Book Reviews

Julia Fernández-Cuesta, Sara M. Pons-Sanz. eds. 2016. *The Old English Gloss to the Lindisfarne Gospels. Language, Author and Context*. (Anglia Book Series Vol. 51.) Berlin: De Gruyter. Pp. 432. 978-3-11-043856-7.

Reviewed by FRANCISCO J. ÁLVAREZ-LÓPEZ, University of Exeter

In 2012, Julia Fernández Cuesta and Sara Pons-Sanz organised a two-day workshop at the University of Westminster on the Old English gloss entered between the lines of the Lindisfarne Gospels in the middle of the tenth century. An autographed colophon attributes this to a certain Aldred, who skilfully sets himself against the background of his predecessors in the building of such a monumental manuscript. Another colophon tells us about his work in the so-called Durham Ritual or Collectar (Durham, Cathedral Library, A.iv.19), where he glosses Bede's commentary on Proverbs.

This collection of essays is the product of that workshop, and in their introduction the editors set out to "offer the reader a fresh approach to the Lindisfarne gloss, one that stresses the importance of interdisciplinary work" (p. 9). In truth, volume 51 of De Gruyter's Anglia Book Series does that. This is a splendid compilation of studies on Aldred's vernacular gloss to the Lindisfarne Gospels and its cultural environment. Evidence is put forward from multiple angles including his glossing strategy, linguistic abilities, palaeographical features and his work in related manuscripts.

The volume's sixteen essays fall into three sections, each grouping studies under the headings 'The Gloss in Context', 'The Language of the Gloss', and 'Glossing Practice'. Given the multidisciplinary nature of this publication, its division allows the reader to focus on their area of interest with ease. Thus, Part I will attract the attention of readers with an interest in the cultural and historical background of Aldred as a scholar, as well as on his palaeographical features and ultimate purpose(s). Part II will cater for those interested in linguistic assessments of Aldred's Old Northumbrian dialect and the extent to which those features anticipate the changes that will develop during the early Middle English period. Finally, Part III offers papers focusing on the methodology behind Aldred's work both in the Lindisfarne Gospels as in the Durham Collectar. Similarly, some further light is shed on the glossing practices of other glossators traditionally related to Aldred.

The book opens with studies by two giant figures of Anglo-Saxon Studies. In the first, Michelle Brown explores Aldred's agenda and his purposes in

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producing his gloss. She highlights the importance of framing his work within the wider context of the cultural and political developments in tenth-century Northumbria and the ongoing efforts to establish a unified English nation. She concludes that Aldred is following an educational agenda with a distinctive emphasis on the vernacular, with particular reference to dialectal variation from Northumbria. Similarly, she reaffirms her belief on the authenticity of Aldred's colophon. The paper by Jane Roberts immediately follows with a more detailed reassessment of the colophon as well as an examination of other linguistic features found in the glosses and of Aldred's connection with some additions to the Durham Collectar. In the case of the often-discussed "account of the book's early history" (p. 39), Roberts discusses her discovery of an older poem embedded within its lines and arrives again at the conclusion that "Aldred was not the fabricator of the book's history, but its inheritor" (p. 41). Moreover, she concludes that Aldred not only used that inherited tradition to reflect the book's history, but he also wrote himself into it by adding his name to the list of those who had played a part in the making of the book before him (p. 48). She explores some surprising differences between Aldred's English in his gloss to John's Gospel and the other three (such as the use of the possessive adjective *sin*). She believes that such specificities may result from using earlier materials amongst which John's Gospel was missing. Finally, she briefly assesses the evidence to reconstruct the library to which Aldred had access at Chester-le-Street.

Philip Rusche looks south of the Humber in an attempt to assess the importance of the Benedictine Reform on Aldred's work and to establish potential similarities between his methodology and that seen in Southumbrian glosses. The results are disappointing and very little evidence is found. Out of the five main features that Rusche identifies in Southern glossators (reliance on early English glossaries, reliance on Isidore, replacement of Latin glosses with Old English, grammatical glossing, and morphemic glossing), Aldred shows none of the first three, and in the case of the last two, the evidence is not solid enough. In a similar vein, Paul Cavill revisits the topic of the influence of the Benedictine movement with regard to Aldred's marginalia on the Beatitudes in Matthew's Gospel. His reassessment of these marginal additions considers both their form (the use of maxims and wisdom literature) and content before concluding that the annotations reflect Aldred's reforming nature and more specifically his concern with simony. Incidentally, within the development of this conclusion Cavill offers a reinterpretation of Aldred's colophon hidden in a series of footnotes (pp. 98–99) where he emphasises

Aldred's concern with simony and the payment of money to the community such as the episode that brought about the dismissal of Abbot Seaxhelm.

The last paper in Part I is by Stewart Brookes and concentrates on the peculiar choices of script made by Aldred throughout his glossing work. Through a meticulous study of Aldred's letterforms we are confronted with a surprising degree of variation that challenges the image of Aldred as the epitome of Northumbrian writing practices in the mid-tenth century and proves that he was aware of scribal fashions south of the Humber. Brookes provides a wide range of evidence (see his appendices, pp. 123–150) that shows Aldred practising different styles, from Square minuscule to Caroline minuscule, scribal fashions often believed not to have reached Northumbria. The article also provides a successful and enlightening example of the use of new digital technologies (here, DigiPal) applied to palaeographical study.

In Part II, the volume turns towards a set of studies on the language of the gloss which opens with the work of Robert McColl Millar. The author provides a morphological study of the noun phrase in the Linsfarne gloss as a precursor of the profound changes to come in late Old English and early Middle English. The paper provides a very good range of evidence even if Aldred's gloss is but a starting point for the study rather than its core. Next, Marcelle Cole offers an exploration of linguistic variation across the gloss in order to test whether this may have been the work of a single individual, namely Aldred. Her unsurprising conclusion confirms the results of previous studies in that it is very likely that "Aldred relied on a variety of different sources from which he copied the variant forms as well as incorporating his own forms" (p. 187). Cole's evidence stems from a corpus including "every instance of a plural and third singular present form with an *-s* and *-ð* ending" (p. 181). Similarly, she leaves open the possibility (discarded by Brookes, for example) that various hands were involved in the copying of the gloss. Finally, Cole highlights the variations found between Matthew's Gospel and John's Gospel, while acknowledging the lack of conclusive evidence. Luisa García-García considers all causative *jan*-forms in an attempt to explore whether the Lindisfarne gloss shows innovative or conservative traits in derivational morphology. She offers a detailed analysis of all deverbal *jan*-verbs, although the article remains slightly inconclusive despite establishing a neat difference between derivational morphology and inflectional morphology. This is also seen in other papers in the volume (e.g. Millar, Cole, and Rodríguez-Ledesma).

In a similar fashion, María Nieves Rodríguez-Ledesma offers a quantitative study of the genitive constructions in the gloss and confirms that Aldred's language is certainly innovative in terms of morphology but more conservative in syntax. The author notes the uniqueness of Matthew's Gospel with regard to certain features such as the genitive singular forms of kinship nouns or "the distribution and frequency of the various inflections used for the genitive singular of the proper noun *Israel*" (p. 238). Rodríguez-Ledesma concludes that many of the features noted in her study will become characteristic of the Northumbrian dialect in later periods. George Walkden's contribution studies the use of null subjects in the gloss as a form of syntactic variation that sets Aldred's Northumbrian dialect apart from West Saxon texts. Therefore, the paper advances a new front in the quest for new evidence in the study of Old English dialectology, with particular emphasis on syntax. Walkden reveals important new evidence regarding the presence of null subjects in the gloss against the background of other Northwest Germanic languages (such as Old Saxon and Old High German). His promising results definitely strengthen the case for a Northumbrian author of the gloss.

The first of the articles by the editors of the volume closes Part II. The topic chosen by Julia Fernández-Cuesta does not fit quite neatly with the preceding five contributions in this second section. However, that does not make it any less appropriate and necessary. Her premise is simple but often overlooked by modern scholarship: it is essential to go back to the manuscript for any adequate linguistic study of Aldred's gloss to the Lindisfarne Gospels. Fernández-Cuesta provides a critical and detailed discussion of the shortcomings in Walter Skeat's nineteenth-century edition of the text, which she justifies claiming that "the transcription [...] does indeed contain a significant number of errors [...], which effectively render [it] useless for linguistic analysis" (p. 258). The author shows particular concern with Skeat's lack of information regarding scribal emendation (as well as punctuation and word-division and spacing) and what that might indicate about Skeat's linguistic skills. Fernández-Cuesta highlights the need to report back to the original source in order to avoid inconsistencies that may obscure any attempted study of the text. Her approach is indeed welcome, and the results are obvious, for instance, in the contribution by Sara Pons-Sanz later in the collection.

Finally, Part III offers five further contributions concerned with the glossing practice and purposes of Aldred. The closing section opens with the work by Christine Bolze. She closely studies multiple glosses with present

tense forms of OE *beon* 'to be' and highlights Aldred's semantic awareness of the Latin text and his efforts to render the vernacular translation as close as possible. Likewise, she challenges the idea of a one-to-one gloss by showing how Aldred's multiple glosses provide contextual information that allow a better rendering of the original text into Old English. In a similar vein, Sara Pons-Sanz, the second editor of the volume, also tackles the issue of Aldred's multiple glosses somehow supplementing the previous paper. From a mostly lexical stand, the author attempts to further explore Aldred's behaviour with her previous work and that of others as starting point, especially Tadashi Kotake. Although some light is shed on Aldred's preferences and ordering practices (he favours placing the interpretamentum that renders the Latin lemmata more commonly first), his overall lack of consistency remains difficult to overcome. The Appendix provided for the multiple lexical glosses in Mark's Gospel is a very useful and thorough resource. Patrizia Lendinara interestingly considers the number and distribution of the Latin words which were left unglossed. She provides a useful comparison with the omitted words in the Rushworth Gospels and consequently provides further insight into the potential connections (or lack of them) between the work of Aldred and that of Owun and Farman. Besides establishing a set of categories in which those unglossed words fall (proper names, loanwords, etc.), Lendinara also provides individual commentary of certain words which remain mostly unglossed (e.g. *centurio*, *contubernium*, *scorpio*, etc.). The paper concludes that Aldred's decision to leave certain terms without a gloss (or indeed glossed with an abbreviation) has more to do with "an attempt to introduce a general economy of the page" than with any "shortcomings in either Latin or Biblical competence on Aldred's part" (p. 359).

The last two contributions to the volume take the reader away from the Lindisfarne Gospels to consider two other manuscripts (arguably) closely related to Aldred. First, Karen Jolly looks at his work in Durham, Cathedral Library, MS A.iv.19, otherwise known as the Durham Ritual or Durham Collectar, both of which Jolly rightly considers misleading titles (p. 361). Jolly places great emphasis on orality and bilingualism behind the glossing practice, as she looks beyond the act of writing the glosses on the page while trying to draw attention to the context in which those glosses were produced. In the end, she concludes that Aldred's glosses had three main purposes: "writing instruction, vocabulary study, and spiritual reflection" (p. 372). A highly useful codicological map of Durham, Cathedral Library, MS A.iv.19 is provided as an Appendix. The final paper on the volume visits another 'satellite' manuscript

often related to the Lindisfarne Gospels, the Rushworth Gospels, which contain an Old English gloss which is assumed to derive partially from Aldred's. Tadashi Kotake furthers some of his previous, ground-breaking work by challenging the assumption that Owun, the second glossator of the Rushworth Gospels, copied his text from Aldred's. Although tentative in his conclusions, Kotake reveals important patches of evidence that seriously question that assumption. A number of hypothetical conclusions are put forward (mostly regarding the use of intervening manuscripts by Owun) before calling for the relevance of the wider context of textual and manuscript transmission when studying the relation between the works of Aldred and Owun. Alongside the previous article by Jolly, Kotake's sits slightly awkwardly in the volume as Aldred and his Lindisfarne gloss become secondary here. Nevertheless, both papers offer valuable contributions to the study of Aldred's gloss beyond the Lindisfarne Gospels. The volume closes with a valuable list of references (pp. 397–421) which is in effect a full and updated bibliography on Aldred's gloss and which proves most necessary for any up-to-date scholarly approach to his work and historical context.

A remarkable effort was made to showcase frequent interconnections between the different studies in this volume as constant references can be found drawing the reader's attention to the work of other scholars in the collection. This gives the overall product a certain sense of unity and heightens its academic value, especially when the references include differing views such as those shown by Rodríguez-Ledesma (p. 226) on Lendinara (on page 337 and not 335, as the text reads). All in all, and despite minor editorial hiccups, both Fernández-Cuesta and Pons-Sanz have produced a worthy collection that combines some of the latest views on Aldred's gloss from a range of scholastic perspectives. Nevertheless, the intended interdisciplinarity of the collection is undermined by the fact that most contributions come from the field of linguistics, which opens a noticeable gap for similar contributions from areas such as cultural and historical studies that would help contextualise the Northumbria in which Aldred was working. Similarly, further work on textual and manuscript transmission in monastic libraries (such as Chester-le-Street) would be very welcome to attain a better understanding of the type and number of sources that Aldred and his contemporaries had at their disposal.

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Leonard Neidorf. 2017. *The Transmission of* Beowulf*: Language, Culture, and Scribal Behavior*. (Myth and Poetics II.) Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. Pp. xx + 200. 978-1-50170-828-2.

Reviewed by ANDREW BREEZE, University of Navarre

In forty years, this reviewer has never read a more brilliant and compelling account of Beowulf than the one here. He thinks it more helpful than Tolkien's (1936) lecture 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics'; as regards other Old English texts, *The Transmission of* Beowulf is (in his opinion) excelled only by Kenneth Sisam's *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford, 1953). Sisam has prior place because the advances which he set out were his own, whereas Professor Neidorf presents advances made by others, particularly R. D. Fulk of Cornell University.

For its contribution to learning, then, *The Transmission of* Beowulf deserves classic status. Its author is a new star rising in the firmament of Anglo-Saxon scholarship. His book, offering resounding proofs for Beowulf as a Mercian text composed in the years about 700, also provides an x-ray of the strange things said by Anglo-Saxonists since the 1970s.

It was then that some scholars came to regard Beowulf as a late work, perhaps hardly older than the manuscript of about the year 1000 in which it survives. A new and fashionable relativism, with a failure to understand arguments of exact philology and metrics, was in the air. How Neidorf exposes its defects makes for exhilarating and even entertaining reading. On this subject he quotes the poet and textual scholar A. E. Housman (1859–1936) for textual scholarship as an art which requires consequent reasoning and coherent thought. These qualities ever being rare, Neidorf's study is a powerful

weapon against irrationalism. It tells the truths on matters other than Old English.

Again and again, Neidorf shows Beowulf as an early work, containing narrative, verbal, and metrical archaisms which confused the scribes who copied it in the early eleventh century (or else their predecessors). Through no fault of their own, they lacked knowledge of eighth-century English prosody, language, and heroic tradition, on which scholars of the twenty-first century often know more than they did. Hence the presence of corruptions; hence, too, the insistence of weak and conservative critics that what we find in the manuscript is not wrong (as a rational person might think), but perfectly sound and not to be changed. Neidorf and his authorities are, fortunately, made of sterner stuff. Let us give instances of what they say.

In line 18, which editors understand as 'Beow was renowned, his fame sprang wide', the scribe wrote "Beowulf". Early genealogies name Beow as Scyld's son; the form *Beowulf* also ruins the metre. Wise critics hence conclude that a copyist substituted famous Beowulf for obscure Beow as a *lectio facilior*. Less intelligent ones defend the manuscript reading on the grounds that the poet perhaps knew "an alternative tradition" or "invented details of Danish history", as Neidorf notes (p. 74). Who is correct should be evident.

Lines 902–903 tell of Heremod's fate: "Among the Jutes he was betrayed into the hands of enemies". But the manuscript reads *eotenum* 'giants' and not *Eotum* 'Jutes'. Implication: a scribe, knowing nothing of this ancient Germanic people, altered *Eotum*, which he did not understand, to *eotenum*, which he did. That 'Jutes' makes good sense and 'giants' very little was of no concern. As Neidorf observes, to him "there simply were no Jutes in Beowulf, only giants" (p. 85).

In lines 2920–2921 ("The good will of the Merovingian was ever afterward unobtainable for us"), the manuscript has meaningless *mere wio ingas*. That has long been restored as *Merewioingas* 'Merovingian'. The scribe plainly failed to recognise this name for the Frankish people. We are luckier. We can close spaces and restore an archaic form, which Neidorf notes (p. 89) as coming from "native vernacular tradition" and not any late written Latin source, as claimants for a late Beowulf would have us believe.

The scope of this volume, and what it succeeds in doing, will now be clear. It is a book to use as an introduction to the practice of textual scholarship as a whole, and not just Old English. It has a surprise at the end. After many pages of most satisfying analysis, Neidorf has an appendix on Tolkien's translation of and commentary on *Beowulf*, published at last in 2014. Tolkien's learning was

great and it is good to find that his posthumous publication puts him on the side of the angels, both for *Beowulf* as an early Old English poem, and as the work of one poet and not two or more (an older philological dragon, rightly slain by Tolkien in his 1936 paper).

In the anarchy of modern academic discourse, one greets *The Transmission of* Beowulf as one might a doctor in a lunatic asylum. There are lessons here for all. Leonard Neidorf has performed a supreme service for the academy. He defends rationality against its perennial enemies; he gives heart to those who love the objective and dispassionate analysis of our texts. What he says should be taken very seriously indeed by Anglo-Saxon scholars all over the world.

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Tim William Machan. ed. 2016. *Imagining Medieval English. Language Structures and Theories, 500–1500*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. xiii + 320. 978-1-107-05859-0.

Reviewed by JUAN CAMILO CONDE-SILVESTRE, Universidad de Murcia[1]

Imagining Medieval English is, in the title-words of the introduction by its editor, Tim William Machan, a book about "[t]he metaphysics of medieval English" (pp. 3–12) and the processes of "categorization" behind its study. These two labels make better sense when they are seen in the context of two commonly held premises in historical linguistics. The first one is the well-

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known need for researchers to "make the best use of bad data" (Labov 1994: 11). The 'bad-data problem' is now a wide-encompassing notion which refers both to the "limited set of written documents from the past at the disposal of linguists" and also to the skewed nature of this evidence, with a majority of texts "produced by well-educated males, from the upper or professional ranks by means of a highly standardised variety" in the formal styles and registers (Tuten & Tejedo 2011: 287–288).[2] In the cultural-philological context of the book, 'bad-data' also applies to the manuscript format in which the medieval textual materials are preserved and the difficulties of researchers to have access to the original documents except through scholarly editions which may consciously or unconsciously, by emendation or critical commentary, precondition both reconstruction and interpretation. It goes without saying that historical linguists have made their best to overcome the 'bad-data problem' and have developed epistemological and methodological strategies with this aim: from the application of the 'uniformitarian principle' to the use of corpus linguistics and the quantitative approach. Moreover, computing and internet resources are making digitised versions of manuscripts available online for the community of scholars. Nevertheless, the notion of 'bad-data' still endures in so far as "[t]he historical record, for the most part, is partial and not created to prove the point" (p. 7).

The other interesting assumption —not so widely held— in the context of "categorization" and "metaphysics" applied to medieval English is the construction of many of the foundations of the history of the English language on myths: "communally shared narratives told in the construction of an idelological set of beliefs" (Watts 2011: 10), affecting, in this case, the

[2] In the case of historical sociolinguistics, the limitations of data also impinge on the stylistic, social, and demographic information available: the impossibility of having access to the social and communicative contexts in which language was produced and received and to the characteristics of the society where the relevant speech acts were produced, as well as the lack of knowledge on the socio-demographic background of informants —age, gender, education, social status, social networks— which often remains hidden behind the anonimity of texts. The significance of the 'bad-data problem' varies, however, from one period to another in connection with purely contingent circumstances and with the impending weight of time-depth: the further back in time research is to be undertaken, the greater the scarcity of data at the disposal of researchers (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brumberg 2003: 26–28; Conde-Silvestre 2007: 35–37, 2016: [n.p.]).

common understanding of the structure of language, its functional uses and its development in the course of time. As Richard Watts has recently shown in *Language Myths and the History of English* (2011), the discipline, from its inception in the nineteenth century, has been built on a range of myths, such as "the longevity of English myth", "the ancient language myth", "the unbroken tradition myth", "the myth of linguistic homogeneity", "the legitimate language myth", etc. These are "at the basis of a dominant discourse on what modern English is and on how the history of the language should be taught" (2011: 288–289). Watts represents this approach to the history of the language with the symbol of the funnel, "in which a number of varieties are poured in the wide top" along the Old English (OE) and Middle English (ME) periods, and "standard English comes out of the narrow neck" (2011: 291) from early Modern English (EModE) onwards. Many of the chapters in *Imagining Medieval English* share in this new tendency to challenge the "myths" on which the history of the English language is constructed.

In this context, "categorization" draws into how the object of research known as medieval English is recognised, differentiated and understood, i.e. "constructed through interpretation and classification of the linguistic record by means of varying practical and theoretical concerns" (p. 7). "Metaphysics" goes a step beyond and involves "not only the language's structural traits, but also the sociolinguistic and theoretical expectations that frame them and make them real" (p. 4). Instances of "categorization" are the application of labels by researchers which may precondition the interpretation of the (available) data, or the tendency to pigeonhole the existing records into periods —the question of periodisation being a recurrent issue in several chaptes. The "metaphysics" of medieval English touches on the way we modern scholars think about the language of the period 500–1500 and "simply through the process of thinking about it give substance to an array of phenomena, including grammar, usage, variation, change, regional dialects, sociolects [...] and even language itself", as stated in the book's sleeve. These are recurrent topics throughout the thirteen chapters in the volume, which are organised into five sections.

After the 'Introduction' —Section I— the three chapters in Section II —'Organizing Ideas'— explore how the medieval English record is categorised. Seth Lerer in 'What was medieval English?' (pp. 15–33) deals with the fuzzy borders imposed by periodisation as well as with its philological, ideological and pedagogical raisons-d'être. In order to relativise the efforts to pigeonholing texts into periods, the author highlights multilingualism and inherent variation as the natural locus of medieval English, which is "not an

absolute or essential category but a relational term" (p. 20); in the editor's words: "a social condition of people living with competing vernaculars, synchronically differing dialects and an awareness of ongoing diachronic change" (p. 10). Jeremy Smith in 'The Evolution of Old and Middle English Texts: Linguistic Form and Practices of Literacy' (pp. 34–53) advocates a "new new-philology", a revival of the late twentieth-century return to the rigorous philological analysis of texts in their manuscript context proposed by Stephen G. Nichols and others in the well-known 1990 issue of *Speculum* (Volume 65.1). The complete analysis of texts —their "grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, paleographical characteristics and lay-out" (p. 10)— is a way to access "the socio-cultural contexts in which [...] [they] existed" (p. 52). The insightful analysis of some of the few early medieval texts with more that one surviving witness —Laȝamon's *Brut* or *Ancrene Riwle*— allows Smith to philologically test how texts were reinterpreted and refashioned, which, incidentally, entails the relativisation of the overexposed concept of "authenticity". The section closes with Tim William Machan's chapter on 'Snakes, Ladders and Standard English' (pp. 54–77), where the metaphor drawn from the popular children's board game is applied to the vicissitudes of the many different "candidates" chronologically conceived as standards in the context of medieval English —from the language of the OE Mercian gloss and King Alfred's early West-Saxon, to the four types proposed by Samuels (1963), including the extensively discussed Lollard and Chancery Englishes, through some earlier ME *Schriftsprachen* like Orm's or the Midland's AB language. Machan shows that the initial "triumph" of each of these forms in the way to becoming proper standards was systematically thwarted in the historical narrative. This circumstance leads the author to question some of the tenets in the study of medieval English standardisation —variant focusing, sociolinguistic stratification, diffusion or acceptance— as clear instances of "categorization" and as "chapters" —"myths"?— in "the master narrrative" (p. 10) of the history of English and its institutionalisation: "[t]he identification of medieval standards is a way to impose retroactively a teleology on the history of the language; it is a way to construct a narrative of inevitable progress to the present" (p. 73).

Section III —"On the Continuities of Language"— deals with how different varieties of medieval English related to one another, i.e. it approaches the metaphysics of language contact and variation. Chapter 5, "þæt is on englisc': Performing Multilingualism in Anglo-Saxon England' (pp. 81–99), by Christopher M. Cain, is a discursive and cultural approach to languages in

contact in Anglo-Saxon England which transcends the discussion of borrowings to focus on texts "as [...] location[s] where languages meet, where differences between languages are negotiated, and where language relationships are established" (p. 83). This is exemplified with the analysis of the functions of English and Latin in preaching contexts and the way oral performance before mixed audiences of learned and illiterate people helped construct "linguistic consciousness" or "metalinguistic thought" (p. 93), leading —through the sociolinguistic associations of each code— to the construction of identities and ideologies (p. 88). The chapter closes with the study of discourse markers and code-switching in Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies*. Focusing on ME, in Chapter 7, Ad Putter adopts a sociolinguistic methodology to study 'The Linguistic Repertoire of Medieval England, 1100–1500' (pp. 126–144). The author pays attention to the reconstruction of attitudes towards the range of languages used in medieval England —English, Latin, French, Scandinavian and Celtic— and particularly to the language shifts from one language to another, Norse and French to English, as the possible reasons behind some processes of borrowing in the period (see also Ingham 2012). The "metaphysics" of geolectal variation is the aim of Chapter 6, Merja Stenroos's 'Regional Language and Culture: The Geography of ME Linguistic Variation' (pp. 100–125). Stenroos offers a complete critical overview of the methods used for the reconstruction of ME dialects —including the "fit technique" as developed for the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English* (LALME, McIntosh, Samuels & Benskin 1986).[3] She then discusses the benefits of documentary texts, often discarded due to their being short and repetitive. Texts of this genre necessarily make reference to date and spatial location. This means that they are connected to real time and real physical spaces on the map, which, ideally, may allow researchers to reconstruct both a "regular dialect continuum" for late medieval England as well as the different discourse and text communities around which texts and their dialects gravitate — manors, monastic houses, guilds, municipalities, educational institutions, etc. This means that the connections of variation patterns with their social and cultural contexts can be traced and that the actual diffusion of innovations — changes in progres— along certain routes can be located, with interesting implications for standardisation. This methodology has proved successful in the *Middle English Scribal Texts Programme* (MEST) developed at the

[3] See <http://www.lel.ed.ac.uk/ihd/elalme/elalme.html> for *An Electronic Version of A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English* (accessed 24/11/2017).

University of Stavanger, some of whose results, challenging traditional assumptions in the study of ME dialects, are here pointed out.[4]

The chapters in Section IV —'The Discontinuities of English'— move from the wider range of medieval languages and varieties to the "grammatical and stylistic peculiarities [...] concealed beneath the label 'medieval English'" (p. 11). Simon Horobin delves into the 'bad-data problem' in connection to 'The Nature of Material Evidence' (pp. 147–165), particularly highlighting the restriction to research posited by the non-autograph nature of many surviving manuscripts, which are often scribal copies based on exemplars that no longer survive. In line with the new new-philology advocated by Smith in Chapter 2, Horobin points to some commonly accepted tenets which careful paleographical analyses should challenge. In this sense, contrary to accepted tradition, the author contemplates the possibility that scribes could have changed their spelling practices and switched from one variant to another, depending on the texts they were transmitting, the quality of the manuscript being produced, or the idiolectal peculiarities of the individuals dictating to them. This point of view questions the commonly-assumed idea that scribes were repositories of coherent, idiosyncratic and personal traits, which necessarily impinges on the study of variation and standardisation in medieval English. The manuscript context is also considered by Cynthia L. Allen in her chapter on 'Sifting through the Evidence: Principles and Pitfalls' (pp. 166–187). Her main interest is grammaticality in diachronic English syntax — another instance of "categorization"— and the difficulties to reconstruct it in a context where linguists cannot have had access to native speakers. To compensate, she proposes some maxims which may help make the best use of the available data: know your manuscript, know the edition, use parsed corpora, and check out all unusual examples (p. 185). They are all tested with examples from Ælfric's *Grammar* and *Catholic Homilies*. Stylistic issues are considered in the next two chapters in this section. Colette Moore surveys the existing written evidence to theorise on and reconstruct 'Everyday English in Late Medieval England' (pp. 188–209). This is an interesting exercise illustrating how "to make the best use of all available data": from etymology to genre study, through direct (quoted) speech, and the display of interpersonal content and speech-like elements in texts. The possibilities offered by this range of sources are tested in a selection of letters from the *Middle English*

[4] See <http://www.uis.no/research/history-languages-and-literature/the-mest-programme/> (accessed on 24/11/2017).

Grammar Corpus (MEG-C) —also compiled at the University of Stavanger (Stenroos, Mäkinen, Horobin & Smith 2011)— and in William Caxton's *Dialogues in French and English* (*c.* 1483). The "metaphysics" of medieval English literature— its language and scope— is the subject of 'Imagining the Literary in Medieval English' (pp. 210–237) by Andrew Galloway. The author surveys the difficulties of measuring the "literariness" of many medieval texts through the standards established by twentieth-century literary theory. Galloway delves into some of the peculiarities of medieval texts that challenge present-day assumptions on what counts as literature and what does not — aesthetic vs. functional purpose, fictional vs. historical, prose vs. poetry, etc.— and exemplifies with the close reading of relevant and updated secondary sources on this issue.

A final (fifth) section on 'Retrospection' (pp. 241–280) looks back at a landmark in the "categorization" or "imagining" of medieval English: the establishment of the discipline itself . The two chapters in this section follow each other in chronological terms. Helen Cooper in 'The Most Excellent Creatures Are Not Ever Born Perfect: Early Moden Attitudes to Middle English' (pp. 241–260) deals with the awareness of earlier forms of English in the sixteenth and seventeeth centuries. She traces the different attitudes towards OE and ME texts often grounded not only on the well-known nationalistic, political and theological issues —the case for the antiquity of the English church and the stability of early political and legal institutions— but also on stylistic reasons: the language of ME texts —which still circulated in the sixteenth century— was becoming archaic and unfamiliar and was felt as lacking eloquence in contrast to the antiquity and purity associated to the arcane OE documents that cropped up after the dissolution of monasteries. This is an early deployment of "the ancient language myth" proposed by Watts (2011: 32–38). David Matthews, in turn, approaches the prevalent 'Ideas of Medieval English in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries' (pp. 261–280). He engages with Cooper's arguments on the different destinies of OE and ME in the early modern period, and pays attention to the coining of descriptive labels referring to the language of texts from *c.* 1100 to *c.* 1500. Special attention is given to the vicissitudes of the name "Semi-Saxon" proposed by George Hickes in *Institutiones Grammaticæ Anglo-Saxonicæ et Mæso-Gothicæ* (1689) and *Linguarum Veterum Septentrionalium Thesaurus Grammatico-Criticus et Archaelogicus* (1705): a label that persevered in highlighting the corrupted nature of ME in contrast to the purity of Anglo-Saxon, and which survived well into the Victorian period, even after German comparative

philologists had already spread the tripartite division of the history of languages into "Old", "Middle" and "Modern".

All the chapters in this volume challenge some of the traditional assumptions on which the study of medieval English have been sustained and, in some cases, expose the myths behind the received views on the history of the language. In this sense, they are all interesting food for thought. Their common aim, however, transcends the mere shattering of these presuppositions; on the contrary, by pointing to the multilingual and multilectal realities of OE and ME, by anchoring the analysis of texts in their manuscript and cultural contexts and by often taking advantage of corpus methods, they teach how the best philological use of the available data can be successfully made.

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