



TOEBI

Newsletter

2025 Volume XXXXI

The TOEBI Newsletter returns with a special retrospective issue, bringing together updates, features, and reflections from our members across 2024–2025. As this is our first issue as editors, we would like to begin with a heartfelt thank you to Francesca Brooks, Chiara Giancoli, and Abigail Williams for the care, energy, and dedication with which they shaped previous editions. We are delighted to be building on their excellent work.

In this issue you will find recent conference reports, book reviews, and pedagogical resources shared by our members, alongside a report on the 2025 Kemble Lecture delivered by Professor Richard Dance at Trinity College Dublin and reflections on TOEBI meetings at Edge Hill University (2024) and University College Dublin (2025) by our chair, Francis Leneghan.

It was a pleasure to see so many of you at these gatherings, and we hope to see many of you again at this year's TOEBI conference, to be hosted by Christina Lee at the University of Nottingham on 24 October. The theme for 2026, "All Kinds of People," promises a wide-ranging and engaging programme, and the CFP is now available.

Contents

Editors' Letter

TOEBI reports

Conference award reports

Feature Articles

The Kemble Lecture 2025 Report –
'Myths and Monsters: *Beowulf* and
the Etymologists'

ROEP: Resources for Old English
Prose

Unravelling Old English Riddles
with Year 7s at the Bodleian's
Weston Library

Playing with Old English: A Playful
Pedagogy Resource

Book Reviews

Recent Publications

TOEBI Information

We are very grateful to everyone who has contributed to this issue, and we warmly encourage you to take part in future editions—whether by sharing news, writing a short piece, or suggesting items you would like to see featured. Our aim is for the newsletter to reflect the breadth and vitality of work on Old English language, literature, and culture, as well as their afterlives, intercultural and multilingual connections, and modern creative adaptations.

This newsletter is, above all, a space for the TOEBI community. We hope you enjoy reading it and perhaps feel inspired to appear in its pages next time!

Francisco J. Rozano-García
Universidad del Atlántico Medio

Claire Poynton-Smith
Trinity College Dublin

ISSN: 1694-3532

TOEBI Reports

TOEBI Annual Meeting 2024

Edge Hill University, 7th September 2024 - *Old English on the Edge: Borders and Boundaries*

The 2024 TOEBI meeting was organised by Dr Lindy Brady at Edge Hill University, Ormskirk, Lancashire — a first for TOEBI! The opening session featured four short presentations by Fatima al Moufrijji (on a YouTube series on early medieval England, Northern Africa and the Middle East), Claire Poynton-Smith (on the potential of a mixed corpus of Old and Middle English), Fran Ash (on gender boundaries in Ælfric's *Lives*) and Emma Nuding (on using Ælfric's language pedagogy as a model for contemporary teaching). In the second session, Daria Izdebska and Donna Beth Ellard spoke about their project on corpus linguistics and the teaching of Old English language, and Francis Leneghan shared his research on translation strategies in the Old English Heptateuch. The final session featured a Pedagogy Workshop with Rebecca Stephenson and 'Open Mic' Lightning Talks. The meeting concluded with the AGM after which delegates decamped to Liverpool for the conference dinner. Thanks to Lindy Brady for organising a very enjoyable event!

Prof. Francis Leneghan

TOEBI Annual Meeting 2025

UCD, 25th September 2025 - *Education and Early Medieval England*

The 2025 meeting was hosted at UCD by Prof. Rebecca Stephenson. This very well attended event kicked off with three lightning papers: Megan Cavell spoke about foxes, riddles and teaching; Francis Leneghan and Niamh Kehoe introduced the new *ROEP: Resources for Old English Prose* website; and Lindy Brady talked about her research on encounters between speakers of different languages in early medieval England. James Paz delivered a moving and thought-provoking reading of his own creative-critical poetic responses to Old English poems. The board meeting took place during the lunch break, followed by a Syllabus Swap featuring Alice Jorgensen, Christina Lee and Amy Faulkner, all of whom shared teaching resources and approaches. Following a round

table discussion and AGM, delegates were treated to a viewing of the excellent *Words on the Wave: Ireland and St. Gallen in Early Medieval Europe* exhibition at the National Museum of Ireland, followed by a fascinating Viking Walking Tour of Dublin generously led by Christina Lee. After all these exertions, delegates were rewarded with pizza on Baggot St. It was very encouraging to see so many new and enthusiastic members in attendance—this bodes well for the future of the society and subject. Thanks to Rebecca Stephenson for being such an excellent host!

Prof. Francis Leneghan

Conference Award Reports

TOEBI invites applications from members who are graduate students or recent PhDs without a full-time post to support conference attendance (in-person or online). If you are a graduate student or early career researcher, please do consider applying for a grant in 2026, whether to attend a TOEBI meeting or another conference. And if you're a supervisor, do remind your students to put in an application. Below, some recent recipients of TOEBI support present reports on their activities.



Communities: 22nd ISSEME Conference, HHU, Düsseldorf

Dr Jasmin Higgs

University of Nottingham

Determining the Functions of Runic Script in the Pre-Old English Runic Corpus

The funding I received from TOEBI allowed me to attend, for the first time, the International Society for the Study of Early Medieval England (ISSEME). This year, the conference was held in the city of Düsseldorf, Germany, in the Summer of 2025.

I participated in session 2c, titled 'Runes 1: Past, present and future of runology'. This was one of two runology-themed sessions. This was unique in ISSEME history, being one of the very few times that runologists, that is, scholars who focus primarily on the study of runes and runic inscriptions, have come together to present their research in Old English-themed sessions. These two sessions were devised to bring together the very few runologists who work on Old English runic inscriptions to present their research to both each other and to a wider, non-runological audience of Old English scholars. Old English runology is a small subset of an already small academic discipline, and it was a joy to be together and also to network with scholars interested in our subsection of runology.

Session 2C was chaired by Lilla Kopár, and I presented alongside my esteemed runology colleagues Kerstin Majewski, Kerstin Kazzazi, and Gaby Waxenberger. My paper was

titled 'Determining the functions of runic script in the pre-Old English Runic Corpus', and summarised my recently completed PhD research. My PhD explored the functions of runic script in the pre-Old English Runic Corpus through a methodology based on historical pragmatics. With the growing use of interdisciplinary approaches in runological studies, ranging from sociolinguistics to semiotics and pragmatics, it is crucial to assess the suitability and limitations of these methodologies in analysing runological data. My research investigated the applicability of historical pragmatics to the pre-Old English runic corpus, particularly given the high proportion of fragmentary and non-lexical inscriptions, which make it nearly impossible to determine script functions using purely linguistic methods. To address this, I proposed determining the functions of inscriptions by studying their pragmatic context, which includes factors like the production and reception of the text, as well as the social relationships between the text's creator and its audience. I identified several distinct functions of script. Primarily, many inscriptions follow a simple-name formula, where a personal name in the nominative case denotes ownership, craftsmanship, or donation, marking property or possession. Other formulae were also discussed, demonstrating the variation in script functions discernible from the text itself. Additionally, non-lexical texts appear to serve a similar purpose. By comparing the pragmatic context of lexical and non-lexical inscriptions, I argued that non-lexical texts perform the same roles as their lexical counterparts, fulfilling the functions of textual formulae without using recognisable linguistic units.

ISSEME, despite the gruelling heat wave, was a welcoming and vibrant conference, which, without the TOEBI grant, I could not have attended. I had not anticipated the positive outcomes of attending ISSEME: a consistent line of communication has opened up amongst Old English runologists, and a new collaborative project titled The Runic Post, involving Kerstin Majewski, me, and other colleagues, is hoping to publish new runic finds next year. Huge thanks to TOEBI for enabling all of this and providing me with my first opportunity to present the complete findings of my PhD research.



Abigail Lloyd

University of Nottingham

Communities—on the Edge or in the Centre? Exploring New Evidence for Old English and Old Scandinavian Dialect Contact through a Distinctive Corpus of Place-names

ISSEME 2025 took place in Düsseldorf from 2–4 July. I was extremely grateful for a grant from TOEBI which helped me to attend and present a paper in person. Although I was, alas, not speaking until the final session, I managed to enjoy the rest of the conference. The theme was that of ‘Communities’ and the proceedings opened with a wide-ranging keynote from Professor Rory Naismith, which set the scene for interdisciplinary investigations of communities in early medieval England.

As ever, it was hard to choose which talks to attend once we split into tracks, and I look forward to being able to listen to recordings of the talks I had to miss. Of those I saw in person, particular highlights were looking again at ‘gilds’ [*sic*] as a form of community (Rory Naismith), *Andreas* as a form of inadvertent rogation (Helen Appleton), *Judith* (and Holofernes) as you have never seen it before through the medium of PowerPoint animation (Claire Davis), hearing exciting updates about new and existing digital projects (Echoe, DOE, ROEP, Mercian Network and the ‘big data’ analysis coming out of Trinity College, Dublin, with Mark Faulkner) and the detective story that is chasing down the N-Psalter’s fragmentary history (Monika Opaliński), not to mention the other keynotes on scribal communities in the North Atlantic archipelago (Colleen Curran) and astronomy in the *Old English Boethius* (Susan Irvine).

Outside of the sessions, all of the breaks and events in the evening felt very collegiate. It was great to be able to talk to so many, making new connections and renewing old. When the final session came round, I enjoyed speaking enormously and was grateful for many thought-provoking and stimulating questions. After the conference closed, I dashed off to Kaiserswerth to see the island where Swiðberht (of Northumbria) died, after his life as a missionary consecrated by Wilfrid in Mercia. It was wonderful to see the physical links between Old English communities and places on the continent.



Michael Lysander Angerer

University of Oxford/University of Cambridge

Old English outside England: Ælfric and North Sea Literature

The TOEBI Conference Grant allowed me to attend the 22nd ISSEME Conference at the Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, 2–4 July 2025. There, I presented a paper as part of the panel on ‘editing and technical work’, alongside Mark Faulkner and Elisabetta Magnanti as well as Andrei Crisăn. This paper came from a new research project under the title ‘Old English Outside England: Ælfric and North Sea Literature’.

That English continued to be written in England after the Norman Conquest has by now been amply demonstrated. In this paper, however, I argued that English also continued to play an important part in literary exchanges across the North Sea in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This is illustrated in the case of the works of Ælfric of Eynsham, which provide evidence on the importance of English in a multilingual literary community spanning the medieval North Sea world.

Two Old Norse texts translated from Ælfric’s *De falsis diis* and *De auguriis* survive in the Icelandic Hauksbók. These translations have previously been taken to be isolated efforts completed in England, since no Old English manuscripts survive in Scandinavia. Yet it is not just that they must be seen as part of the well-documented English influence on early Old Norse homily-writing. Ælfric’s *De falsis diis* euhemerises Classical gods and in doing so equates them with Norse gods, which allows the Old Norse translation to reframe the sermon as an exploration of pre-Christian Scandinavian history. In this, the translation must also be set alongside less-studied evidence for the use of Old English genealogical manuscripts in twelfth-century Scandinavia, whose inclusion of pagan gods notably underlies the euhemerisation of Norse gods in Snorri’s *Edda*. This indicates that Old English manuscripts likely had a more international reach than is commonly assumed, and that English played a sustained part in the larger textual community of North Sea literature.

The ISSEME Conference provided a space for many meaningful conversations and helpful discussions of my project, which were instrumental in preparing its publication as an article. More broadly, this was also an unrivalled opportunity for networking and

following new developments in the field. I was especially pleased that one of my recent articles, on the Old Dutch poem *Hebban olla vogala* in the context of interactions between English and Dutch in the late eleventh century, received the ISSEME Award for Best Article by an Early-Career Researcher.

Overall, this was an excellent occasion for engaging with the wider field ahead of moving on to a Junior Research Fellowship at Clare College, Cambridge, where I am beginning a new major research project on the literary history of the North Sea. I am incredibly grateful to TOEBI for providing me with this opportunity.



Daniel Evans

University College London

The Replication of Old English Verse in Non-hexametrical Anglo-Latin Poetry

Thanks to a generous grant from TOEBI, I was able to attend the 22nd Biennial Conference of the International Society for the Study of Early Medieval England (ISSEME) in Düsseldorf (2–4 July 2025). This was my first major international conference and represented a unique opportunity to publicise my research.

At the ISSEME Conference, I presented a paper entitled ‘The Replication of Old English Verse in Non-Hexametrical Anglo-Latin Poetry’. My paper argued that some Anglo-Latin verse, written in a variety of sometimes esoteric verse-forms, consciously replicated the rhythms, sounds, and structures of Old English verse. I focused on three case studies which covered some of the luminaries of the period: the rhythmic octosyllables popularised by Aldhelm and adopted by the eight-century West Saxon missionaries on the Continent, the quantitative adonics of Alcuin, and a rhythmical hexasyllabic poem by Ælfric of Eynsham. Sifting previous scholarship and identifying some new examples, I position these poetic experiments as part of a tradition of conscious imitation of vernacular verse in Latin. I then suggested that many of these alliterative experiments represented an attempt at establishing and curating a sense of community; English poets, writing from abroad to a fellow countryman (either at home

or also in exile), skilfully reference Old English verse as a reminder of their shared membership of a cultural group. This explanation accounts for the potential motives of several of the poets under discussion.

It was very pleasing to present on some technical qualities of Latin metre to an informed and engaged audience. Questions and discussions, continued both in person and by email, have helped to push my thinking in new directions and have provided me additional references. The encouragement of senior scholars was also gratifying. In light of those discussions in Düsseldorf, I am now preparing this material for submission as a journal article.

I was also able to attend many inspiring papers over the course of the three days on subjects of interest to my research (among others, Old English verse, Anglo-Latin literature, and palaeography). I was fortunate to have the opportunity to meet a number of other medievalists for the first time and reconnect with others. This can sometimes feel like a rarity, siloed as well often are in our various institutions. I left Düsseldorf feeling academically invigorated and with a profound sense of community with colleagues from across the globe – and aptly so, for a conference with the theme ‘Communities’.



International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds 2024

Brittany Hanlon

Defusing the Alfredian Woodland Crisis: Narrative Strategies in Bishop Wærferth’s Dispute Memorandum

I am delighted to have received a grant from TOEBI, which aided my participation in the 2024 Leeds International Medieval Congress (IMC). It was a real joy to take part in the two-part Alfredian Voices session, organised by Dr Amy Faulkner and Professor Francis Leneghan, presenting my paper, ‘Defusing the Alfredian Woodland Crisis: Narrative Strategies in Wærferth’s Dispute Memorandum’. My paper examined the

language used by Alfredian charter scribes in the dispute memorandum known as Sawyer 1441, which documents the resolution of a dispute between Bishop Wærferth of Worcester (c. 869/872–907/915) and the priest Æthelwald over the woodland at Woodchester. By focusing on terms with violent connotations, such as *bereafian* ('to rob') and *geniman* ('to seize'), I argued that Worcester's charter scribes intentionally portrayed their rival's claim as an act of violence to safeguard their leased properties and delegitimise their opponent's claim. This study highlights that Alfredian charters were deeply interwoven with contemporary literary contexts by exploring the meaning and function of these phrases in Alfredian literature and earlier Latin diplomas.

It was a pleasure to attend the Leeds IMC in person for the first time. I attended sessions outside of my usual research focus, such as "Crises in the Medieval North Sea" and "Medieval Bishops." This diversity of topics helped me to think more critically about broader medieval contexts and allowed me to draw unexpected connections to own research, sparking new ideas and approaches. I eagerly anticipate returning to Leeds next year!



Anine Olsen Englund

Balliol College, University of Oxford

The Crisis of the Soul: Preparing for Judgement Day in Old English Eschatological Poetry

I was very grateful for the grant I received from TOEBI, which allowed me to attend the 2024 International Medieval Congress, where I delivered a paper titled "The Crisis of the Soul: Preparing for Judgement Day in Old English Eschatological Poetry". The paper was given as part of a session on Extraordinary Days, the second session in a series on the day in early medieval England, organised by Harriet Soper and moderated by Amy C. Clark.

My paper explored how the act of preparing for Judgement Day is not only conveyed through plot and theme, but also through lexical connections across poems. The focus

of this paper was a poetic clause which I have found recurring in *Soul and Body*, *The Wanderer*, *Christ III* and *Judgement Day II* which I have called the ‘hu x bið’ clause, in which ‘x’ is substituted for a descriptive adjective. Through the analysis of the clause within these poems, I argued that we can draw several conclusions. Firstly, the clause is mainly used to emphasise various characteristics concerning death and Judgement through adjectives, all of which have negative or intensifying qualities. Secondly, the phrase is used to accentuate the need for preparation for Judgement before death. Thirdly, the phrase is occasionally used to form part of a maxim, such as in *Soul and Body* and *The Wanderer*, but even when it cannot be characterised an actual maxim, it still imparts universal knowledge concerning the state of the soul after death. The clause thus conjures the image of possible torment to make his audience reflect upon the futurity of their own souls and the plausible outcome of their own future judgement, all the while considering the present.

As in past years, the IMC offered a vibrant space for sharing ideas, meeting new colleagues and catching up with others, and to get introduced to new research.



Amy Faulkner

University College London

The Pursuit of Wisdom in the Old English Pastoral Care

With the support of a conference grant from TOEBI, I was able to attend the International Medieval Congress at the University of Leeds in July 2024. I had co-organised, with Francis Leneghan, a two-panel session on ‘Alfredian Voices’, in which I presented a paper on wisdom in the Old English *Pastoral Care*. My paper compared attitudes towards wisdom in the Prose Preface with the main text of the translation, focussing on the Gregorian balance between the private pursuit of wisdom and the necessary performance of public duty. There was a good deal of connectivity between the six papers in the session, with lots of the same motifs recurring in more than one paper, resulting in some very productive discussion. For example, Brittany Hanlon’s paper on violent language in a charter from Alfred’s reign and Song Tan’s paper on civil

war in the Old English *Orosius* invited discussion on the military backdrop to the literature produced in the reign of Alfred. Similarly, the papers given by Michael Treschow, Anna Packman and myself were concerned with ideas of knowledge, wisdom and learning in Alfredian literature, resulting in a rich question and answer session. Rachel Burns' paper on the page layout of the Metrical Epilogue to the *Pastoral Care* in Hatton 20 gave detailed insight into scribal practice, and provided a counterpoint to other papers which had focussed more on the prefaces in this corpus. This year's Alfredian Voices was, moreover, a special one, in light of the recent publication of *The Age of Alfred: Rethinking English Literary Culture c. 850–950*, edited by Francis and myself, published only a few weeks before the conference by Brepols (Studies in Old English Literature 3). We were delighted to be able to show a copy of the book to attendees at the session!

It was excellent to see so many sessions on Old English literature at Leeds this year. Although timetabling clashes meant that I could not see as many as I would have liked, it was a real pleasure to be able to attend the Early Medieval Riddling sessions, a session on Story Worlds which took us from the Old English hagiography to river basin boundaries, papers on the day in medieval England which ranged from Christmas Day to Judgement Day, and a session on letter-writing in Early Medieval England. As always, Leeds IMC offers a delightfully diverse selection of papers, and I came away with lots to think about both in terms of my research and my teaching. I am very grateful to the TOEBI conference grant committee for generously supporting my attendance this year.



Tom Revell

University of Oxford

A Crisis of Confidence: An Intertextual Approach to Genre and Characterisation in the Old English Poem *Judith*

Thanks to the generous support of TOEBI, I was able to attend Leeds IMC 2024 in-person for its entirety.

Along with Dr Francisco J. Rozano-García and Dr Claire Poynton-Smith, we organised two panels on the intersection of our interests: Old English intertextuality, reception, and corpus linguistics. We hosted a range of speakers from the UK, Ireland, and the USA, and of various career-levels. Despite being on Thursday morning, both panels were very well-attended, and subsequent discussion was largely supportive. It was a pleasure to moderate one of the panels, showcasing the work of our colleagues.

I also gave a paper, part of my recently submitted doctoral work, on an intertextual approach to the composition and reception of the Old English poem *Judith*. With a particular focus on verbal parallels involving substitution of proper nouns, I argued that the *Judith*-poet was specifically influenced by Cynewulf's two saintly narratives in characterising the Old Testament widow as a pseudo-saint. The evidence for this was not to be found in thematic or generic similitudes but rather in the extensive verbal parallels between the *Judith*-poet's depiction of Judith's virtues and Cynewulf's portrayal of Judas-Cyriacus. Analysing evidence of this nature might reveal a great deal to us about emergent intertextual meaning and the genre of *Judith*. I hope that such a critical approach has the potential to provide a new lens through which to re-read old texts.

I also participated in a TOEBI roundtable on radical hospitality and shared spaces in early medieval English. Having attended the previous panel last year, I wanted to help continue these very important discussions. I hope that in subsequent years we can conceptualise concrete actions to make our field as inclusive as possible, and engage more people in these projects, despite the inherent difficulties we all face.

One of the greatest pleasures of Leeds is the diverse array of panels one can stumble over, and the opportunities for networking with faces old and new. I would not have been able to accomplish any of the above without the financial aid provided to me for TOEBI, for which I am very grateful.



Feature Articles

The Kemble Lecture 2025 Review – ‘Myths and Monsters: *Beowulf* and the Etymologists,’ delivered by Prof Richard Dance. Trinity College Dublin, 2025.

The 2025 Kemble Lecture 2025 was delivered on 13th November by Prof. Richard Dance (Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, University of Cambridge) in Trinity College Dublin’s Long Room Hub. Now in its twentieth year, this annual public lecture continues to provide scholars with an excellent opportunity to present innovative research on any aspect of Old English language, literature, history or culture. The lecture, moderated by Dr Alice Jorgensen and delivered in a hybrid format, was well attended by an audience which ranged from undergraduates to senior scholars, with sixty-eight participants joining remotely through Zoom. Prof. Dance’s light humour and wit generated a lively atmosphere, as demonstrated by the audience’s engaged questions and suggestions.

Entitled ‘Myths and Monsters: *Beowulf* and the Etymologists,’ Dance undertook a reconsideration of the terminology for monsters in *Beowulf*, highlighting the significance of the glosses provided in J. M. Kemble’s (1835-38) edition of *Beowulf* as well as the plethora of modern resources available to scholars online. Throughout, he also noted the possible associations of these monster-terms with other Indo-European languages and reiterated the association of emotion with physical reactions as a prevalent feature of Old English poetry, where we often see emotions mapped metaphorically to sensations such as fire and heat.¹ In particular, we were intrigued by Dance’s discussion of the enigmatic term *aglæca* and by some fascinating new theories on the name ‘Grendel.’

Dance’s thorough and comprehensive handling of intricate etymological family-trees was impressive, as he expertly navigated between hypothesised word origins while keeping the audience from getting lost in the haze of language families and postulated historical forms. Ensuring that the lecture remained focused on the text itself, Prof. Dance drew parallels between his findings and the development of *Beowulf*’s plot, characters and themes. His thoughtful and holistic approach to etymology, recognising

¹ See Leslie Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto, 2011); Alice Jorgensen, *Emotional Practice in Old English Literature* (Cambridge, 2024).

and accepting both the limitations of scholarly endeavours and the interpretative productivity that this supplies, foregrounded *Beowulf's* compelling imaginative potentiality for both reader and critic and stood as a compelling justification of etymology's importance in the study of Old English texts. As undergraduate students, the lecture introduced us to a variety of approaches to *Beowulf* we were previously unfamiliar with, and motivated us to further pursue our studies in the field of Old English.

Works cited

Lockett, Leslie. *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto, 2011)

Jorgensen, Alice. *Emotional Practice in Old English Literature* (Cambridge, 2024).

Eavan O'Keeffe

Trinity College Dublin

eokeeff6@tcd.ie

© 2025 Eavan O'Keeffe

Aurora Ventrizzo

Trinity College Dublin

ventorua@tcd.ie

© 2025 Aurora Ventrizzo

ROEP: Resources for Old English Prose

The teaching and study of Old English literature has long been dominated by a small, select corpus of poetic texts, while the much larger and more diverse corpus of Old English prose remains relatively neglected. In recent years, however, Old English prose has come increasingly to the fore. A new Oxford-based website *ROEP: Resources for Old English Prose* (<https://roep.site.ox.ac.uk/>) designed by Francis Leneghan as part of his AHRC project ‘Writing Pre-Conquest England: A New Literary History of Old English Prose’, with the assistance of Niamh Kehoe, makes available, for the first time, accessible, authoritative, and dynamic learning resources on Old English prose texts and writers. Intended for university and school-level students, researchers and teachers, as well as interested members of the wider public, *ROEP* spotlights the remarkable achievements of English prose writers from the seventh to the twelfth centuries. On this website, users will find ‘Short Introductions’ to Old English texts, which provide essential information on context, content, style, themes, manuscript contexts, as well as select bibliographies; linked audio recordings of excerpts from the texts; recent publications on Old English prose works; further learning resources; and news on upcoming events.

Written by established and emerging scholars, the Short Introductions are grouped thematically and generically, allowing students and their teachers to see at a glance the types of prose writings that exist and that are available to them for further study: current groupings include Ælfric; Alfredian Prose; Biblical Translations and Apocrypha; Historical Writing; Homilies, Sermons and Penitentials; Mercian Prose; Philosophy; Saints’ Lives; Science and Medicine; Travel Writing, Geography, and Romance; Practical and Administrative Writing; and Wulfstan. The website thus offers a much more dynamic learning experience than the average textbook. Individual prose texts will appear under multiple relevant groupings, in a way that isn’t possible in printed anthologies. For example, entries grouped under Mercian prose (such as the *Old English Martyrology*, Wærferth’s *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, or *Wonders of the East*) encourage comparison but also curiosity and independent learning: students may then wish to navigate to ‘Saints’ Lives’ to explore other hagiography produced throughout the period and in other parts of England — or to ‘Alfredian Literature’, or ‘Travel Writing’. These groupings will hopefully build a more cohesive picture of the remarkable range and scope of Old English prose for students, encouraging them to follow their noses and

make their own connections between texts. Crucially, these Introductions offer examples, or models, on how to approach writing literary analyses on prose texts; as much university-level teaching on Old English tends to prioritise verse texts, we hope that *ROEP* will provide a way in for students to approach prose texts with confidence. *ROEP* can also provide inspiration for class or seminar assignments: for example, students could be asked to choose one grouping or genre to explore and present upon; or students can be directed towards the website to supplement their knowledge of a certain area. In providing this resource, we aim to lay the building blocks for students to then go on to explore more comprehensive resources, such as the website for the ECHOE project and *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*. At present, we have uploaded over 40 Short Introductions, with many more in the pipeline. If you would like to contribute a Short Introduction on an Old English prose text that you are interested in, please do get in touch with us!

In addition to the *ROEP* website, we have been engaged in outreach work with local communities, such as Cerne Abbas, to raise the profile of key prose writers such as Ælfric: we delivered a public lecture in Cerne on the 10th January which is now available online: <https://cerneabbashistory.org/chs-youtube-channel/>. A major international conference, *New Directions in Old English Prose*, is taking place at the University of Oxford in March 2026, with keynotes from Daniel Anlezark, John Hines and Luisa Ostacchini, followed by a symposium on the Old English *Apollonius of Tyre* at the University of Bergamo, co-organised by Garbiele Cocco, in April. In May 2025, we held a highly successful Prose Training Day for 25 graduate students, with sessions led by Amy Faulkner, Susan Irvine and Christine Rauer. Details of past and future events are available on the *ROEP* website here: <https://roep.site.ox.ac.uk/events>.

For further information on the project, please contact Prof. Francis Leneghan (francis.leneghan@ell.ox.ac.uk) or Dr Niamh Kehoe (niamh.kehoe-rouchy@st-hildas.ox.ac.uk).

Francis Leneghan and Niamh Kehoe
University of Oxford



Unravelling Old English Riddles with Year 7s at the Bodleian's Weston Library

In late April of 2024, the Year 7 pupils of Swan School in Oxford descended upon the Weston Library for a morning of medieval literary study. Their day was to be a varied one: after receiving a quick welcome from members of the excellent Bodleian Education team, Dr Roger Caseby and Georgina Moore, the 11–12-year-olds were split into groups of around twenty pupils and proceeded to take part in a carousel of activities spanning the medieval period. These offering the pupils varying modes of engagement with the medieval literary world, and comprised a tour of the landmark *Chaucer: Here and Now* exhibition (curated by Professor Marion Turner), a practical printing workshop using the Weston foyer's resident printing press, and a creative-critical workshop on Old English riddles entitled 'Unravelling Riddles', which I led.

Teaching Old English riddles to Year 7s offered an enjoyable challenge. These pupils were still very early in their study of English Literature and represented all abilities and inclinations towards the subject. They did, however, have some grounding in early medieval literature: they had studied Seamus Heaney's translation of *Beowulf* as part of their syllabus in Year 7 (indeed, many UK schools now teach *Beowulf* in translation in their final year of primary school). My aim for this session was to enrich their knowledge of early medieval literature, incorporate playfulness as a key component of their learning, and to encourage critical reflection that extended beyond qualitative assessments of texts as 'good' or 'bad'. This all sounds rather ambitious for a forty-five-minute session, but it was aided by the nature of riddles themselves. As Nick Montfort writes in *Twisty Little Passages*, riddles are a form of Interactive Fiction, this being defined as a text or computer-mediated game that allows the reader or user to engage with it (for example, choosing the trajectory of the narrative in a choose-your-own-adventure novel, following links in hypertext fiction, or guessing a riddle answer). As such, they allow readers the opportunity to creatively play with the text in a way that echoes that of their earlier medieval readers.

I structured the workshop by splitting it into four smaller sections of five to ten minutes each, which allowed variation while also ensuring a sense of trajectory to the workshop. In the first section, 'what do we know?', I asked the pupils to tell me anything that they knew about 'Anglo-Saxon' culture (the term that they are taught at school). I simultaneously showed them some images of archaeological finds from early medieval

Britain and said that if they did not already know anything about the Anglo-Saxons, then what could they *tell* from these images. I then offered the pupils some brief facts (what languages did Anglo-Saxons write in? Who could read and write? What did they read and write?) about early medieval literary culture in England, to offer a firm foundation for our exploration of riddles.

For our next section we looked more closely at riddles themselves. I showed them a series of modern riddles on the screen (for example, the fish riddle by J.R.R. Tolkien, and Lord Byron's riddle on the letter 'e'), and gave pupils thirty seconds to discuss with their neighbour what they thought they answer might be. They were very good at this and offered a forest of hands up, many of the groups getting the answer right on the first educated guess. I then asked students, based on their experience unravelling these riddles, how they would define a riddle, why they think someone might write one, and why someone might read one. To these questions they offered thoughtful reflections about readers wanting to feel challenged and gaining a sense of achievement, about writers wanting to feel intellectually superior, and on the value of riddles for helping readers see the world differently.

We then moved to take a closer look at Old English riddles. I offered some information about The Exeter Book and noted some of the key literary features of riddles. This reinforced some of the literary terminology they had used to discuss *Beowulf* and their wider English studies (notably, alliteration, metaphor, and kenning), and the pupils readily and accurately offered correct definitions of these terms. We then played the riddle guessing game again, but this time with Riddle 47 and 49 of the Exeter Book, as translated by Megan Cavell for the *Riddle Ages* website. Astoundingly, some of the groups offered answers to both riddles correctly with no help, which they were very pleased with. When the correct answer was guessed, we looked at the riddle again and paused over the moments that gave us clues towards the answer.

This final activity drew together the knowledge that students had gained about Old English riddles and their own creativity. The pupils were each given a cue card on which was written and visually depicted an answer to one of The Exeter Book riddles (for example: 'an onion', 'a snowflake', 'a sword'). Pupils were then asked to write a riddle for their neighbours, the answer to which would be their cue card. Their handouts provided support for this activity, and prompted pupils to think about the material

qualities of their cue (what does it smell like? What does it taste like?) They then shared their riddle with their neighbours and asked them to guess the answer. I asked pupils who wished to share their riddle with the group, and the room then also tried to guess the answer. This produced some fantastic results, a couple of which I have reproduced (with permission of the talented young authors!) below:

*It comes at night,
Sometimes in the day.
It is your imagination
Coming to play.
Is it real? Is it not?
What am I?
(Answer: A dream)*

*An enjoyable piece of wood;
By my words it is written.
On my brain and body,
On your mind and eyes.
Keep me in your head.
Who am I?
(Answer: A book)*

The workshop proved both fun and informative for me as well as, I hope, for the pupils. Teaching a younger age range of pupils helped me to better understand the kind of contextual learning that undergraduate students may still carry with them into their studies – who among us still remembers the outstanding English teacher they were taught by at school? – and the perceptions of the early medieval world that are currently being taught. If their continued study of Old English is anything as good as their current ability to unravel riddles, then the future of our discipline is in safe hands.

Eleanor Baker
University of Oxford



Playing with Old English: A Playful Pedagogy Resource

Traditional tools for teaching Old English do not work particularly well for all learners—perhaps for the majority of learners—for a variety of reasons. In 2023, we embarked on a project to bring play into Old English classrooms, with the aims of a) underpinning our own teaching practice with pedagogical theory about creativity/play in higher education b) encouraging our PhD students to make use of pedagogical theory in their teaching and c) co-designing teaching resources and making these as widely available as possible.

Education researchers have long known that play increases dopamine, enables creative and motivated engagement, promotes group cohesion, encourages inclusive learning, and builds resilience. Lindsay Wheeler and Michael Palmer refer to natural increases in dopamine during learning as “biological candy,” elicited “when we are curious, solve complex problems, discover something new, novel, unexpected or intriguing, believe we have choice, control and autonomy, or imagine a creative solution.” Play and learning are a perfect fit, yet higher education often expects students to undertake the latter without a hint of the former. This has more to do with traditional power structures and perceptions of authority than with pedagogy. Yet, instilling creative and self-motivating learning practices in students is essential in a world that will require them to think on their feet and develop new skills rapidly. The pedagogy of play has a place in every higher education classroom.

Based on a completely unscientific sampling of friends and colleagues, Old English teachers seem to recognise this—a LOT of us use games and playful activities in our classrooms. Enough of us, in fact, that in 2019 the annual meeting of TOEBI at the University of Manchester was themed “Work and Play.” We were both in attendance, and we realised that we have a shared investment in transforming the teaching of our subject through engagement with innovative pedagogies.

We are especially interested in structured play that allows students to engage with difficult grammatical concepts that they are increasingly untrained to tackle when they enter higher education, and we are particularly eager to exploit opportunities for spontaneous learning and authentic engagement with material that, when taught badly, becomes an alienating experience. Rather than putting this pedagogical theory into

practice in separate contexts, we decided to collaborate with each other, our colleagues and PhD students to design distinctive educational opportunities for both postgraduate and undergraduate students. The fact that our institutions had an already-established partnership meant that we could fund this initiative through the Birmingham-Illinois Partnership for Discovery, Engagement and Education with a Teaching and Learning Grant.

The result was a week-long, intensive workshop, held at the University of Birmingham in May 2023, that brought together professors, lecturers, and postgraduate students from Birmingham, the University of Illinois, and the University of Oxford – including both of us and Wai Leuk Cheung, Jamie Keener, Hannah Majewski, Meg Morrow, Kate Newton, Anna Packman, Katharine Sykes and Laura Varnam. In the lead-up to the workshop, we shared a reading list and wrote responses to a series of essays on higher education, language learning, creativity and play, providing a solid grounding in pedagogical theory. Our workshop then put this theory into practice by designing resources for teaching Old English, conceived as standalone activities that could be dropped into any course structure. The workshop began with structured discussion and brainstorming sessions, as well as a LEGO Serious Play session run by Danielle Hinton of Birmingham’s Higher Education Futures Institute. The rest of the week was divided up into planning/designing sessions in break-out groups, with small groups changing across each activity so we all had the chance to work with everyone at the workshop. We also beta-tested each activity to identify any immediate snags, and this was perhaps the most fun part of an extremely engaging five days!

The final list of activities includes:

1. **Preposition Quest** – for helping students memorise (or quizzing them on) 8 key prepositions through embodied play around the classroom and a fun (but low-stakes!) competition element.
2. **Dictionary Pilgrimage** – for introducing key aspects of dictionary resources through a worksheet that guides students through a pilgrimage. Importantly, students will all learn the Old English word for “cheese,” which you know is going to come in handy.
3. **Ship of Beowulf** – for engaging students with Old English grammar through an ongoing creative writing project that involves slowly replacing Modern English words with Old English ones as new grammatical concepts are learned. The

name is inspired by the Ship of Theseus thought experiment, which asks if an object that has had all of its components replaced is still the same object; we ask that of translation instead.

4. **Verbs: Making a Meal of It** – for introducing the morphology of Old English verbs at an early stage of instruction. The focus is on differentiating between strong and weak verbs and understanding paradigms.
5. **Introducing Case: The Treasure ‘Case’** – for introducing students with little or no experience of inflected languages to the concept of grammatical case through student-led sample sentences in Modern English. Lots of room for silliness, depending on which objects the players bring in or choose.
6. **Kennings Kwest!** – for introducing students to literary concepts such as defamiliarisation, synecdoche, metaphor, and metonymy through kennings. Students will both translate real kennings and design their own (e.g. hand dryer = air fury).
7. **Old English Story Packs** – for practising the appropriate grammatical forms of nouns, verbs and adjectives. Groups of students write their own stories using sets of cards with a random mix of words. Absurdity is encouraged, as long as the words are grammatically correct!
8. **Subject/Verb Word Order Matching Game** – for demonstrating both the importance of word order in Old English and how suffixes/vowel variations in verbs convey semantic information. Who doesn't like a matching game?
9. **Beowulf Brawl board game** – for testing grammatical information about nouns in a fun and competitive group context. The goal of the board game is to be the first to get to the end, where death by dragon secretly awaits. No one can escape their fate!

Each module lists the goals of the activity; provides teacher notes indicating estimated time for the activity and potential variations; required materials; instructions for setting up the classroom; and resources, such as worksheets, handouts, playing cards, images, and instructions that can be printed or displayed as necessary.

The full resource pack is available open-access through the University of Illinois' research repository, IDEALS. You can access the pdf here (<https://hdl.handle.net/2142/122753>) or simply scan the QR code.



Special thanks go to Illinois PhD student Jamie Keener, who took the group's variously formatted activity files and revamped them into the delightful pdf you will find there.

We hope you try out these activities in your own classroom, and we welcome feedback if you do!

Megan Cavell
University of Birmingham

Renée R. Trilling
University of Toronto



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
- Junicode font
- learned societies
- and more!

See <http://www.toebi.org.uk/resources/>.

Additionally, we would like to draw your attention to the Medieval Unicode Font Initiative, a huge help when completing diplomatic transcriptions from manuscripts. You can browse the characters here: <https://www.mufi.info/q.php?p=mufi/chars>

Special Offer

Liverpool University Press have published two new critical editions of Old English texts: The Battle of Maldon edited by Mark Griffith, and Maxims I and Maxims II edited by Kazutomo Karasawa.

LUP are offering 30% discount to TOEBI members through their website, with the discount codes 27BATTLE (Maldon) and '27GNOMIC' (Maxims). www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk

Both volumes are in the series Exeter Medieval Texts and Studies | Liverpool University Press; LUP is keen to hear from potential authors of other critical editions of Old English texts, or monographs and companions on related topics. Please contact commissioning editor Clare Litt, clare.litt@liverpool.ac.uk

Book Reviews

Literary Form in Early Medieval England, by Jennifer A. Lorden. Cambridge Elements: England in the Early Medieval World. Cambridge University Press, 2025, 69pp., £17.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-009-32861-6

Jennifer Lorden's essential new introduction to *Literary Form in Early Medieval England* is pithy enough to give the beginner a bird's eye view of the field as whole without compromising on nuance or interest. It offers a survey of the verse, mixed, prose, plain, and late styles of the literature of Early Medieval England in both English and Latin. Along the way it teaches the reader to attentively but critically consider the structures of texts, the structures of collections, and authorial claims about style and form—all cues to parsing how medieval texts were intended to be read and understood. Between the introduction and the section on Verse Forms, Lorden touches upon all the major points I would want a beginner student to understand about how they are stepping into a field that was shaped by perspectives and enthusiasms of previous generations, which must be continuously re-examined. Even as this material serves as an orientation to this specific field of literature it also introduces the concept of a critical tradition for a student who may be new to literary study more broadly, while simultaneously signalling to a more experienced reader what some of Lorden's own ideological positions are in relation to these critical debates. This is characteristic of the book as a whole, which is written to have appeal and relevance to multiple audiences.

The first section of the book is concerned with Old English and Anglo-Latin verse. I regularly use Lorden's article on sitting in *Beowulf* to introduce students to the principles of formulaic composition as she conveys its essentials so memorably and pithily, so I had high expectations for her explanations of the formulaic and allusive aspects of Old English verse, and was not disappointed. One of the points Lorden returns to across the volume is the idea that 'Insular literature was never so insulated as accounts of its history have sometimes been' (3). This amounts to more than just a gesture to the global turn; she emphasizes how influence flows not only across borders and languages but across periods, forms, and genres, as well as within and between Old English poems that construct meaning through formula and repetition. Interconnectedness is key. This

idea also comes through in her discussion of Anglo-Latin verse which highlights ways in which this was not a separate tradition but one that was thoroughly interconnected with Old English verse.

The section on mixed forms leads with an examination of the Latin tradition of twinned prose and verse texts, including a careful unpacking of Aldhelm's architectural metaphors for the function of the two forms. Lorden proposes in passing that Old English biblical poetry should also be understood as engaging in this *opus geminatum* tradition—an important corrective to the frequent assumption that the poems are merely tools of evangelism intended to make the narratives more culturally accessible. Reading as someone with a more superficial knowledge of the Latin tradition, I found that this section constructed a scaffold (to use another architectural metaphor) that placed what I know of that tradition into a more coherent whole. The Old English examples of mixed forms include the Old English *Boethius* but also, less expectedly, the Chronicle poems: Lorden uses the Edgar poems and their surrounding prose context to highlight differences between medieval and modern experiences of what constitutes a text.

The third section contrasts more and less ornamented prose forms, touching on such classic examples as Ælfric's alliterative prose and the intermittent passages of hermeneutic Latin in Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion*. Much of the appeal of this chapter lies in Lorden's interesting choice of exempla, which tend to be drawn from her own areas of research interest, such as such as the Latin and Old English lives of St Swithun by Lantfred and Ælfric. In her examination of these authors' stylistic choices she illustrates how meaning can be generated and authority claimed through adherence to convention within processes of adaptation. Lorden also uses this section to put across points about how structures—of collections and of individual texts—function as guides to reading, with an illustrative look at the Old English lives of St Malchus and St Mary of Egypt in contrast with *Apollonius of Tyre*. This is also the chapter that deals most extensively with the 'Alfredian' corpus, dwelling particularly on the *Soliloquies*.

In the section on plain and standard styles Lorden makes the case that 'plain style' is not only a deliberate formal choice and implicit rhetorical framing but often profoundly innovative as 'plainness' must be reinvented for different audiences and cultural contexts. She introduces concepts such as Standard Old English and Winchester

Vocabulary. Bede and Alcuin serve as illustrations of how plain Latin prose may be defined in relation to verse or to vernaculars: for Bede the simple style of his prose life of Cuthbert cultivates the authority of unembellished historiographical reportage, while for Alcuin standard Latin requires conscious cultivation to avoid blurring with a closely-related romance vernacular which might limit accessibility. Each author is also carefully navigating relationships and hierarchies. In a Benedictine Reform context Lorden casts a critical eye on conventional framing of the vernacular as a concession and examines how claims to straightforwardness of language imply accuracy of interpretation and so stake claims to authority.

The section on Later Forms traces the continuations of the Old English literary tradition beyond the Conquest (or conquests, with a nod to Cnut), primarily through poems that preserve or evolve formal features and generic conventions of Old English verse. *The First Worcester Fragment* is poignantly read as a continuation of the elegiac tradition. While the subject matter of these texts reinforces the impulse to read them as monuments to loss, Lorden frames them also as sites of innovation, noting interactions with a Latin and French dialogue tradition. She also points to how the contents and structures of earlier English texts profoundly influence Latin writers of hagiography and historiography.

The ideal audience for this book as a whole is an intermediate-level student who could use this volume to develop their mental map of the corpus and to challenge assumptions they might have brought to the material (or picked up from dated scholarship) about various forms and their functions; I can imagine this book being usefully assigned alongside to Daniel Sawyer's recent *How to Read Middle English Poetry* in a course that covers Medieval English literature across a broader chronological span. However, individual sections of the book could appropriately be assigned to a beginner, including students encountering this period only in the context of a broader survey course. Experienced researchers are also likely to find value in this book, since we all have our blind spots about areas beyond our respective niches; I came away from it with a clearer understanding of the contexts influencing the stylistic choices of the writers of Anglo Latin texts, and a new appreciation for the artifice of 'plain' style. I highly recommend this book as a teaching resource and will be using it regularly in my own teaching going forward.

Hannah M. Bailey
Wadham College, University of Oxford
hannah.bailey@wadham.ox.ac.uk
© 2025 Hannah M. Bailey



The Hermeneutics of Distraction in Early Medieval England, by Erica Weaver, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2025, xxv + 223 pp., US\$100.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-19-892209-4

Erica Weaver’s monograph strikingly disrupts the view that the phenomenon of ‘distraction’ is solely the preserve of a modern consciousness. It does so, primarily, by noticing ‘that it was the management of distraction that helped create and sustain textual and religious communities, from the idealization of desert asceticism ca. 420 right through the development of Western monasticism’ (xix). Central to the overarching argument is perhaps the most zealous Benedictine reformer, Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester (d. 984), and his intellectual circle (which included, of course, his prolific pupil Ælfric) and the texts they revered and composed. Notably, too, these tenth-century monastics wrote in ‘difficult’ hermeneutic Latin – known for its archaisms, neologisms and predominantly Greek loan-words – as well as the vernacular.

After contextualizing ‘Histories of Attention’ from the fourth-century Desert Mothers and Fathers who established ‘the forcing ground for monasticism in its Christian expression’ in Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Arabia to the writings of John Cassian (d. c. 435), the *Regula Sancti Benedicti* (RSB) and, finally, the *Regularis Concordia* (RC) written by Æthelwold himself, Weaver’s first chapter turns attention to the Psalms and singles out the respective Old English (OE) glossators’ vocabulary choices in the Royal and Lambeth Psalters. This chapter demonstrates that the very real problem of someone’s mind wandering as a consequence of psalmic overfamiliarity (it must be remembered that the first duty of a person entering a monastic house in the early medieval period was to thoroughly memorise and internalise all 150 psalms) could be potentially

overcome by the variegated OE vocabulary found in both the Royal and Lambeth Psalters. Weaver puts it this way:

By using innovative vocabulary, the Royal and Lambeth glossators ensured that readers would have several different options to stop and muse on what, exactly, the words might mean. While this might seem like an invitation to distraction, it reminds readers of all kinds to pay careful attention to every phrase. (51-2)

Weaver then positions this ‘erudite and recherché [OE] lexicon’ (43) of Royal and Lambeth within what she terms ‘hermeneutic English’ (54) whose purpose was to act as a ‘as a goad for heightened attention’ in rendering the Latin in so-called ‘clear words’ (63).

The second chapter notes that the core texts behind both Æthelwold and Dunstan’s efforts to reform the monasteries were the Psalms, the *RSB* and the works of Aldhelm who is described as ‘early medieval England’s first “man of letters”’ (64-5). It then harnesses Aldhelm’s *Enigmata* to showcase how his quintessentially hermeneutic Latin (Aldhelm himself proclaimed his admiration for *verbose garrulitas aut garrula verbositas* ‘verbose garrulity or garrulous verbosity’ (73)) functioned as an antidote to distraction. In other words, the experience of reading these complex, layered and multivalent riddles had the effect of vitalising the subject at hand and potentially, then, combatting boredom.

Next, the third chapter turns to address what Weaver calls an ‘attentive poetics’ (102) and argues persuasively for how late OE religious poems such as, for example, the *Metrical Psalms*, *The Menologium*, *The Lord’s Prayer (II)* and *The Lord’s Prayer (III)* can be read within this ‘attentive poetics’ frame when positioned alongside the poem *Occupatio* by Odo of Cluny (d. 942) which was written for the express purpose of occupying ‘minds that might otherwise wander away from proper monastic reflection’ (102). This chapter closes with a consideration of the role of these dedicatedly religious poems in personal devotion/formation. Weaver notices, for example, that a poem such as *Judgement Day II* audaciously implores the reader to repentance as well as vigilance for his/her proper living. She also observes the following:

Just as monastic practices of reading and prayer were heavily corrected, then, so

were monastic poems. In aspiring to cultivate attentive, responsive reading, the poets of millennial houses reoriented English and Latin poetics around literacy and learning, devising new techniques for stylistic embellishment [...]. And they [these poems] [...] provide an intense, immersive educational experience, wherein the poem and the reader become teacher and student embarking together on a project of readerly salvation. (132)

The final two chapters pivot away from the deliberation of various means to overcome distraction to consider how distraction was deliberately invoked or ‘scripted’ within didactic texts and early ‘liturgical drama’ (162). Chapter Four highlights how the schoolroom texts Ælfric’s *Colloquy* and Ælfric Bata’s *Colloquies* consciously script scenes of distraction and subsequent punishment to be performed by young novice monks in order to foster the formation of a requisite monastic identity. It also notices that in Byrhtferth’s *Enchiridion* (E) ‘everything is framed in an institutional, instructional context’ and the clerics chastised for their lack of discipline and Latin learning (in E) are essential to Byrhtferth’s ‘classroom practice’ in his shaming them for being inattentive (154). Chapter five considers how the *Visitatio sepulchri* (which was written into the RC and required monks to ‘inconspicuously’ interrupt the third lesson (165) of Matins on Easter morning and reenact the three Marys (the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene and the sister of Lazarus) arriving at Christ’s tomb and finding it empty) deliberately utilises inattention to sharpen awareness of the most important event in the liturgical year — the Resurrection. This chapter closes with a reflection of the inversion of attentive Divine reading depicted in the Tiberius version of *The Wonders of the East*. Finally, Weaver concludes by considering the ‘rapid cooling of interest in the hermeneutic style in the twelfth century’ (xxix) and how handbooks such as *Ancrene Wisse* articulate a movement away from ‘enclosed minds to enclosed bodies’ (188).

Given that the 2017 paper which is considered a foundational contributor to open AI is entitled ‘Attention Is All You Need’, the *Hermeneutics of Distraction*’s rich consideration of the multi-faceted role human attention plays in the acquisition of knowledge (within the tenth-century Benedictine reform) is timeless in two ways. First, it reminds us that a tension between attention and distraction is hardly a recent phenomenon. Second, it perhaps can function as a call, then, to attend to the role of attention in the ongoing discussion about how to use and evaluate AI.

Works Cited

- Gretsch, Mechthild, 'Benedictine Reformers (act. c. 960-c. 1000)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 4 October, 2008, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/98101> [accessed 29 November, 2025]
- Lapidge, Michael, 'The Hermeneutic Style in Anglo-Latin Literature' in his *Anglo-Latin Literature 900-1066* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1993)
- Stephenson, Rebecca, *The Politics of Language: Byrhtferth, Ælfric, and the Multilingual Identity of the Benedictine Reform* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015)
- Toswell, M. J., *The Anglo-Saxon Psalter* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014)
- Vaswani, Ashish, et al., 'All You Need Is Attention', *Advances in Neural Information Processing Systems*, 30 (2017), 5998-6008
- Ward, Benedicta, trans., *The Sayings of the Desert Mothers and Fathers* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1975)

Ann Pascoe-van Zyl

Trinity College Dublin

pascoeve@tcd.ie

© Ann Pascoe-van Zyl, 2025



The Cædmon Manuscript: The Beginnings of English Poetry, I. Bernard J. Muir. Anthem Press, 2023. 250 pages. Hardcover, \$195.00 (ISBN 9781839989742).

A new edition of the poems of Junius 11 is overdue and highly welcome, and feels part of a resurgence of interest in the manuscript and its poetry. This volume offers a relatively brief, 50-odd-page Introduction; valuable gathering diagrams for the manuscript; the editions of the poems themselves with footnotes on the major variations from past editions; and an art historical commentary on the images of the manuscript. There is no glossary, and no translations; the introduction suggests that Daniel Anlezark's 2011 translations for Dumbarton Oaks should be used for the Old Testament poems. Curiously, there is no reference to Mary Clayton's 2013 translation of *Christ and Satan* in the same series, with the reader advised instead to use R. K.

Gordon's 1954 revision of his 1929 translation, and to make use of Ophelia Eryn Hostetter's online Old English Poetry Project (Foreword, p. vii).

Although Carl Kears' 2023 monograph is too recent to be included, Bernard Muir here broadly agrees that the "overriding theme" of the codex and its texts is falls that result from disobedience through pride (p. vii). He also points out other common interests, such as Eastertide readings and their typological interest in texts foretelling Christ's coming and victory over Satan (pp. 3–4). As with his fine edition of the Exeter Book's texts, and at the same time as looking for unifying principles, Muir reads Junius 11 as an anthology and indeed seems to have some interesting views on "the anthologising poet responsible for *Christ and Satan*" in particular (p. 23). Reading this text as an anthology which ends an anthology which contains a composite *Genesis* and a possibly composite *Daniel* is a potentially generative line of argument, and fuller exploration of the arguments for reading both text and manuscript in this way would have been welcome.

The second volume of Muir's excellent edition of the Exeter Book has full discussions of each text in the manuscript. By comparison, this edition is limited in scope: the editor again refers readers to editions of the individual poems for more detailed discussion (p. 17). This supplements the feeling that the volume as a whole was put together in something of a rush. A minor point, but one that feels to me telling of the sense of haste, is that <P> and <D> several times appear to be printed in a different font, as do some parts of some footnotes.

The exclusion of Clayton's translation is not exceptional: while there is enough material in the bibliography to show that some more recent revision has taken place, on the whole it looks as though this edition was made in the early 2000s. Ericksen's 2020 study is, for instance, included in the list of studies on page 33, but is clearly tagged on at the end too late to be alphabetised; perhaps for the same reason, her name is misspelt (here, but not in the bibliography). There is no mention of Gneuss and Lapidge's 2014 bibliographical handlist of manuscripts, somewhat more useful as a bibliographical reference than anything mentioned here. While no bibliography can be complete, significant analyses with direct relevance to the ideas discussed here, such as Mittman and Kim's marvellous article on Junius 11 MS page 3 are not included. The bibliography is explicitly only select, but this makes life difficult for any reader. Herbert J. Broderick

III's 1978 doctoral thesis is, for instance, referred to three times in the discussion but not cited there. The decision to use only "author, date" citations even for these unlisted texts makes the process of following up references more time-consuming than it needed to be.

The edition itself is clean and readable. It is very useful to expand the manuscript's Roman numerals into Old English words to show the alliteration. The addition of subtitles while excluding manuscript fitt numbers is an interesting editorial move, and I would have welcomed some editorial reflection on this. The footnotes on corrections and scribal variations are excellent, in some senses making the edition most valuable when read looking at the manuscript images. The only footnote that is not a discussion of the manuscript itself is an interesting reflection on God being called *Metod* at Genesis 1415 (though the same noun has been used earlier, 14 times by my count), discussing the pre-Christian term as adopted into Christianity via Acts 1.7 with a comparison to *Beowulf* (n. 278 p. 121). This is perfectly reasonable, but being the only note of this sort in the edition makes it appear peculiar. The more usual form of notes on scribal forms are marvellous. An example is the marvellous note 76 on *breacna* in *Exodus* 345 (p. 189), in which Muir calls attention to the scribe starting to write <n> and then shifting to write <c>; it is similarly useful to have notes pointing out the scribe's rare uses of high <s> (on MS page 228 lines 12 and 18; and MS page 229 line 6). There are of course occasional omissions (such as the marginal pen trials on MS page 214) and areas where I read the scribe's work differently (such as marginal *healf trymt* on MS page 98, n. 404 p. 147 where I read an abbreviation mark as printed here and Muir does not). But on the whole, it is a great pleasure to return to the manuscript with the detail observed here and the support it provides. This makes it all the more regrettable that there is not fuller discussion in the Introduction of what Muir sees happening and the choices he has made. MS page 228 for instance, noted above as the site of unusual use of high <s>, is the end of (what I read as) an astonishingly cramped sequence of scribal work and Muir's sensitivity to scribal work and interest in copying stints could have made for a compelling discussion of the process of production. Such discussion could also have contextualised some editorial decisions: there must be a logic behind rejecting the scribe's enlarged *b* (MS page 229.3, *Christ and Satan* 713b). Most editors follow the scribe here and start a new sentence: Muir uses a semi-colon and ignores the small capital. Similarly, against an explicit general policy of presenting what the manuscript shows, especially when corrections show that decisions were conscious (as at e.g. *Christ and*

Satan 34, retaining MS *alda* against usual editorial *ealda*), Muir emends scribal *gesetet* with a likely final letter emendation (*Genesis A* 100), and restores the erased final <-a> in instances of *gyta* at *Genesis A* 116 and 155, the second of which is arguably a metrically-influenced emendation. Like Krapp but unlike Clayton, Muir emends *Christ and Satan* 57b (MS page 214 line 8, *earm sceaða* → *sceaðana sum*), another site where the current manuscript reading was produced by correction, for metrical reasons. I am not suggesting that any of these scribal forms should be retained: just that the decision-making around them matters; such reflections are a major reason for reading new editions of poems like these; and the policy of this edition and its interpretation of the manuscript and its language remain unclear.

By contrast with this lack of synthesised analysis of scribal work, it is potentially enormously valuable to have an edition of these poems which is focused on the images, explicitly as a companion piece to the online images in the Digital Bodleian project. Muir’s discussion of the artists in the Introduction is deeply informed and useful (pp. 24–31), in contrast with an extremely short section on the scribes on page 17. The Art Historical Commentary (pp. 261–99) is the richest part of the book and can be read independently of the edition itself. In this, Muir summarises the contents and most direct Scriptural source(s) of each image; gives some critical history focused on feasible origins for both different elements and overall composition; and gives his own commentary on notable aspects of the image or ways to assess it. Perhaps most insightful is his discussion of the serpent on MS page 41 as slithering back towards the hellmouth (p. 26; pp. 278–79), against Karkov’s reading of the image. On the whole, Muir follows Barbara Raw’s influential reading of the images as somewhat clumsily adopted from a Carolingian codex, though this characterisation of relatively unthinking planning contrasts with his recognition of a “quite complicated” process (p. 30) involving improvisation and creativity (see esp. n. 71 p. 31). There are occasional references to Augustine’s *City of God* to provide some exegetical context, which are all useful. It might have been ideal to have fuller exploration of relevant commentaries; Bede’s *On Genesis*, for instance, would have been useful in analysing the manuscript’s image of Enoch (MS page 60, illustrating Genesis 5.15–17, discussed pp. 286–87 here), given their apparent shared interest in Enoch as representing the righteous ones who dwell with God forever. Given how comprehensive a reference source it is, it is a shame that the Commentary includes neither discussion of the zoomorphic initials as individual pieces, nor of the interlace pattern on MS page 225 in *Christ and Satan*.

Given Muir’s knowledge of the manuscript and its contexts, I would have valued more of his opinions, even if expressed tentatively. The sequence of initial making, for instance, is complicated and scholars have expressed different views about who made them and when. These views are summarised here (pp. 31–32), but without Muir giving his own assessment; another reason to regret these not being included in the Art Historical Commentary. Likewise, the competing arguments for the manuscript’s date and place of production are given (n. 9 pp. 2–3; repeated as n. 2 p. 262) without the editor giving his view.

While there is reference to Catherine Karkov’s significant 2001 study of Junius 11 and its images, and indeed to Broderick’s 1982 discussion of frames, the thinking of neither seems to have been fully incorporated into the way Muir looks at the images and especially their frames. Broderick’s 2009 essay (not cited here) is a good example of how thinking about the framing of images in Junius 11 continues to develop. By comparison, this edition’s art historical commentary feels somewhat outdated; nowhere more so than when being scornful of the artist’s management of perspective (at e.g. p. 268 on MS page 9; p. 282 on MS page 52; p. 287 on MS page 60). The close observation and insight shown in Muir’s reading of the snake on MS page 41 is not reflected when considering the captions—that on MS page 3, for instance, which states that this is the moment at which God created hell, is not “clearly out of place” at all (p. 264). It is almost certainly set half-way down the page because this is the point at which the narrative twists, from Lucifer’s rebellion to his defeat. A twisted shape in the centre of the frame illustrates this: hell has been created at this point to receive the falling angels, who fall into it further down the image.

To refer regularly to “Anglo-Saxon” culture and traditions likewise implies a degree of separation from current discussions or an unreflective approach to the material—especially when making propositions about “native Anglo-Saxon” and “foreign” workers and practices (n. 8 p. 2; p. 16). We can be much more specific about scribal practices and artistic trends than that; and a major purpose of Muir’s discussion about influence and movement in the Introduction is that modern notions of “native” and “foreign” as absolute categories dividing those brought up on one side or another of the English Channel don’t hold in this period.

There are a number of comments incorporated into both the Introduction and the Commentary which are set in square brackets (at e.g. pp. 283, 285, 293, 295). Presumably these are additions, by Muir or someone else, at a specific stage of revision. Some of them have information which feels almost random, and which is certainly tangential to the discussion at hand. It's perfectly true, for instance, to observe on page 296 in the art historical commentary that the Scriptural Abram becomes Abraham once he renews his Covenant in Genesis 17.5. But he's always called Abraham in the poem, and none of this is relevant to the image on MS page 82 anyway because it doesn't name anyone. Likewise, it is a fact that some Biblical scholars see Cham looking at Noah drunk and naked as echoing the Uranus and Cronus myth (p. 295)—but what does this have to do with the poem or its images?

There are mistakes in discussion of some aspects of the culture and period. Ælfric is not, for instance, the author of the Old English Hexateuch (as stated on p. 29) but just of the very start of it (as he himself states in its Preface). *Genesis A* is most unlikely to be later than *Genesis B*, though it may perhaps be later than the Old Saxon poem translated into *Genesis B* (p. 16; contrast p. 18). The multiplicity of the Genesis texts does make discussion of them complicated, but that makes it all the more important that editions of this material do so carefully: on pp. 264–65, the Old Saxon poet seems to be attributed with *Genesis A*. This may be a confusion drawn from the 1915 translation of the composite Genesis poem, which is used at this point only. On page 31, Muir reads the scribe writing a small letter to show a later draughtsman what the enlarged and decorated initial should be as an innovation showing that the draughtsman was probably not a native speaker of Old English, rather than being named as a guide letter which is normal practice in manuscripts before and after this date.

On the whole, this edition will not replace existing editions of the individual texts and does not provide an overhaul of scholarship on Junius 11 in a manner comparable with the impact of Muir's edition of the Exeter Book. A reader has to work hard to pull out the most valuable elements from a somewhat unstructured and unfinished whole. Those valuable elements are, though, genuinely productive and potentially exciting: where Muir provides his analyses or close readings, they are always rich and stimulating. As a result, as a handbook alongside which to reread the work of the scribes and artists, it is excellent. Through it, I have found myself excited by different aspects of Junius 11,

and sparking engagement is certainly the most important accomplishment for any academic text.

S. C. Thomson
Heinrich-Heine-Universität, Düsseldorf
simon.thomson@hhu.de
© 2025 S. C. Thomson



Recent Publications

Below is a by no means exhaustive list of some recent titles in Old English and Early Medieval Studies. If you're interested in reviewing one of these books for future editions of the TOEBI newsletter, or there is a book not included on this list that you would like to review, please get in touch with the newsletter editors.

De Gruyter Mouton

Javier E. Díaz-Vera, *Positive Emotions in Old English Language and Thought: An Emotion Family Approach* (2025).

Larry Swain and Aaron Hostetter, *Teaching Beowulf: Practical Approaches* (2024).

Oxford University Press

Tom Birkett, *Runes: A Concise History* (published online 2025, available in print soon).

Bloomsbury Press

Heather O'Donoghue, *Beowulf: Poem, Poet and Hero* (2024).

ARC Humanities Press

Rachel A. Burns, *A History of Old English Verse Layout: Poetics on The Page* (2024).

Colleen M. Curran, *The Anglo-Latin Poetic Tradition: Sources, Transmission, and Reception, ca. 650-1100* (2024).

Elaine Treharne, *Disrupting Categories, 1050-1250: Rethinking the Humanities through Premodern Texts* (2024).

Boydell and Brewer

Francis Leneghan, *Old English Biblical Prose: Translation, Adaptation, Interpretation* (2026).

Daniel Anlezark, *Constructing the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* (2025).

Brepols

Daniel Thomas, *The Old English Poet as Reader* (2026).

Mercedes Salvador-Bello, *The History of the Physiologus in Early Medieval England* (2025).

Charles D Wright, Thomas Hall, Thomas D. Hill eds, *A New Commentary on the Old English Prose Solomon and Saturn' and 'Adrian and Ritheus' Dialogues* (2024).

Thomas N. Hall, Winfried Rudolf, eds, *Sermons, Saints, and Sources: Studies in the Homiletic and Hagiographic Literature of Early Medieval England* (2025).

Amy Faulkner and Francis Leneghan, eds, *The Age of Alfred: Rethinking English Literary Culture, c. 850-950* (2024)

Peter J. Lucas, *Old English Poetry from Manuscript to Message* (2024).

Cambridge University Press

Harriet Soper, *The Life Course in Old English Poetry* (2024).

Medieval Institute Publications

University of Toronto Press

Mo Pareles, *Nothing Pure: Jewish Law, Christian Supersession, and Bible Translation in Old English* (2024).

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 early medieval 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 Dr Amy Faulkner (amy.faulkner@ucl.ac.uk) or consult the website, www.toebi.org.uk/joinus.

Meeting

The next TOEBI meeting will take place at the University of Nottingham. The conference will take place on 24th October 2026 and this year's theme will be 'All Kinds of People.' A CFP is available [here](#).

Conference Awards

TOEBI regularly awards bursaries to help postgraduate students attend conferences. Applications are welcome from both current postgraduates and those who have recently completed doctorates but do not yet have an academic post. The application form can be downloaded from the website

TOEBI Committee

Chair

Prof. Francis Leneghan

President

Prof. Elaine Treharne

Committee Members

Dr Hannah Bailey

Dr Lindy Brady

Dr Rachel Burns

Dr Alice Jorgensen

Dr Rebecca Stephenson

Secretary

Dr Amy Faulkner

Awards Coordinator

Dr Daria Izdebska

Digital Officer

Dr Patricia O'Connor

Newsletter Editors

Dr Francisco J. Rozano-García

Dr Claire Poynton-Smith

PGR Representative

Robyn McAuliffe

(www.toebi.org.uk/grants-for-graduates) and should be submitted to Dr Daria Izdebska (d.w.izdebska@salford.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

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. To contact the editors about a review, a submission, or anything else, please write to the following addresses: francisco.rozano@pdi.atlanticomedio.es and poyntonc@tcd.ie.

