LASS, Roger 1994: *Old English*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

It is very likely that presently I shall be writing a rather naive review of a thoroughly well-devised and well-developed work. However, I would like to use this (apparently?) innocent approach, because what I may have mainly in mind is, really, a (re)view and a commentary of *Old English* as a book for Spanish undergraduate students reading for a degree in English. On second thoughts, I may also say something from the point of view of prospective customers and advertising agents (lecturers and other *fauna inter alia)*.

This very useful and (nevertheless) entertaining handbook by Roger Lass will soon become a classic on its own: on the one hand, because it is very difficult to find in the bookshelves of libraries and bookshops a volume that claims to be "A historical linguistic companion" to the Old English Language (OE) -and period, up to a certain extent- which is at the same time rigorous, most sound in its linguistic approaches, and accessible (or readable, if one may say so) for the students that it seems to have had in mind when it was produced. On the other hand it is also comparatively cheap: indeed it is your money's worth in many respects.

Firstly, this is really an excellent book for students of English Linguistics: it could constitute on its own the core reading of a subject such as "Theoretical Approaches to Linguistic Change in English", and in such a way it might complement H. H. Hock's new edition (1994[1986]) of his *Principles of Historical Linguistics*. But *Old English* has also been conceived for advanced students of Old English. We must agree with Lass in that the book is designed for students who have already followed an introductory course in OE, as for instance, a typical beginner's introduction based on the standard handbook by B. Mitchell and F. Robinson (1994). I may add that this study, together with O. W. Robinson (1994), R. Hogg (1992a, 1992b), and, why not, and still, A. Campbell (1959), may also form the basic reading list of an

advanced undergraduate course in the History of English for those periods prior to the Norman Conquest. But I should also suggest that it can also be the main handbook for an OE introductory course for students who have already followed a good introductory course in Linguistics. Of course the author declares that the students he has in mind might have followed either that kind of Linguistics course or a "linguistically sophisticated English Language course". As this is generally the case in Spanish Universities where a subject usually called Linguistics is a first year compulsory course, and those reading English will also have suffered the slings and arrows of at least a first year English Language course, Lass's *Old English* might hence substitute other more primary approaches that are currently in wide use for the study of OE. As most traditional Spanish Universities tend to run compulsory OE courses, and many of the newer institutions tend to have at least one optional subject in this field, I would not be surprised that this book may have interesting sales in Spain and will, in due time, exert an important influence in our academic future. With all these *caveats* and intellectual biases on my part, let us now examine in some detail this publication.

Old English has a strong hierarchical structure that leads us through nine chapters plus an interesting (though mild-hearted) preface:

— Historical Prelude (9-32)
— OE Phonology (33-104)
— Morphophonemic Intermezzo (105-122)
— Morphology, lexis and syntax (123-242)
— Historical Postlude (243-252)
— Glossary of 'Hard Words' (253-271)
— Bibliography (272-279)
— Indexes (Names: 281-282; Subject: 283-289; OE words and affixes: 290-300)

The Preface presents us a discussion confronting the Linguistic versus the Philological approaches to the study of ancient periods of a language. Lass is keen on emphasizing the "Indoeuropeanness" and "Germanicness" of his intentions, while in the end what will be achieved is the "Old Englishness" of Old English. He delights us with a competent persistence of fond memories of times past (although these are recent enough) when the last of the late Neo-Grammarians were still forging the spirit of linguistics such as Lass and his contemporaries received and understand it. He seems to defend a partial revival for a 19th century frame of mind in some of the ways in which the student may tackle the case. This is extended into the Introduction, where the root problem of the notion of Old English is discussed together with some main branches of the same tree: the lack of uniformity of what we consider as the OE corpus both in terms of dates and dialects, and the fact that there is no direct OE textual tradition into Middle English (ME). That is, Lass points his accusing finger to the well known (although much silenced) fact that OE grammars and courses have traditionally resorted just to the West Saxon dialectal varieties (or even what many consider as a theoretical OE standard) for their descriptions, while East Midlands varieties tend to constitute the basis of ME grammars. The example provided by the phonological characterization of ‹ y › (p. 2 ff.) is very illustrative of this discussion. This section of the book finishes with the author's claims that future and backward projections of the evolution of English will be of paramount interest to the student of his monograph, and closes with "A note on Handbooks" (pp. 5-6) that resumes the controversy between the 'linguistic' and the 'philological' approaches to the topics under discussion. Lass's seems to conclude (for the moment at least), that "It is certainly advisable to have at least one of the standard OE handbooks available for reference, since this book is designed to be both complementary to them, and an introduction to some of their more technical concerns." (p. 6).

Part I (Historical Prelude: 1 Background and origins; 2 Indoeuropean to Proto-Germanic to West-Germanic), starts arguing about the polarities that backgrounds and origins pose for the study of OE. The intrinsic and extrinsic justifications of the object of study are severely analysed, and this leads to a survey Indoeuropean and Germanic languages so as to assert the attestation of the Germanic ones. A figure on p. 15 provides the cladistic descent of the Germanic group, and one may remark that the use of figures and drawings in the book is concise and most of them may be converted into acetate transparencies or scanned into computer PICT files for teaching purposes. It is important, if such extremes are effected, that proper acknowledgement of the source be included in the actual class or lecture delivery to avoid the scavenging consequences that may ensue in other circumstances. Next comes the evolution from Germanic to West Germanic, and Lass devotes special attention to the Vowel Systems while he reviews the traditionally-based approaches established by Grimm and Verner concerning those consonantal systems. North Germanic (p. 25) and West Germanic (p. 27) tend to be characterised from the phonological point of view, and this instance also tends to be extended universally throughout the book.

Phonology is naturally the apple of the author's eye, and hence that (I think) OE phonology is (again, see Lass 1987 and Lass & Anderson 1975) is studied according to the principles of sound change and, especially, sound structure with a theoretical approach (p. 33 ff.). This may be why Part II (Old English Phonology: 3 Evolution of Old English phonology: the major early sound changes; 4 Suprasegmentals), has such a bright treatment. The most attractive issues are devoted to the *semper* conflictive case of OE Gemination and to Syllable Theory, together with the Edinburgh School strong conceptual point dealing with the strong and weak nature of OE consonants. As a bonus, and directly connected with previous Lassian thought, Metric phonology also receives its due section. I have also delighted myself (I am well aware that this may not be everybody else's case) with the paragraphs

explaining the Anglo-Frisian Brightening, and the Restoration of [α] (3.3, 3.4 and 3.5). Certainly of outmost interest are Sections 3.6 that explores the effects of Breaking in OE diphthongs, Height Harmony (pp. 48-59) and Back Umlaut (p. 51); 3.7: Palatalization of ‹ c/g › (pp. 53-59); 3.8: I-Umlaut (pp. 59-71); and 3.9: Fricative sounds and their changes (pp. 71-82).

Chapter 4 (Suprasegmentals), has two distinguished topics: Stress (pp. 84-95), with special reference to Germanic and OE, but also in comparison with Latin. Lass presents a well founded and engaging discussion on Left-Handed (Germanic) and Right-Handed (Latin) developments of the Indoeuropean stages, that, indeed, is a new and more formalised discussion of the Latinists' crux concerning Indoeuropean melodic and intensive accentuation. Weak syllables and deletion processes complete this section, and although my commentary here is laconic Lass's is magisterial in those points.

Part III (Morphophonemic Intermezzo: 5 Ablaut, the laryngeals and the IE root), is concise and condensed: in some 15 pages there is a most competitive inspection of Alternations (p. 105), root/degree/extension, Ablaut and the Laryngeals (pp. 109-114), a new visit to the 0 grade problems, and a tail devoted to Consonantal alterations. However, this one of the chapters that qualifies this books as a handbook for a "Theory of Linguistic Change in English" course.

Chapters 6-9 conform Part IV (Morphology, lexis and syntax: 6 Inflectional morphology, I: nouns, pronouns, determiners and adjectives; 7 Inflectional morphology, II: The verb; 8 Vocabulary and word-formation; 9 Topics in OE historical syntax: word order and case), of *Old English*. This "constituent" of the book is both conventional and innovative. For instance, what we find about the Noun and its features (pp. 123-129) is mostly traditional in the sense that Lass explains items such as root and stem, thematic and athematic, and morphological features that characterise OE nominal elements. I should comment that figure 6.3 (p. 124) shows pretty well the kind of magisterial information that Lass delivers so well. Also, nominal classes (pp. 129-139),

tend to follow this traditional presentation, while the "Note in retrospect" (p. 138) is instead quite the opposite. Let me quote here its opening and final paragraphs: "The apparent complexity of OE noun-declension is a bit misleading: there's actually very little there, even if its distribution is rather elaborate." (p. 138). And: "The moral is that there is a great difference between what a language has and what it does with it; this should make one suspicious of any kind of facile argument suggesting that changes are 'caused' by the growth of morphological ambiguity." (p. 139). This, I am afraid, is what many of us tend to think about OE morphology, whereas very few dare express it in public. Let us thank Lass for having delivered the speech with such a magnificent redolence. Pronouns and determiners, with special attention to personal pronouns and a well-linked debate on the strong and weak values of the OE article/demonstrative, are followed by some interesting points on the interrogatives, and the repetition of the strong/weak features affecting the adjective.

Chapter 7 reproduces partially the strong/weak dichotomy when explaining the origin and development of the OE verb. First, verbal features and inflectional categories are presented (pp. 151-152), and the concepts of heavy and light root. This has to be linked to the presentation of verbal nominal forms (pp. 161-163), and the weak verbs themselves (p. 164). Preterite-present verbs (p. 169) give way to a detailed examination of verbal inflection (pp. 172-177), including sound comments on the categories of Person, Number and Mood as morphologically defining in OE.

Vocabulary and Word-formation (Chapter 8) tend to conform to the traditional ways the author has been exploiting. The components of the lexicon, with their corresponding definitions and characteristics introduce an immaculate structure that unfolds different stages in the formation and evolution of a vocabulary: Proto-Indoeuropean becomes Germanic, and this branches for Lass into NW Germanic, W Gemanic, and, at last, OE. Inheritance and Borrowings are the two main concepts to follow this line of thought. There is here a suggestion I would like to make. The structure of chapter 8 starts with

"The PGmc lexicon" (8.1), but then, immediately we find "Loans in OE" (8.2), continued by "Word-formation" (8.3) and this section is expanded by "Names, adverbs and numerals" (8.4). My suggestion may be the result of a paradoxically unexplained fact in Old English: why borrowing appears before inheritance while the reverse order had been adopted when introducing the case. That is, I think that section 8.2 should be transferred to the final position in this chapter. But although this may also be just a matter of taste, I will try to provide some foundations for it. The section on Loans in OE is again subdivided in three 'provinces': 8.2.1.- Latin borrowings and calques; 8.2.2.- Scandinavian borrowings; and 8.2.3.- Celtic and French borrowings. Again, this last section, and for the same reasons that the author has been using throughout parts II and IV, should have been subdivided, maybe into 8.2.3.- Celtic borrowings, and 8.2.4.- French borrowings. Both etymological sources are almost negligible (it seems) and hence that they have been grouped together: but from a formal point of view I think they should have been kept apart. This is the formal principle that also provides ground for my previous suggestion concerning the order of sections in Chapter 8. But there is more to be added, because in section 8.3, the presentation starts with the Typology and Productivity of forms (see for instance the, again, excellent figure 8.2 on p. 192), then moves into Compounding (pp. 194-198), and is closed by Derivation: suffixes of a nominal and verbal nature and effects, and prefixes. As we have just seen this is traditional enough as to consider the placement of native stock procedures prior to imported (borrowed) ones. The only justification that I find coherent enough for the order of this chapter is precisely section 8.4: Proper names, adverbs and numerals, as it can be considered an expansion and exemplification of different special Word-formation procedures of OE.

Chapter 9 studies OE syntax by means of a semi-conventional approach through Word Order and Case . The dilemmas of reconstruction (pp. 216-217) and the typical/topical cruxes of Constituents Order (pp. 217-224), tend to follow this conventional (or traditional) trend that I have been using as a

leading line for my own discussion. I must admit that, on the other hand, and hence my label of "semi-conventional", Lass's ideas on Clausal Bracing, V_2 Order and Wackernagel's Law (pp. 224-228), are what the reader will find most attractive and controversial. The second aspect in this chapter that must be emphasized from the point of view of innovative and future discussion in the field concerns the syntax of OE cases. Lass prefers a (mainly) comparative approximation that involves not just OE, but also Latin, German and Classical Greek. In this sense, figure 9.17 (p. 232) explains case syncretism in a most synthetic way. Now that I have turned (again) to figures, I should also remark that representing the intersections of case-functions/senses (p. 240, figure 9.22), as a final summary of Lass's survey of OE cases in detail, and particularly his view of the Genitive (pp. 235-237), and the Dative (pp. 237-240).

The last part of the body of Old English, Part V (Historical Postlude: 10 The Dissolution of Old English) is both a mixture of topics not previously covered and a declaration of principles for further research. While 'Stasis, Flux and Transition' seem most appropriately arcane and thus connecting *Old English* with the remote world of the Old English peoples, there is a double textual analysis (pp. 244-245: St. Matthew 8:20 as in the West Saxon Gospels and in a Wycliffite version, and an except from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle) in order to establish the great difficulty that most scholars (at least those sensible enough to communicate with Lass) have in proposing clear-cut divisions when talking about Old and Middle English. But this section has also some other attractive features: Merging (pp. 246-247), the treatment of New Diphthongs (pp. 247-249), and, why not, the comely figure (fig. 10.4, p. 248) representing the seven new diphthongs and their collapsation into some later five, are part of the opening session that then deals with quantity adjustment and the collapse of the weak vowels systems. This is partially circular, as Lass returns to some arguments used in section 3.6, but this results in a better understanding of the process (I think). In the end, Lass

decides that (p. 252): "At the very least we can say that any language that looks like this does not look a whole like Old English as we know it, but does begin resembling the language we speak now." If we jump back to the Introduction, where the notion of OE was under close scrutiny, a now re-examine what Roger Lass is proposing at the end of *Old English,* my own conclusion is that, surely I must be mistaken and Lass will correct me in his next general boxing of ears, this handbook is traditional enough and innovative enough as to reach both people with senior education and people who are about to start being educated in Old English.

I really must say two more things concerning this handbook as this has resulted a rather binary review. Firstly, some very brief notes about the glossary. I tend to be a quick reader, and hence I occasionally miss things, but I have not been able to find terms which I think should be there, for example «Stasis», especially because the concept that Lass uses in the book, as on p. 243, is not what I call standard. Then, whereas «Homorganic» is present, «Heterorganic» is not. Also, «Lenition» appears only under the heading of «Weakening», but not on its own. Some more cross-references would be interesting too. Secondly, and lastly, two even briefer notes on the list of references, or rather, the list of references and the Index of names. Not surprisingly, there are no Spanish authors in the bibliography, the reasons for that are well known and I will not vent some of them here again, but I dare suggest that at least Juan de la Cruz's introductory book on OE (1986) might have attracted the attention of the author's. Then, I just wonder why there are no bibliographical references (anywhere, or at least I have not been able to track them down) to editions of some OE authors or authors that used in *Old English* for illustrative and methodological purposes. I will just mention Ælfric, Athelstan and Wulfstan among the former, and Cæsar and Tacitus (both mentioned as early as on p. 13) among the latter. We all know that there are not very many authoritative editions of such authors, but nevertheless, it is not, strictly speaking, and just to mention one instance, exactly the same to

read the *Germania* in the Oxford edition (Olgilvy & Winterbotom 1975), or reading it in the *Les Belles Lettres* edition.

My biased and partial review of *Old English* has now come to an end. To quote Roger Lass is always academically correct (at least from my point of view). Let us then cite him once more: "And this is as good a place as any to stop." (p. 252), and tell the students to go and buy this book at once.

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