FERNÁNDEZ, Francisco 1998: *Middle English Texts: Translation and Philological Commentary*. Valencia, Albatros. 204 pp.

Traditionally, publications on historical linguistics encompass the diachronic and synchronic description of ancient English, bearing thus little attention to the task of text analysis (Brunner 1970; Clark 1957; Berndt 1984; Smith 1996). *Middle English Texts*, however, following that methodology found in Mossé (1952) and Burrow et al. (1992), proposes a new and up-dated account of medieval English using an anthology of Middle English prose and verse. In fact, its author aims to write a text-book for his Spanish undergraduate students of English philology who are in the task of learning Middle English and, as such, it succeeds in affording an overall perspective of the language of the period covering the geographical and chronological differences of Middle English dialects.

Professor Fernández has actually shown his proficiency on this subject for his previous and very well-known *Historia de la Lengua Inglesa* (1982) which stands out as one of the most comprehensive description of the historical development of English published in our country. In addition, we should also mention his recent contribution *A History of English* (1998) in which he proposes a systematic analysis of the external history of the English language which serves as a complement to his masterpiece.

With regards to the book's structure, it shows a clear-cut four-fold division which corresponds with the four Middle English works included in the anthology. Therefore, it comprises excerpts from *The Peterborough Chronicle* (7-54), *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (55-116), *The Poema Morale* (117-148) and *The Owl and the Nightingale* (149-196). This anthology is warmly welcomed in an undergraduate text-book as it offers the possibility to tackle with Middle English dialects owing to the different provenance of each text. *The Peterborough Chronicle* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* have been chosen as examples of the East and West North Midlands dialects whereas the *The Poema Morale* and *The Owl and the Nightingale* stand out for their Southern provenance. Apart from these facts, the book is also recommended for intradialectal reasons since the author has proficiently included texts covering the whole time-span of Middle English.

Thus, *The Peterborough Chronicle* and *The Owl and the Nightingale* are considered to belong to the Early Middle English whereas *The Poema Morale* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* deal with the late period.

Each of these chapters is structured according to a three-fold organisation containing a) a transcription of the original text, b) its annotated translation and c) philological commentary. This taxonomy has proven to be very efficient for didactic purposes since it allows the student to read the text and simultaneously realise all the linguistic features proposed.

The transcription of the original text, first of all, stands out as a reliable version of the original since it faithfully preserves the old graphs such as <p>, <ð> and <h>. Apart from this, the author also affords diacritics to help the students to analyse the text since, using his own words, they are used "to make it easily comprehensible" (Fernández 1998: 4). The punctuation of the original, on the other hand, is omitted preferring thus the modernised version with the same objective, just to avoid any kind of misunderstanding in the undergraduates' approach.

Once this first part is introduced, we come across the annotated translation of the passage. In our viewpoint, this section comprises the foremost of the book as it includes the original text, its translation into Spanish along with the grammatical category of each word, its etymology, their morphological characterisation and their cognates in Contemporary English. Furthermore, this information is included between the lines of the text, allowing thus a very easy-reading and avoiding the time-consuming task of similar types of publications (Mossé 1952; Burrow et al. 1992). All in all, this annotated translation is recommended for Middle English lecturers as it may be easily used as the object of a detailed linguistic analysis in class since the etymological information may be used to highlight the morphological, phonological and orthographic development of the word involved.

Third, the book is concerned with the philological commentary of the text which is structurally organised into two different sub-sections. The first one proposes a general introduction to the text (author, date, dialect, genre, metre and rhyme, editions, etc.) whereas the second, on the other hand, contains the linguistic approach. Methodologically, this third section must be viewed as the starting point for students who will have to grasp this synchronic/diachronic information to subsequently achieve the proficient

reading of the text. Additionally, the author displays such a clear-cut methodology of presentation that it further enables the possibility of self-training. This type of information is accordingly divided into orthography, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and versification. Among them, we should actually highlight the orthographic, phonological and morphological components, since syntax, semantics and versification happen to be oversimplified. As for the description of orthography and phonology, following the line of Bourcier (1981) or Peters (1968), Dr. Fernández offers a step-by-step explanation which leads him to begin with the analysis of Old English vowels and consonants in order to trace their subsequent development until the Middle English period, allowing thus a comprehensive grasp of the system in both stages. Thus, in the case of vowels the author particularly highlights the smoothing of Old English dipthongs, the development of new ones along with some other procedures such as the preserving of long <a>, the development of Old English <æ>/<æ> and <y> or the dropping of vowels. As for consonants, the book is especially concerned with the voicing of fricatives, vocalisations, assimilations as well as the dropping and development of new consonants. Along with the diachronic development of words and sounds, this section is also warmly welcomed for the synchronic analysis proposed, affording continuous dialectal features which could be considered as characteristic of the dialectal provenance of the text. Nevertheless, this section should be revised in order to re-organise its order of presentation since, although vowels usually preceed the consonantal description, the chapter devoted to *The Poema Morale* is the only one in which the author inverts the usual order beginning with the analysis of consonants.

Inflectional morphology, on the other hand, also follows a traditional mode of presentation. As in some other manuals on this field (Burrow et al. 1992; de la Cruz et al 1995; Smith 1999), the author begins with the description of nouns, adjectives (though comparison is lacking), personal pronouns, verbs and adverbs of manner. As in the case of orthography and phonology, the morphological description is full of dialectal features, especially in the analysis of verbs, which help the student to grasp the geographical peculiarities of medieval English.

The syntactic component, as mentioned above, is restricted to some clues on Middle English word-order, the increasing use of prepositions, the passive voice, impersonality, subordinators and the various functions of

auxiliary verbs. Semantics and vocabulary, on the other hand, is dealt with very briefly since the author limits himself to word-etymology along with the semantic changes observed in the words of the text. Possibly, the description of Middle English word-formation processes should have been included.

The last pages of the book contain references (201-204). Following the linguistic taxonomy described above, the author divides his bibliography according to the different fields of study. Therefore, he begins with (a) general reference, (b) phonological structures, (c) morpho-syntactic structures, (d) lexico-semantics, (e) anthologies and (f) dialectal studies and other references. The bibliography, although lacking some key publications of the period such as McIntosh's *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Middle English* (1986) or Kristensson's *A Survey of Middle English Dialects* (1987) in the field of dialectology, stands out as being very up-dated and complete.

The book needs, however, a re-reading in order to correct some minor spelling mistakes, such as that of *Middlands* instead of *Midlands* on page 3, *sepelling* instead of *spelling* on page 141, *te* for *the* on page 193 or even the repetition of the word *applicable* on page 184. All in all, apart from these minor flaws of no importance, once used as a text-book with my own students, *Middle English Texts* has proven to be a valuable contribution to the teaching of Middle English and we are sure it will soon become a stand-ard book in the curriculum of English Philology. We have to congratulate Fernández for this particular achievement and its easy-mode of presentation.

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