm, we launched a riddle competition. The challenge was to write a riddle in the Old English style on a topic that could be either medieval or modern. It was an impossible choice to pick just one winner, and so we selected three that most resembled the Exeter Book riddles. The winners for joint first prize were: Em Horne, Sam Masters and Otilie Owen. They each received a copy of the recently published dual-text edition of *Beowulf* by J. G. Nichols. Special mentions also go to Ianthe Betts-Clarke, Emily Brown, Amalia Costa, Vincent Guilbert and Emily Williams for their fantastic riddles. Here they are, and we hope you enjoy trying to solve them! (Answers below).

As many of you will know by now, Paul Cavill retired this year. Over the years he has inspired so many students with his wisdom, good humour and generosity and the enthusiasm shown by his students here is a real testament to that. I am accompanying the riddles with a marvellous piece of artwork

created by a second year student, Phoebe Raine, who completed this painting inspired by *The Seafarer* during lockdown and sent it in to us to cheer us up. It worked!

Eleni Ponirakis
University of Nottingham

The Riddles

Joint first prize winners:

Em Horne

I saw a strange creature
All crumpled and worn
Which told the strange tale
Of a man pack-born.
This wolf stood his ground against
Death, fire, and greed
Alongside a woman
With the city she freed.
This thing shifts armies of letters to stories,
The sole keeper of honour from language of old.
Rescued from flames, it's ashy remains
Help to maintain the tales of the bold.

Sam Masters

In my mighty youth, I was marvellous to behold,
A firm foundation, great finger-pointer to the Saviour's hall.
Than the sharpest steel, stronger was I then.
Yet weaker than rain, which rages against me.
Now I am vanquished, no victor in that war.
God's sheer sculpture, now shaken by children;
Rough and robust, now round and smooth.
I am down-trodden by troops of men,
Still well may I crush, and kill when I tread them.
I am dull and dark, dim in all light.
But the shiniest sword started life in me.
Wonder on this, wise man,
And say what I am.

Ottile Owen

I am a loathsome creature; I cannot escape my predatory profession.
Profound in nature, profound in presence,
harrowed, hated, no hero to household homeliness,
feeding on futile fear your finite existence,
I leave in my wake nothing but dismal, despair, doom and decay.
Worms wiggle, worshipping my wake, waiting wishfully for their feast,
but,
I never stay long enough, for the stench of rot to intoxicate my nose,
festering flesh no longer fresh.
In the fumes of youth, you flirt with me;
dancing with danger, silently screaming, you torment, torture me.

A life-sucker could never capture your kindling spirt;
no soul-gatherer could cut acute creatures of creation.
Fruitless fantasies of a forever-after feed your fear, drop to decadence decays of hell,
or soar to the celestial sphere, soul safe, fare away from here,
but,
I cannot rest until no life is left.
I stood by your side when father told a fragile lie, dear old Fred
had gone to a farm nearby;
I watched woefully as you wished, wise wittering Great Gran goodbye;
watched water waves trickle from your eyes;
shed silent tears as your stillborn was taken too soon from here;
crouched in the corner, as you cried, by your childhood friend's dying bedside.
I pondered your pointless praying, a pitiful picturesque of hope,
for your partners passing,
each meet merging, your timer ticking, this futile finite existence,
your certain knowledge, our paths will cross,
when your timer goes tick tock.
You know my profession,
now tell me my name.

Outstanding Runners Up

Ianthe Betts-Clarke

I was one of many, now one of less;
keen on the East I create the harvest.
The banquet I sup is clouded with pests
invisible to my eyes and hidden until flight.

I plummet to the ground at a monstrous pace,
wondering nervously if I'll fly again.

Emily Brown

I can be either soft or hard,
Long hair or trimmed.
Find me under the sheets
utilized in bed,
I am often grasped tight at night.
I do not speak,
But there may be noise when I'm squeezed.
Use me, then you will feel sleepy;
eager to get to the world of dreams.
Sometimes costumes are involved,
When I'm used for imaginative play.
I am loved and used no matter my size or shape.
I am a member
of the family.

Amalia Costa

Hwaet! I found myself within the chamber of a noble lady,
And saw upon her night-stand a gilded book,
Within which contained a languid lake.
A second page revealed to me a number of iridescent sea-jewels,
Which crumbled and turned to dust at my touch.
The peace-weaver thus entered and took the book from my prying hands.
She smeared the dust on her soul-windows and lo! she was ever the more radiant.

Vincent Guilbert

Most of my days are spent in night,
Hidden away for cause of my strong might;
Yet this might I myself cannot wield,
For without man I cannot make man yield.
I, like most, come from the entrails of a woman,
Although she be old and to most quite un-arousing.
Yet I love her and for her often fight.
She is quite a productive matriarch, and I have many brethren;
My family is constituted of good guard brothers, but also of quite sensitive cousins:
Be they cooks, herbalists or hunters, they all sometimes heavily weep.
I for one serve them all in good spirit, although my sole goal in life is to protect
everyone.
Yet I, most sorrowful, weep more than all my cousins,
And my existence is so sad that I live for these tears.
And like my family when they cry,
My tears are crimson,
And the suffering I feel
When I am struck
Is for others ten times stronger.

Emily Williams

I am the image that you interpret me to be.
You are my captain and I am your celestial ship,
rigged and ruled by your mind's eye from below.
You name my otherwise amorphous identity,
so I can purposefully glide in proud glory above.

Then I am gone.
Little by little my shape softens,
dissolving against my defenceless will,
and wistfully I cry as, uninspired, you walk away.
My tears of lost triumph fall in fury,
cascading down to curse you earth-walkers.
Then my anger subsides. Passively, I watch as
each small tear of my shapeless sorrow,
wearily gathers into great watery reserves,
in hope that, even if you're looking down,
my radiant reflection in this sea of sadness
will point you back up to
the unmanned ship now wandering meaninglessly on.

To find out more about Old English riddles, visit The Riddle Ages Blog:
<https://theriddleages.wordpress.com>

Answers:

Emma Horne: The *Beowulf* Manuscript; Sam Masters: A pebble; Otilie Owen: Death;
Ianthe Betts-Clarke: A Honey-Bee; Emily Brown: A Teddy Bear; Vincent Guilbert: A
Sword and Emily Williams: A Cloud.



Art by Phoebe Raine.

Call for submissions

The editors of the TOEBI newsletter are keen to receive submissions based on your projects, outreach and classroom plans, as well as reports on creative work. Please see the final page of the newsletter for the editors' email addresses.

Re-imagining the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in the primary school classroom

In the summer of 2018, we led workshops at primary schools in Crayford, Kent, in collaboration with ‘Crayford Reminiscence and Youth’ community education group, as part of a larger, National Lottery-funded local history project entitled ‘A Spot Called Crayford: the Legend of Hengest’. Our paper at TOEBI 2018 examined the challenges of teaching the *Chronicle* beyond the university in a diverse primary school classroom, and of tackling our brief, which was ‘to teach year 4 and year five pupils how to compose in Old English their own version of the Battle of Crayford’.

The 456 entry of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is all that we know about the Battle of Crayford, fought between the Anglo-Saxons and the Britons. The entry here, from the 11th-century ‘Abingdon Chronicle’ (British Library, Cotton Tiberius B. I.) is

characteristically lacking in detail and leaves plenty of room for creative work. We started our classroom exploration of Old English with this, using the entry to introduce Old English letterforms, and prompting the children to think about missing information and the way the report represents the historical event.

From there, we moved on to introducing more of the Old English language, including alliteration, kennings and the concept of a ‘word hoard’, with an illustrated and interactive worksheet. The activities that followed involved the examination of archaeological finds from in and around Kent and discussions of what the pupils imagined they would see, hear, feel, taste, and smell in the lead-up to and during a battle. Using this growing knowledge, as well as emerging empathy and feelings of

proximity, the classes then matched Old English and modern English words, created their own kennings for ‘ship’, ‘horse’, ‘shield’, ‘ship’ and ‘sword’, and thus began to build their own ‘word hoard’.

Using their worksheets, the pupils then composed ‘lost poems’ of the Battle of Crayford. They engaged creatively with the early medieval vernacular but also with unfamiliar, fragmentary remnants, and grew fascinated by the connections between their local environment and its Anglo-Saxon past. Archaeology and text opened up space for the children to contemplate historical change in the places they see every day.

The poems crafted by the pupils of St Paulinus C.E. and Holy Trinity C.E.

schools were atmospheric, detailed, lively and full of striking, unusual and surprising Old English words and kennings. Looking ahead, there’s scope and space for more Old English in primary education, and for more work in the primary school classroom that fuses early medieval history with creativity, play and personal reflection.

We hope to make the full resources available publicly in the future. If you would like to see them in the meantime, please be in touch!

**Fran Allfrey, Carl Kears, and Beth
Whalley**

Kings College London, TOEBI 2018
Conference Report

Schools Outreach at the Bodleian Library

In February and March of this year, I joined with conservators at the Bodleian Library, including Nicole Gilroy, Emily MacMillan and Lauren Schott, to plan and deliver a series of short outreach workshops for children in their first year of secondary school. Our focus in these half-hour sessions was early medieval

manuscripts. The students had already read some Old English in translation, and I opened by asking them what they remembered about early medieval England, and about manuscripts. Once we'd re-established some basics, I told them that we were going to be looking at a genre of writing called riddles, and asked them what they already knew about riddles – what are they, and how do they work? They even competed to 'beat the clock', solving a series of simple enigmas in Modern English, often finding multiple possible answers ("What has legs but can't run?"). We then divided the class into small groups, and gave each group one of three scriptorium-themed riddles from the Exeter Book: *Riddle 26* (Bible), *Riddle 47* (bookworm) and *Riddle 51* (hand, pen and ink). The conservators and I encouraged the students to 'solve' the riddles, identifying metaphors and thinking about materials and processes. The students got stuck in with enthusiasm, often producing some imaginative interpretations. We then came back together as a class and discussed our thoughts. I didn't seek to impose a 'correct' answer (it was great fun hearing their alternative solutions), but I emphasised the references to materials like ink, quills and parchment in our discussion. After this, the students moved around the room in small groups, visiting three stations run by the conservators, on parchment-making, manuscript preservation, and writing with quills and ink. Each conservator gave a short introduction to their area, and then the students were able to hold and touch some of the materials, and ask their own questions. Inevitably, they would still be talking away when it was time to move on to the next station. Overall, we found it hugely successful to bring these riddle-texts into contact with the physical materials and processes of manuscript-making, encouraging these young students to make connections between the metaphorical and the material.

Rachel A. Burns

University of Oxford

Book Reviews

Burial, Landscape and Identity in Early Medieval Wessex

Kate Mees. Boydell Press, 2019. 324 pages, 4 black and white, 45 line illustrations. Hardcover £60. ISBN: 9781783274178.

Burial, Landscape and Identity in Early Medieval Wessex can be approached and consumed in different ways, in part because it contains different sections, each having distinct value. The first part of the book is a series of essays on aspects of the topics listed in its title. All are concerned with human relationships with the environment with regard to burial, and all are fascinating. An appendix follows the conclusion to these essays, a 61-page gazetteer of burial sites in the counties of Wiltshire, Hampshire, Dorset and Somerset, the area covered in the research. Each entry provides brief

information, including: the *pays* (an area defined by ‘a combination of cultural

characteristics and complex geological and topographical attributes’, p. 6) in which the site sits; grave goods; history of discovery and excavation; and general characteristics. This, we are told, is the fruits of research over several years (see pp. 10-12 for the background), and it offers an excellent practical reference dimension to the book, particularly as each entry lists further references to specific works that provide additional information on that burial site.

The introduction clearly sets out the author’s stall, outlines her methods, and offers a brief overview of the ‘past work’ on ‘monumentality and monument reuse’ (p. 13) going back to the early twentieth century. I would have liked more of this history of research, a couple of pages covering the history of noteworthy ideas concerning

burial and landscape more generally, for additional situation before we embark on the essays. However, earlier studies are referenced in those essays and the appendix, especially relevant archaeology, so that the reader achieves a solid contextual grounding upon engagement with the book as a whole.

Then we get into the essays, all of which can be considered independently, though they also build progressively to an argument for the significance of burial and the landscape for different sections of society in Early Medieval Wessex, and changing conceptions over time, particularly during key shifts such as the process of conversion (Chapter 5). Highlights for this reviewer include absorbing discussion of the significance of watercourses for ritual (90-97), and the consideration of territory and boundary, and its relationship with burial practices, particularly its 'endurance' as society changed (p. 177, and Chapter 4 in general). Chapter 5, on 'The Church and the Funerary

Landscape', is full of both intrigue and information, and a brief written source (from 'The Law Code of Ine'), fascinating evidence for the relationship between military service and land tenure, is put to particularly effective use by the author when discussing a particular burial (p. 193). Could more use have been made of such written evidence? The author often highlights the influence Bede and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* have had, and advocates for an alternative perspective presented in *The Law Code of Ine* (see p. 110, for example). The unreliable nature of much literary evidence may be a plausible reason why it is not much utilised, and Mees herself demonstrates the problem on p.51, in a discussion of the reliability of a charter and place-name evidence (though place-names are often used as an interesting aside – pp. 63-4 on the vocabulary of topographical place-names being a good example). Yet perhaps additional, well-chosen contemporary examples, like the line or

two from the Laws of Ine used so effectively, would have added another dimension, another tangible link between sites and society to animate the topic and persuade the reader. This is by no means a significant omission, however, because the other evidence is handled so well.

Indeed, perhaps because the author remains largely focused on the physical environment, and human interaction with it, the overall impression is one of well-organised thinking and judicious, long-term research being successfully distilled into the monograph format. It reads as a survey of the landscape and its features in the study area, but also successfully integrates wider cultural concerns, including such peculiarities as the formation - or lack - of civil defence garrisons, into the discussion of specific burial sites. This variety increases the readability and the potential audience. Bringing together the discussion of different aspects of Early Medieval English culture – particularly cultural change in relation

to burial practices – in the consideration of physical landscape features is brilliantly executed.

Exposing the human context of burial decision-making and procedures also invigorates the subject matter.

Possibly the least engaging aspects of the book are the illustrations and maps, which suffer at times for being very *grey*. Perhaps Google Maps has prejudiced this reviewer's understanding of what constitutes readability and appeal. Still, if one were to need to know the geographical relationship between sites and other landscape features, they perform the function. And the line illustrations are fine and purposeful too. I guess the issue is that the author has done such a good job of bringing burial to life in the essays, that the cold, hard geographical facts that appear in a top-down map or plan seem rather lifeless in comparison. More 3-dimensional imagery illustrating what some sites were/are like would have been a bonus.

Aside from such minor niggles, the presentation is exemplary. This book looks beautiful, feels substantial, and was produced using high-quality materials. Its cover, 'Grave Group from a Surface Interment at Winterslow, Wiltshire', an 1814 oil painting by Thomas Robert Guest, is a nice twist on the armour and jewellery imagery that often appears on books about early medieval matters. The objects depicted: bucket; spearhead; bronze brooch; a boss and a grip from a shield, suit the writing style, which gets the job done in a no-nonsense, eloquent and engaging manner that belies the often-complex assemblage of issues being dealt with. The physical book is a grand achievement. Happily, so too is the material within.

This book also offers timely contributions to wider approaches to writing about our research. Before its introduction, the author addresses the recent focus on the problematic nature of the term 'Anglo-Saxon', with a brief, sensitive note explaining her practical

and balanced approach to the issue: we cannot forego the term, because it is embedded in our field, but we should acknowledge changes in terminological appropriateness. In the conclusion to the book's essays, Mees returns to consider the term 'Anglo-Saxon'. She states, for example, in relation to appropriate definitions of who prompted the cultural practices surrounding burial in 450-850, that labelling burial practices as 'Anglo-Saxon' has certain connotations, involving 'immigration and external forces', whereas the picture is more complex, involving 'internal processes of identity formation and emulation'. We needn't 'reject the label "Anglo-Saxon" altogether, provided that we bear in mind that inherent in these new rites were elements of hybridity' (p. 203). She thus argues that more precise labelling, and awareness of changing notions of a term, can benefit our research. She brings together discussion of modern attitudes to the appropriateness of a word, with that of

a specific term's efficacy in adequately defining historical circumstances. The book thus situates itself in, and addresses, particular developments in 21st-Century research, but it also has long-lasting relevance as the primary go-to source of information on its topic.

Steven Breeze

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**Weaving Words and Binding Bodies:
The Poetics of Human Experience
in Old English Literature**

**Megan Cavell. University of
Toronto Press, 2016. 256 pages, 1
black and white illustration. Cloth,
\$74. ISBN: 9781442637221.**

Megan Cavell's monograph *Weaving Words and Binding Bodies: The Poetics of Human Experience in Old English Literature* is an in-depth critical analysis of a subset of poetic diction rooted in material and metaphorical weaving and the abstract concept of binding.

The book is organised neatly into three parts which are then further divided into three or four chapters. 'Part I – Webs and Rings: Experiencing Objects' (pp. 15 – 92) concentrates on the material contexts of objects, particularly the technical and poetic aspects of weaving and woven material, as well as the function of binding in buildings and other structures. Chapter 1, 'The Material Context of Weaving' (pp. 17 – 46) takes a look at poetic depictions of cloth and weaving, and examines the intersections of what is usually understood as gendered labour with the poetic diction of prestige objects and the heroic register. Chapter 2, 'The Woven Mail Coat' (pp. 47 – 67) draws further on this idea of high-status woven objects to examine depictions of armour, highlighting that while modern translations generally refer to mail coats as 'woven', there are in fact a number of other terms that suggest a complex relationship between the object itself and the nexus of construction-constriction terms at the heart of this

study. Chapter 3, 'The Material Context of Structural Binding' (pp. 68 – 92) explores the conventional descriptions of bound constructions with a view to demonstrating how binding is used on a structural level in Old English Poetry. Drawing on Earl R. Anderson's theory of the 'uncarpened world' – itself drawn from cultural anthropology (pp. 69 – 9) – Cavell demonstrates how poetic descriptions of bound structures reflect the need for control over a natural world via means of construction through constriction (p. 78).

'Part II – Fetters and Chains: Experiencing Bondage' (pp. 93 – 192) takes a look at bondage in relation to the natural world (chapter 4, 'Binding in Nature', pp. 95 – 119), 'Imprisonment and Hell' (chapter 5, pp. 120 – 156) as well as 'Slavery and Servitude' (chapter 6, pp. 157 – 192), continuing the themes and overall emphasis explored in Part 1. In a culture where society is conceived of as 'under attack' by the 'natural world' (as argued by Jennifer Neville), the function of constriction and binding is

vital in the bid for overall power and control. Cavell argues that the desire to bind nature and other dangerous abstractions suggests fear of its ability to also act as binder, such as constricting humans in the fetters of winter, for example (pp. 95 – 96). Moving on from the natural world, Cavell then examines the varying types of imprisonment with a more specific focus on humans rather than objects, beginning with the physical chains of political imprisonment, then progressing to the physical and metaphorical binding of religious heroes, saints and demons. Here she also discusses the function of loosening and unbinding fetters, which is something exclusive to binding. As she mentions in her introduction, despite the lexical and thematic overlap in weaving and binding, there are some distinctions which set them apart, such as the fact that there are no extant examples of 'unweaving' (p.5).

Finally, in 'Part III – Patterns and Nets: Experiencing the Internal and the Abstract', Cavell looks at how the

concepts of language, fate, magic and creation are imagined in terms of the weaving-binding poetic complex, further demonstrating how Anglo-Saxon poets transliterate abstract forces to function on human terms (p. 13). Using Raymond P. Tripp Jr's term 'knot-body' as her starting point in chapter 7, "The Body and Mind" (pp. 195 – 230), Cavell negotiates the tricky terrain posed by the opening lines of *Deor*, arguing for the poetic image of the interwoven body; regardless of whether Weyland cannot move due to physical fetters, being hamstrung, or even both of these things, his body is bound through disconnection (p. 199), thus demonstrating the sheer complexity of weaving and binding metaphors in Old English poetic technique (pp. 199 – 200). Appropriately, chapter 8, 'Language and Knowledge' takes a critical approach to the concept of 'word-weaving'; while accepting that Anglo-Saxon poets may indeed have conceived of their art in the terms of another, equally treasured craft

(weaving), Cavell disagrees with John Leyerle's theory of narrative interlace, stating that despite its influence, it appears to reflect a modern metaphor rather than an Anglo-Saxon one (p. 233). Chapter 9, 'Creation, Magic, and Fate' (pp. 251 – 179) deals with similarly abstract concepts which impact on the human condition. Despite the fact that weaving and binding references to these three concepts are not as formulaic in presentation, she asserts that they are united by association with supernatural or divine control over the human condition (p. 279). Finally, in chapter 10, 'Peace', (pp. 280 – 295), Cavell re-examines and interrogates the loaded compound *fripunebba/e* ('peace-weaver'), labour which she insists is necessary due to the fact that "the idea of the 'peace-weaver' has developed beyond the literary depictions in which this compound is invoked..." (p. 281). She disagrees with scholarship's tendency to infer more about Anglo-Saxon women and gender roles from a metaphor which only occurs three times

across the Old English canon and, what is more, never in exclusive association with women (pp. 281 – 286). Rather, in order to expand on the potential significance of such imagery, she argues for an intertextual approach to close reading that focuses on a specific set of formulaic diction – in this case, weaving and binding metaphors (p. 295).

Cavell focuses on poetry rather than the entirety of the Old English corpus (which is simply too large to approach with any sort of rigour) with a view to situating the poetic texts within their immediate formulaic environment (p. 4). She makes a case for the inclusion of certain prose texts – for example, Ælfric's saints' lives – citing Thomas Bredehoft and his argument that these texts contain 'rhythmical prose' and as such they cannot be contained within a rigid, formulaic definition. In a similar logical vein, Cavell suggests that weaving and binding exist on a continuum which also defies boundaries; while weaving relates to construction – cloth and language, but

also physical and social structures – binding relates to constriction, be it physical or mental. Importantly, this continuum indicates that neither weaving/construction or binding/constriction are definitively positive or negative in the Anglo-Saxon cultural mind set (p.5). As she later shows, (p. 33) despite a commonly held association between cloth and positive social relations (as expressed by Jane Schneider and Annette Weiner), poetic descriptions of weaving are often jarringly violent. In contrast, while binding and constriction often pertains to servitude or bondage, it is represented in a positive light in *The Wanderer* when the narrator binds his heart and mind in order to protect his body and soul (p. 228).

In spite of the material context suggested by the terms 'weaving' and 'binding' the emphasis of this work is placed firmly on poetic language and stylistics, which may make it of more interest to textual scholars. This is not to suggest, however, that it is not a valuable

resource for those with an interest in Anglo-Saxon weaving and material culture; while it is Cavell's purpose to examine the poetics of weaving and binding in order to further our understanding of Anglo-Saxon poetic technique and artistry, this volume also demonstrates the importance of approaching material artefacts via means of literature, as it provides scholars with a direct insight into the cultural and social valuation of objects and how they might have been viewed by an early medieval literary elite. Cavell's book – although perhaps at times too broad in scope – is an articulate and rigorous exploration of poetic techniques that sheds light on what is a rapidly emerging field of research: literary textiles.

Rachel Balchin

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Old Age in Early Medieval England: A Cultural History

Thijs Porck, Boydell Press, 2019. x, 278 pages, 8 bw illustrations. Hardcover £60. ISBN: 9781783273751.

Old Age in Early Medieval England: A Cultural History is a detailed and multidisciplinary study of old age in Early Medieval English literature, art and archaeology. In the Introduction, Porck outlines the central ideas of the volume: he considers old age as a cultural construct which needs to be studied specifically within the literary, artistic and archaeological context of Early Medieval England (pp. 5-6), and states his aim to demonstrate the complexity and ambiguity of Early Medieval English conceptualizations of old age (p. 8).

In chapter 1, "Definitions of Old Age", Porck focuses on the representations of the "ages of man" in Early Medieval English art and literature, to analyze how Early Medieval English artists and authors understood the human life-

course and how they interpreted old age in relation to other life phases (p. 16). He is also concerned with determining the age at which authors thought that old age began (the ‘threshold of old age’) and with examining the sources from which Early Medieval English authors derived and adapted their ideas, to learn what these might reveal about Early Medieval English conceptions of old age (p. 17). Furthermore, throughout the chapter Porck challenges the idea that old age was divided into two distinct phases – a ‘green’ and a ‘grey’ old age (pp. 17, 33, 49) – showing that in most visual and written works old age was presented as one single period, which usually began around 50 (p. 49).

The next two chapters, on the “Merits of Old Age” (chapter 2) and the “Drawbacks of Old Age” (chapter 3), contribute to depicting an ambiguous representation of old age in Early Medieval England (p. 52), in contrast to previous scholarly interpretations of old age as the “golden age” for men during this period (p. 53). In chapter 2 Porck

examines a range of pastoral and wisdom texts (like the *Rule of Chrodegang*, the Old English translations of the *Heptateuch* and of *The Dicts of Cato*, and the poems *Vainglory*, *The Seafarer*, *The Wanderer*, *The Riming Poem*, and *Precepts*, among others; pp. 55, 59-61, 69-73) to determine what roles the elderly played in these works. As poems frequently portray old men as advisers, teachers, witnesses, councilors, and as keepers of the history and wisdom of their society (pp. 54-59), Porck convincingly argues that wisdom poetry provides a positive depiction of the elderly as wise men who have important communal roles despite their physical decline (p. 73). Pastoral texts, such as the *Rule of Chrodegang*, are instead rather ambivalent: for example, they state that the elderly had to be respected and taken care of (p. 60), although it is also made clear that respect should not just be given to an elderly person, but had to be earned (pp. 61-62). The elderly were also supposed to be spiritually virtuous, but mentions of figures like the

puer centorum annorum and the *senex sine religione* imply that this was not always the case, and reveal the authors' concern over the potentially immature or irreligious behaviour of the elderly (pp. 62-67).

The next chapter on the “Drawbacks of Old Age” shows that being old also entailed several problems. Old English poetry, in particular, conveys a rather negative representation of old age (alongside the depiction of the old wiseman analyzed in the previous chapter) as an unfortunate fate which awaits all men and which entails physical decay and illness (pp. 77-80). But, as Porck shows, poets seem more interested in the social and emotional consequences of aging, as seen for instance in *The Seafarer* and *Genesis B* (p. 82). In many poems, like *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Riming Poem*, or *Elene*, old age was often equated with the decay of the world and thus with the fleetingness of earthly life (pp. 83-91); this metaphoric depiction of old age might also be employed, usually in

homilies, such as homily V in the *Blickling Homilies* (p. 95), to remind the audience that death was imminent and to turn away from this meaningless and fleeting life and towards the stability and eternity of heaven (pp. 94-99, 109). Indeed, in some homilies old age is even listed as one of the five prefigurations of hell, for example in Vercelli Homily IX (p. 101). Therefore, old age was presented ambiguously in Early Medieval English sources, as while old people were often wise and could still have important social roles, old age itself entailed physical decay and illness, and became a representation of the transience of earthly life in contrast to the permanence in heaven.

The next four chapters focus on four distinct groups of elderly people: old saints, old warriors, old kings, and old women. Chapter 4, titled “*frode fyrrnwitan: Old Saints in Anglo-Saxon Hagiography*”, examines how old age was described in saints' lives in Old English and Latin, in accordance with hagiographic conventions (p. 110).

These hagiographic descriptions were idealized and didactic: the old age of the saint was meant to emphasize his faith and holiness, and helped to present him as a model for the audience (p. 113). As old age was not usually included in saints' lives, Porck rightfully observes that when it was mentioned, it was likely meaningful and a deliberate choice on the part of the hagiographer (p. 118). Many old saints became spiritual mentors for younger members in their communities (such as Aldhelm, Benedict Biscop, Æthelwold and Dunstan; p. 122), and in some saints' lives, like in the *vitae* of St. Lawrence and St. Pantaleon, elderly saints led younger ones on the path of spiritual life (pp. 123-124). Old saints are also shown as suffering from the physical decay which is typical of old age (pp. 124-128), such as Dunstan and Æthelwold (pp. 125-126). Yet, others, like St. Oswald (p. 129), still performed their duties despite their physical afflictions; as Porck rightfully points out, in these cases their senescence and vulnerability might have

been a way to demonstrate their sanctity (pp. 129, 131). Old saints thus again convey the wisdom of old age, as seen in their role as spiritual leaders and mentors; but they were also vulnerable because of their physical frailty, and holy because they, sometimes, managed to overcome it (pp. 133-134). Overall, then, hagiography provides a positive depiction of old age (p. 134).

In chapter 5, concerning "*hære bilderincas*: Old Warriors in Anglo-Saxon England", Porck examines archaeological, visual and written sources (with specific attention to *The Battle of Maldon*) to evaluate whether there could have been old warriors in Early Medieval England and what roles they might have played (p. 136).

Archaeology and artistic representations suggest that it was likely that Early Medieval English warriors kept fighting in their old age (pp. 136-148), while poems such as *The Battle of Maldon* present many examples of the *hære bilderinc* as the embodiment of heroic values (p. 154), and seem to

demonstrate that old warriors could have important roles as military leaders and advisors, who were expected to encourage younger warriors (as Byrhtnoth and Byrhtwold do in the poem) and fight alongside them (pp. 156-162, 163-164). Thus, old men could still be useful on the battlefield, as military advisors or as active warriors, and could still gain glory in battle (pp. 172-173).

Chapter 6, “*ealde eðelweardas: Beowulf as a Mirror for Elderly Kings*”, considers *Beowulf* as a poem dealing with the common problems that old kings had to face in the Early Middle Ages (p. 179). The chapter begins with a brief discussion on elderly kings in Early Medieval England and Francia (pp. 179-186), after which Porck provides a close textual analysis of old age and old kings in *Beowulf* (pp. 186-208). The latter part of the chapter (pp. 190-208) is devoted to a comparison between Hrothgar and old Beowulf as kings. Each illustrates a different model of kingship, as seen when they are faced

with two monsters in their old age, Grendel and the dragon, respectively (p. 198). While Hrothgar proves to be passive, despite his generosity and wisdom, and employs a diplomatic approach (which is not always effective; pp. 190-197), Beowulf, who is also generous and wise, instead fights the dragon himself and kills it at the cost of his life (pp. 197-201). Porck convincingly argues that Beowulf’s heroic kingship is the model preferred by the poet, as Beowulf manages to protect his people and gain glory in the process (pp. 206-207); Porck also defends Beowulf’s decision to fight the dragon, which has been occasionally considered as rash, by pointing out that he dealt with the threat of the dragon successfully and decisively and secured the safety of the Geats by choosing Wiglaf as his successor, and he cannot be held accountable for their fate after his death (pp. 207-208). In this way, Porck shows that old age is a ‘central’ theme in the poem (p. 186), and argues that this comparison between two old

kings might have been meant to convey a representation of ideal kingship for an elderly patron, who was likely a king himself (pp. 178-179). In the appendix following the chapter, Porck evaluates textual evidence, including *Beowulf*, to suggest that this patron was none other than Offa of Mercia (pp. 209-211).

The last chapter (7), “*gamole geomeowlan*: Old Women in Anglo-Saxon England”, examines the roles and functions of old women in Early Medieval England through an archaeological, anthropological and documentary approach (p. 214). Porck considers recent trends in archaeology and anthropology to argue that women underwent a change, but not a reduction in their status when they became old (pp. 214-216). This is further supported by his analysis of the historical record, which demonstrates that old women could still be useful in society: like old men, they could be keepers of their culture (pp. 224, 229), but they could also become advisers to kings (like St. Hild, pp. 223-224),

mentors to their grandchildren (p. 225), abbesses (pp. 226-227), teachers or ‘remembrancers’ (p. 229), and even interpreters of dreams (p. 230); as with old men, then, becoming old did not entail a loss of status for women, as they remained an important part of Early Medieval English society (pp. 214, 231).

Lastly, the Conclusion summarizes the main findings of the volume (pp. 232-234) and draws attention to interesting new avenues for further research, such as studying old age within the context of disability studies, through a comparative approach focusing on old age in contemporary cultures like Francia, Ireland and Wales in the Early Middle Ages, or diachronically (pp. 235-236).

From beginning to end, this book is superbly researched and provides a nuanced and intriguing analysis of old age, while carefully examining and bringing together descriptions found in several different sources. Elderly

people could be respected, pitied and occasionally despised, but they still had essential roles in Early Medieval England. *Old Age in Early Medieval England: A Cultural History* certainly achieves the aims which Porck outlines in the Introduction: it reconstructs how old age was conceptualized in Early Medieval English culture and does justice to the complexity and importance of this topic.

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The Dynastic Drama of Beowulf

Francis Leneghan. D.S. Brewer, 2020. xxi, 323 pages, 1 black and white illustration. Hardcover, £60. ISBN: 9781843845515.

Thousands of books and articles on *Beowulf* have been published but there are not so many that squarely tackle the very fundamental issue of what the poem is all about. This may well be because the story of *Beowulf* looks quite

straightforward in which a hero defeats monsters and saves people but dies a heroic death in the end. It is true that many different opinions have been expressed about how Christian or pagan the poem is, how positively or negatively the hero is conceived of, whether it has some allegorical meaning, etc., and one's view of the poem can vary in accordance with one's stance on these and other major issues in *Beowulf* critique, but it is generally agreed that the poem is all about the hero and his fights against the monsters, whether he is depicted favourably, unfavourably or ambiguously. In *The Dynastic Drama of Beowulf*, Leneghan challenges this general agreement among scholars, arguing that the poem is primarily a dynastic drama dealing with rises and falls of Germanic dynasties of the Scyldings, Scylfings and the Hrethlings, into which all the three monster battles are carefully integrated as portents of dynastic and national crises.

In the first chapter, Leneghan focuses on the narrative structure of the poem. He argues that the poem, as a dynastic drama, structurally contrasts three different phases in the life-cycle of an archetypal dynasty. It begins with the opening episode of Scyld and Beow (1-67), illustrating the formation of a royal house, or the first phase of a dynastic life-cycle. Then its focus shifts to the fortunes of the same royal house, or the second phase of a dynastic life-cycle (68-1887); the Scyldings first thrive, then face crises, but are saved by Beowulf; though the poet leaves the fates of the Scyldings unsaid, there is an allusion to their future crises. The third and final phase of the dynastic life-cycle is illustrated with the fall of Beowulf's own royal house, or the Hrethlings (1888-3182). Thus the whole work traces the life-cycle of an archetypal dynasty: from its youth, to maturity, and on to old age. Not only are the words and conduct of major characters, such as Beowulf, Hrothgar, and Wealhtheow, interpreted as integral elements of the dynastic

drama, but also many digressions and episodes, such as the Scyld prologue, the Finnsburg episode, those of Heremod and Sigemund, the so-called 'Offa digression', etc.

In the second chapter, Leneghan discusses the making of the poem, addressing issues about its sources and analogues. Leneghan argues that though basically working within the Scandinavian literary tradition of the legends of the Scyldings, Scylfings and Hrethlings, the poet makes a number of interventions in order to dramatise the dynastic drama. For instance, by inserting into the Danish royal tradition Scyld and Beow between Heremod and Healfdene, the poet begins the whole work with an episode narrating the rise of a dynasty. Again, by transforming Beowulf the great swimmer into the nephew of King Hygelac and the last of the Hrethlings who dies fighting against a dragon in defence of his people, he illustrates the decline and fall of a dynasty, implying the future demise of the Hrethlings at the end of the poem.

Leneghan concludes that the *Beowulf* poet is an original artist inventively handling royal traditions in accordance with the central theme of the poem and introducing new characters and episodes into legendary settings.

In the third chapter, Leneghan discusses the role of the monsters in the context of the dynastic drama, and argues that the poet inserted the three monsters into two carefully-chosen moments of northern royal history to bring to life vividly and terrifyingly the dynastic crises. Grendel's attack on the Danish court is interpreted as an attempted usurpation by an illegitimate contender from outside the royal kin. Thus, lines 168-69 (including the crux *gífstol* that Grendel was not permitted to touch or approach) are explained from this perspective. On the other hand, Grendel's mother, who causes the extinction of a branch of the house of Cain by incurring vengeance for the death of Grendel, is interpreted as an anti-type to royal women, such as Wealhtheow, who secure the survival of

the royal house. But Leneghan also interprets Grendel's mother as providing - through her lack of a spouse and her advocacy of vengeance - a troubling counterpart to Beowulf himself, 'whose failure to marry and produce a son will have fatal consequences for his own dynasty and nation' (p. 180). Indeed, Beowulf dies after the vengeance fight against the dragon. Yet the most interesting part of this chapter is the discussion about the hitherto unnoticed close interrelationship between the dragon fight and the Swedish wars. Leneghan discovers an interesting contrapuntal narrative method by which the poet interweaves the two narrative threads; while the story of the dragon fight moves forward, the episodes of the Swedish wars are intermittently narrated in nearly reverse order, tracing the origins of the Swedish wars further and further back. Leneghan argues that with this contrapuntal narration, 'the poet constructed his dragon-fight out of northern and hagiographical models in

order to magnify the final act of his dynastic drama, the fall of the Hrethlings' (p. 185).

The fourth and final chapter discusses the influence of biblical kingship upon the dynastic drama of *Beowulf*. Pointing out the parallels between *Beowulf* and the succession narrative in the Book of Kings, Leneghan argues that the latter served as a mythical paradigm for the dynastic drama of the former, and suggests that Beowulf, together with other kings in the poem should be regarded, in the light of the equally varied rulers of the Old Testament, as 'imperfect forerunners both of Christ and of the Christian rulers of the poet's own day' (p. 235). He also points out that Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, drawing extensively on the Book of Kings, provides a similar perspective. Both instruct readers to imitate the good behaviour of the rulers, while learning from the mistakes of sinners. Moreover, by comparison with Bede's depictions of Æthelfrith and Oswald, Leneghan suggests that the closing lines of *Beowulf*

reflect the emergence of a new model of Christian kingship in early Anglo-Saxon England.

In the Conclusion, Leneghan discusses how the dynastic drama of *Beowulf* may have been read at the time of its composition (c. 650-c. 800), in the age of King Alfred and his successors, when the poem provided an inspiration for the authors both of royal genealogies and of the poem *Andreas*, and also in the age of Æthelred and Cnut (c. 980-1020), when the manuscript was copied. Leneghan shows that the dynastic drama of *Beowulf* has much in common with the fluctuating history of the seventh-century Mercian and Northumbrian royal houses. It may well have been read as a mirror of the contemporary rulers. Leneghan argues that *Beowulf* remained relevant and continued to perform an important political role in the Alfredian period, acting as a link between Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian dynastic traditions. But he also points out that during this period, in the climate of the Viking wars, the poem first came to be

read as a critique of pagan kingship. Leneghan claims that in order to secure the preservation of *Beowulf*, Alfredian writers made various efforts - such as integrating Scyld Scefing and his relatives into the royal genealogies as descendants of Noah; transforming Beowulf into a heroic saint in the poem *Andreas*; and circulating the poem with the Old English version of *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle*, comparing Beowulf with the great pagan emperor Alexander the Great. It is uncertain if the *Beowulf* Manuscript was copied under the reign of Æthelred or that of Cnut, but in both cases, as Leneghan speculates, the political concerns of either royal house may have had much to do with the copying of the manuscript: according to the late-tenth-century *Chronicon* by Æthelweard, Æthelred descended from the royal house whose origin is narrated at the beginning of *Beowulf*, whereas the Danish emperor Cnut styled himself Skjöldung. The topics dealt with in the Conclusion provide interesting material for another book-length study.

Throughout the book, Leneghan's arguments are built on extensive reading of Old English, Anglo-Latin and other medieval literature, as also of the relevant previous studies. This is well reflected in his highly informative footnotes. In addition, each chapter, as well as the whole book, is very well-organised, which makes his discussion both convincing and easy to follow. The volume deals in detail with many of the major issues that have been debated in earlier scholarship on *Beowulf*: such as its origin, sources and analogues; the historical and religious backgrounds; the function of digressions; the interpretations of difficult words, phrases and passages, etc., Consequently, while presenting a new and unique reading of the poem, this book could also be read as a kind of critical companion to *Beowulf* at the service not only of specialists but also of students. It will surely become a must-read in the field of *Beowulf* studies.

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God's Exiles and English Verse: On the Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry

John D. Niles. University of Exeter Press, 2019. xi + 288 pages, 2 bw illustrations, hardcover, £75. ISBN 9781905816095.

Many readers will be surprised to learn that John D. Niles' book is the first monograph devoted to the most important collection of Pre-Conquest vernacular poetry. Across ten eloquent and engaging chapters, Niles offers stimulating new interpretations of such staples as *The Seafarer*, *The Wanderer*, *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Ruin*, while also shedding light on relatively neglected works such as the three Christ poems, *The Wonder of Creation* (aka *The Order of the World*), *Vainglory*, *The Rhyming Poem* and *Precepts*. Underpinning these insightful close readings are Niles' thought-provoking ideas concerning the conception, production and reception of the

manuscript as a whole. Given its thoroughness and cohesiveness, as well as its comprehensive bibliography, *God's Exiles* will become the starting point for all subsequent work on the Exeter Anthology.

Following Bernard J. Muir, the manuscript's most recent editor, Niles refers to the collection as 'the Exeter Anthology', rather than by its more common title 'Exeter Book', in order to emphasise the volume's coherence. While other major studies, notably those of Patrick W. Conner and Michael Lapidge, have posited a pious lay audience, Niles places the codex firmly in the context of the Benedictine Reform. In his view, the manuscript is not a random selection of Old English verse, copied as and when items came to hand, but rather a carefully chosen assemblage of texts designed to educate high-born novitiates in what Brian O'Camb has termed 'monastic poetics'. By studying the poems contained in the manuscript, such readers could learn how to become 'craft-poets', artists

who followed in the footsteps of Cædmon and Cynewulf in adapting the traditional techniques of Old English alliterative verse to the new and higher purpose of glorifying God. As such, the collection aims ‘to elevate English verse to a status like that of its Latin counterpart in the medieval system of higher education’ (p. 187). While not denying the value of source study and other methodologies, Niles takes as his starting point Fred C. Robinson’s dictum that the most immediate and meaningful context for any given Old English poem is its manuscript witness. Instead of isolating individual poems or grouping them by genre, as is typical of modern readings and editions, Niles therefore invites us to read each poem in terms of its contribution to the entire codex. Reading the Exeter Anthology as Niles does, forwards and backwards, repeatedly, makes us ever more alert to recurring themes and images that flow back and forth across the collection. Likewise, to read *God’s Exiles* from cover to cover is to

immerse oneself in the art and craft of Old English poetry. Niles steers the modern reader away from what he terms ‘the search for Anglo-Saxon secular humanism’ (p. 200) and towards the guiding principle of English religious life during the period of the book’s final copying: the Rule of St Benedict.

Paving the way for this integrated, holistic reading of the anthology, Niles rejects Conner’s theory that the codex as it now survives was originally three discrete ‘booklets’ which were only bound together and re-ordered after their initial copying. On the contrary, Niles argues, the texts appear now in the same order as they were copied and intended to be read: opening with the three poems on the life of Christ, we move through saints’ lives and a selection of miscellaneous poems, among them examples of the genres of *planctus*, *paraphrasis*, *carmen morale*, *allegoresis* and *sententia*, concluding with the near-century of *enigmata*.

Fascinatingly, Niles identifies an

underlying liturgical structure (akin to that posited by J. R. Hall for MS Junius 11), whereby the reader is guided from the opening *Advent Lyrics* through to the climax of the Christian year at Easter in the series of eschatological poems copied towards the end of the collection, namely *Doomsday*, *The Penitent's Prayer*, *Almsgiving*, *Pharaoh*, *The Lord's Prayer*, *Homiletic Fragment II* (renamed here *One Faith One God*) and Riddle 30b (*trēon*) (pp. 72–75). The Exeter Anthology thereby emerges as a vernacular counterpart to Latin miscellanies, staples of monastic reading in the early middle ages, which tended to start with the tenets of the faith before bunching together 'lesser' materials such as *enigmata* towards the end. The opening chapters provide a useful introduction to the key figures of the Benedictine Reform, including Dunstan and Æthelwold, before tentatively placing the manuscript's origins in Glastonbury rather than Exeter itself.

An abiding concern of this book is the dismantling of the secular/sacred dichotomy so prevalent in modern scholarship. Indeed, readings which neglect or downplay the Christian doctrine contexts of these poems are given short shrift. When read together with its surrounding items, *The Ruin*, for example, emerges not as a celebration of transience or an uplifting paean to a bygone age, as some have recently argued, but as a warning about the dangers of excess and the judgement of God. Poems that have traditionally been read as secular elegies, such as *The Wanderer*, are shown to reflect monastic ideals, utilising traditional heroic language and imagery to promote the spiritual virtues of the *miles Christi*. In a chapter devoted to the riddles (pp. 164–79), Niles argues that the occasional moments of obscenity in these poems are not evidence of unbridled sexuality as some have suggested but a product of their status as 'catch riddles', texts in which the interpreter is tricked into giving a

vulgar solution before the ‘correct’ mundane solution is revealed. As such, the riddles are consistent with monastic thought, as celebrations of the diversity of the created world. Niles links the ‘hyperliterary’ nature of the riddles (p. 147), in particular their playful and complex use of runes and other forms of cryptography, with *The Husband’s Message* and the two signed Cynewulfian poems, *Juliana* and *The Ascension*. As well as providing an opportunity for humour, the riddles teach the book’s readers how to master literary tropes, allegory, metaphor and rhetorical figures. In this respect, Niles argues, the anthology may have served as a valuable tool for teaching the techniques of vernacular poetry.

Tracing commonalities across texts usually read in isolation from each other by modern commentators, Niles identifies the prevalence of ethopoeia, that is a form of dramatic monologue in which an ‘author adopts the voice of an absent person so as to characterize the ethos, or character, of that speaker

through the style of his or her speech’ (pp. 99–100). This technique is employed not only in the pilgrim-exile speakers of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* but also in wisdom poems such as *Precepts*, *The Penitent’s Prayer*, *The Fortunes of Mortals* and poems about poetry, such as *Widsith*, *Deor* and *The Wonder of Creation*. In order to help the reader to distinguish between these voices, Niles helpfully provides them with names: the Scop of *Widsith*, the Court Poet of *Deor*, the Seer of *The Wonder of Creation*, the Convert of *The Rhyming Poem*, the Lover of *Wulf and Eadwacer*, the Wife of *The Wife’s Lament*, and so on. This helps to create the impression of a sustained and deliberate interchange of distinct but often overlapping voices across the codex, as poets, pilgrims, penitents, sages and lovers mingle to present ‘a simulacrum of the human condition’ (p. 134). In the final part of the book, Niles identifies certain keywords that recur across the anthology, such as *ellen* (courage, fearlessness), *sẏþ* (journey), *bōt*

(remedy, consolation), *hām* (home), *drēam* (joy) and *frōfor* (comfort), which straddle heroic and religious contexts. Cumulatively, these terms ‘help to transform what might have been no more than a miscellany of verse texts into a single coherent discourse, one that extends from the Anthology’s start to its finish’ (p. 222).

One aspect of Niles’ thesis that will divide readers is his conviction that not only the manuscript itself but the texts contained within it are all more or less to be viewed as products of the Benedictine Reform that began in the mid-tenth century. Unlike the contemporary Vercelli Book, for example, the Exeter Anthology appears to be a copy of an existing collection, judging from the neatness of its layout and overall presentation. Kenneth Sisam’s suggestion that the prototype for this collection could have been made as early as the reign of Alfred goes unmentioned. Moreover, Niles’ dating of poems such as *Widsith*, *Deor* and the signed works of Cynewulf—as

well, it would seem, as *The Dream of the Rood* (p. 222)—to the late-tenth century requires us to imagine a scenario whereby very little Old English poetry survives from between the birth of ‘monastic poetics’ in the late-seventh century with Cædmon and the late-tenth century, with the bulk of the extant corpus squeezed into a very short window around the time of the main manuscript witnesses. Niles describes *Beowulf* as ‘a fish—a large one—that has swum in from some other ocean’ (p. 6). But might *Beowulf* itself not also be viewed as a product of ‘monastic poetics’, with its pious narrator ruminating on the lessons of pagan history, its Cædmonian *scop* celebrating the glories of Creation and the sage-like King Hrothgar dispensing wisdom to the young?

God’s Exiles is a landmark study that demands to be read by all serious students of early English poetry. It is elegantly written and supplemented by a detailed bibliography and appendices containing a new prose translation of

The Wanderer as well as helpful lists of the manuscript's contents and Latin poetic genres. It will prove invaluable to advanced scholars and beginners alike. It is to be hoped that *God's Exiles* will inspire a new generation of scholars to explore this extraordinary manuscript in its entirety and to conduct similarly holistic analyses of other codices produced in this period.

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The Chronology and Canon of Ælfric of Eynsham

Aaron J. Kleist. D. S. Brewer, 2019. xxii +346 pages, hardcover, £75. ISBN: 9781843845331.

Peter Clemoes' *The Chronology of Ælfric's Works* has served as an essential reference resource for Ælfric studies ever since its first publication in 1959. After some sixty years, Aaron Kleist's *The Chronology and Canon of Ælfric of Eynsham* seeks to revise and update Clemoes' work, bringing to light

further manuscript evidence, developments in Ælfric scholarship, and a revised understanding of Ælfric's editorial practice. The resulting volume carefully catalogues Ælfric's literary output, and presents the complex nature of his compositional practice, which was characterised by constant revision and correction.

The first chapter, 'Ælfric's Chronology', sets out to update and revise Clemoes' *Chronology*, particularly with regard to the five key dates (989, 992, 1002, 1005 and 1006) utilised by Clemoes to scaffold his dating of Ælfric's texts. In doing so, it considers and consolidates the various, but 'piecemeal' challenges that scholars have made to Clemoes' system over the years. While Kleist's revisions to these dates are largely subtle (the elevation of Æthelwold II, for example, is moved from 1006 to 'Late 1006 x 1007'), this work nonetheless allows for a reassessment of Ælfric's compositional timeline. In particular, Kleist argues that the use of a single point of composition for the

Catholic Homilies is misleading, since Ælfric was continually revising and altering these throughout his lifetime. To this end, he presents a full composition history for the *Catholic Homilies*, updating the work of Clemoes and Malcolm Godden to provide a clear overview of the various stages of dissemination and revision.

The second chapter, 'The Ælfrician Canon', sets out a comprehensive list of all known and possible Ælfrician works. Each entry lists an overview, date, manuscript witnesses, and a bibliography of editions. Notes, digital images and a bibliography of translations are also provided where available. Kleist adds new titles for eleven previously untitled items, and includes forty-two 'new' items not contained in Clemoes' *Chronology*, mostly Latin abridgements of contested authorship. He also adds a number of manuscripts not edited or collated by Skeat to his description of the *Lives of Saints*.

The third and final chapter, 'Ælfrician Manuscripts', catalogues the contents of all manuscripts containing Ælfric's works, including early modern transcriptions and manuscripts containing material that is possibly (but not certainly) by Ælfric. To this end, Kleist adds a significant number of manuscripts to those catalogued by Clemoes, Godden and John C. Pope.

The critical apparatus offered by Kleist constitutes an essential reference work for scholars of Ælfric in and of itself. An extensive review of 'Ælfrician Manuscript Sigla' seeks to offer a common frame of reference for the several conflicting systems currently utilised. As Kleist notes, for example, 'Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 116 [...] has been referred to variously as A, b, J2 and S'. Kleist's sigla includes not only works documented by Clemoes and Godden and known to be authored by Ælfric, but also more obscure manuscripts containing possibly Ælfrician matter, those which constitute witnesses to the Ely

privilege, and later manuscripts containing transcriptions of Ælfric's works. Such a schema is both long overdue and will enable greater clarity and precision in future work on the subject of Ælfric's works, their manuscript context, and their reception. Moreover, the titling of several works previously either untitled or referred to by their associated liturgical occasion will allow for them to be discussed and referenced consistently.

There are some minor matters that complicate the volume's accessibility. For example, all editions are listed under Secondary rather than Primary sources, and as a result the volume does not provide a handlist of Ælfrician editions and translations, a resource that would doubtless be of great use to students and teachers. Similarly, tables describing the contents of Ælfrician collections give item numbers, but not names or descriptions, which renders it harder to consider the precise contents of each manuscript, or to notice

particular trends. Kleist himself notes that comparing manuscript contents may reveal much about the way that Ælfric's work was used. Yet the lack of titles or descriptions makes such comparisons impossible without cross-referencing. Table 15, for example, detailing manuscripts containing aspects of the *Lives of Saints*, would clearly highlight that no single hagiographical (as opposed to homiletic or exegetical) item circulates in isolation, if these items were titled.

Another issue is the use of URL deeplinking – that is, directing the reader to specific pieces of content, rather than to a searchable database or site. Such links, unless they employ slugs (user-readable URL identifiers), contain long character strings that make them time-consuming to copy by eye from a print work. Deeplinks are also liable to change when databases are restructured, change hosts, or move content. The links Kleist provides to *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*, for example, are no longer usable, because the

database (previously hosted by the University of Oxford) will soon be rehosted by the University of St Andrews, using different deeplinks. *Ælfric: The Letters*, which provided online editions of Ælfric's correspondences, is similarly referenced but was taken offline shortly before the volume's publication. Such issues not only indicate the importance of using more stable references to online resources in books, but also to the need to reconsider the archival longevity of our internet databases.

Kleist's extensive consideration of Ælfric's compositional practice focusses on the *Catholic Homilies* specifically. In many ways, this is understandable: there are far more manuscript witnesses to the *Catholic Homilies* than any of Ælfric's other works. Yet Kleist's study gestures towards the complex nature of Ælfric's compositional practice, and it is easy to wonder how this is visible in, for example, the *Lives of Saints*, or the items in the *Supplementary Homilies*. Whilst

some of the notes in Chapter 2 note the compositional history for items written by Ælfric as individual pieces rather than parts of collections (for example, the three versions of the *Erat quidam languens Lazarus*), further work on the revisions made both by Ælfric himself and by other scribes will no doubt provide a fuller understanding of both the Ælfrician canon and early medieval editorial practice. It also becomes apparent that many of Ælfric's shorter works remain understudied – it is heartening and exciting to see the many works that Kleist and Upchurch's forthcoming *Ælfrician Homilies and Varia* (2020) will provide easier access to. In many ways, the *Chronology and Canon* constitutes a starting point for new explorations of the Ælfrician corpus, highlighting the potential for future work and providing the necessary apparatus with which to do so.

Kleist's *Chronology and Canon* provides subtle but necessary revisions to the work of Clemoes and Godden. Kleist

professes that the volume is far from ‘an enjoyable Sunday afternoon read’, and that ‘such tedious details as are found herein may cause the most season Anglo-Saxonist to pale’.

Nonetheless, it is precisely the abundance of such details (notably the extensive appendixes, tablature, and manuscript sigla) that renders the *Chronology and Canon* such an essential reference work. Just as Clemoes’ *Chronology* has been a permanent fixture on bookshelves since its publication in 1959, the *Chronology and Canon* will doubtless be consulted by both students and scholars of Ælfric for many years to come.

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*Priests and Their Books in Late
Anglo-Saxon England*

**Gerald P. Dyson. Boydell and
Brewer, 2019. x + 286 pages, £60.
ISBN: 9781783273669.**

This book is a study of the literacy practices of the secular clergy in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and the part they played in the provision of pastoral care. The surviving evidence does not paint a good picture of the secular clergy of the period, with writers in the monastic reform movement describing them as lazy, ignorant or illiterate, however Dyson’s study argues that when considered carefully the evidence for the secular clergy, while certainly not as rich as that for their monastic counterparts, reveals a group of functionally literate readers capable of principled engagement with the texts at their disposal. Dyson critiques and builds on the four criteria outlined by Yitzhak Hen to identify the ‘humble and portable volumes’ (5) that priests would have used: the materiality of a manuscript; liturgical content; the

combination of canonical material and liturgical prayers; and the combination of different types of liturgical books in one volume. In doing so, Dyson argues for the inclusion of two additional manuscripts in the group so far identified as books for priests. In current scholarship, books for priestly use in pastoral care have tended to be studied individually rather than holistically, and Dyson's aim is to fill that gap.

The book is divided into two sections, with the first (Chapters 1-3) providing a wider context in terms of the types of people involved, the need for clerical literacy, and how books were produced and supplied to priests. The first chapter provides an overview of the role of the priest in tenth- and eleventh-century England, the various institutions they worked in, the performance of the liturgy, and the technical vocabulary used to name liturgical books. This culminates in a discussion of the books that priests were expected to have access to, and

Dyson uses book lists found in Anglo-Saxon and Carolingian episcopal legislation and pastoral letters to gauge the expectations that bishops had of their priests. One of the strengths of Dyson's book throughout is his inclusion of comparative evidence from continental Europe to offer contrasts with, or corroboration of, practices which are less well-evidenced in the Anglo-Saxon record.

This chapter is followed by discussions of the extent of clerical literacy, and how literacy was acquired by learners. A useful distinction by Dyson is his focus on the level of literacy required for a priest to fulfil his role adequately: 'in attempting to assess the ability of Anglo-Saxon priests to use the books prescribed for them, we are not pursuing a definition that would necessitate what one might call elite literacy' (47) (e.g. the levels of ability displayed by writers of 'hermeneutic' Latin). Texts such as saints' lives and chronicles show that opportunities for schooling were perhaps wider than is

normally appreciated, though the evidence for education during this period is rather scanty, and this is supplemented by a survey of glossing activity by scribes who identify themselves as priests, as evidence for literacy in Latin and the vernacular. Following this, Chapter 3 turns to how books may have come into the possession of priests, and discusses evidence for places of production in addition to scriptoria in cathedrals and monasteries. Dyson suggests that some unlocalised Anglo-Saxon manuscripts may well be the product of smaller centres such as secular minsters, and that this may have been one of a number of routes (including provision of relevant texts by bishops for churches under their control) by which priests acquired the texts necessary for their pastoral duties.

The second section (Chapters 4-6) focusses on specific types of text and identifies a number of manuscripts which form case studies for evidence of priestly ownership or use. The focus of

Chapter 4 is homiletic texts used for preaching, and it discusses features such as signs of use in three individual manuscripts. The case studies are valuable in demonstrating the different approaches possible in investigating these manuscripts, though they vary in their level of detail and in one or two places some consideration could be given to alternative interpretations of the evidence, or further detail provided. For example, in Chapter 4's second case study (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 85 and 86), Dyson adduces the presence or absence of <ie> spellings in different scribal stints as evidence of changes in the underlying sources of one anonymous homily. While this could certainly be the case, an alternative explanation might be sought in the differing copying practices of each scribe (a litteratim, a translator and a mixer scribe respectively), and further detail would help support Dyson's argument here.

The final two chapters complement each other by considering standalone

texts (Chapter 5) and those which are only found in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts in combination with other works (Chapter 6). Chapter 5 focusses on those used for performing the liturgy, and documents the move from earlier periods in which the sacramentary was used alongside a number of supplementary texts, to the innovation of the Missal which combined several books into one volume. Dyson explicitly links this development with the expansion of church building in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and makes a strong case for the utility of such single-volume books to priests serving smaller churches. The case studies demonstrate instances where existing text collections have been annotated for liturgical use (Warsaw, Biblioteka Narodowa I. 3311) or used to collect texts that could supplement an existing liturgical volume (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41). Penitentials, manuals and computi are the topic of the final chapter, and Dyson stresses that the

form in which we experience these texts today is not necessarily the same as their original context. He argues that many priests' books have been overlooked (and are yet to be recognised as such) as researchers have focussed on too narrow a set of criteria, and rarely considering the evidence of manuscript fragments.

Some of the most appealing aspects of this book are the breadth of sources used, alongside comparative material from continental Europe, and the range of disciplines brought to bear on the topic, e.g. palaeography, reader reception, and manuscript content and context. However, the lack of any substantial linguistic interrogation of the manuscript contents is a puzzling and (for this reader) frustrating omission. The inclusion of more linguistic evidence could certainly shed interesting light on the relationships between the manuscripts discussed, and potentially on affinities with other contemporary texts (especially if, as Dyson suggests, some of these may

have been produced for priests at larger monastic centres). The focus of the book on texts in both Latin and Old English is particularly welcome, in considering the manuscripts used by a readership with a need for bilingual literacy, and this is an aspect which would also repay further study.

Overall, this is an engaging and very readable book which fills an important gap in the existing research, and which provides several interesting avenues for further research.

Christine Wallis

University of Manchester

Recent *Publications*

The following titles, which may be of interest to TOEBI members, have recently been published. If you are interested in reviewing any of these titles, please get in touch with the editors.

Anglo-Saxon Micro-Texts

Ursula Lenker, Lucia Kornexl (eds.) De Gruyter, Berlin 2019. viii + 377 pp. + 28 black-and-white illustrations + 27, colour illustrations, hardcover, £91, ISBN: 9783110629439.

Trinity College Library Dublin: A catalogue of manuscripts containing Middle English and some Old English

John Scattergood, with Niamh Pattwell & Emma Williams. Four Courts Press, 2021. 420pp; colour illustrations, hardcover, €50. ISBN: 9781846828522

Imagining Anglo-Saxon England: Utopia, Heterotopia, Dystopia

Catherine Karkov. Boydell Press, 2020. vii, 272 pages, illustrations, hardback, €90, ISBN: 9781783275199.

Slow Scholarship: Medieval Research and the Neoliberal University

Catherine E. Karkov (ed.). D. S. Brewer, 2019. 182 pp, 10 black-and-white illustrations, hardcover, £30, ISBN: 9781843845386.

Writing History in the Community of St Cuthbert c.700-1130

Charles C. Rozier. D. S. Brewer, 2020. 253 pp, 7 black-and-white and 1 line illustrations, hardcover, £60, ISBN: 9781903153949.

Old English Lexicology and Lexicography: Essays in Honor of Antonette diPaolo Healey

Maren Clegg Hyer, Haruko Momma, and Samantha Zacher (eds). 2020, D. S. Brewer, 312 pp, hardcover, £60, ISBN: 9781843845614.

Debating with Demons: Pedagogy and Materiality in Early English Literature

Christina M Heckman. D. S. Brewer, 2020. 260 pages, hardcover, £60, ISBN: 9781843845652.

TOEBI *Information*

Teachers of Old English in Britain and Ireland

(TOEBI) aims to promote and support the teaching of Old English in British and Irish universities, and to raise the profile of the Old English language, Old English literature, and Anglo-Saxon England in the public eye.

Membership

TOEBI welcomes new members. You do not have to be currently employed in teaching Old English to become a member. If you have any questions regarding membership, please contact the Membership Secretary, Dr Frances McCormack (frances.mccormack@nuigalway.ie) or consult the website, www.toebi.org.uk/joinus.

Meeting

The next TOEBI meeting will take place in 2021 at the National University of Ireland Galway.

Conference Awards

TOEBI regularly awards bursaries to help postgraduate students attend conferences. Applications are welcome from both current postgraduates and those who have recently

TOEBI *Committee*

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Thanks go to outgoing committee members Phillip Shaw (chair), Thijs Porck (webmaster) and Jennifer Neville (committee member), for all their hard work for TOEBI.

completed doctorates but do not yet have an academic post. The application form can be downloaded from the website (www.toebi.org.uk/grants-for-graduates) and should be submitted to Dr Helen Appleton (helen.appleton@ell.ox.ac.uk).

Spread the Word

We hope you have enjoyed this issue of the TOEBI Newsletter and urge you to share it with colleagues and students who may be interested. We particularly encourage you to introduce TOEBI to your postgraduate students and to internationally based colleagues. Students can join for £5 a year and, as members, they will be able to apply for funding towards conference expenses, get experience writing and publishing book reviews, and enjoy discounts on select academic publications. They need not be teachers to join!

Contact the editors

To contact the editors about a review, a submission, or anything else, please write to the following addresses: rachel.burns@ell.ox.ac.uk ; n.kehoe-rouchy@liverpool.ac.uk

This version of the 2020 newsletter has been revised from that initially published online, to include some minor corrections. Further details can be sought from the editors directly.