

FULK, R. D. 2014: *An Introductory Grammar of Old English with an Anthology of Readings*. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 463. MRTS Texts for Teaching 8. Tempe (AZ): ACMRS. pp. xii + 332. ISBN: 978-0-86698-514-7. \$40.



OLD ENGLISH PEDAGOGY HAS A LONG HISTORY THAT stretches back, at least, to the late seventh century. In his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (v.2), Bede records how John of Beverly, then bishop of Hexham, taught Old English to a dumb and sickly youth. The bishop started with the single word “gæ” (“yes”) and proceeded to educate the boy in the pronunciation of individual sounds, followed by syllables, words and, finally, longer sentences. Then, a miracle took place: the boy, who had previously not been able to speak, now talked incessantly and, moreover, the boy’s bald head, which had been covered in hideous scabs and scales, was now fully cured and covered with beautiful, curly hair. The overall structure of Bishop John’s course in Old English, with its initial overview of sounds and gradual progression towards longer, complex sentences, is still surprisingly akin to the growing number of modern-day Old English textbooks, to which Fulk’s *Introductory Grammar* is the latest addition. However, whereas introductions such as those by McGillivray (2011), Baker (3rd edn., 2012) and Mitchell & Robinson (8th edn., 2012) have started catering for students who, much like Bishop John’s mute youth, have little to no knowledge of traditional grammatical and linguistic terminology, Fulk’s grammar is explicitly aimed at more advanced learners of Old English with a decidedly linguistic interest.

With its linguistic focus, Fulk’s *Introductory Grammar* differs from other textbooks on the market today. In an overview of twenty-first-century introductions to Old English, Scheil (2007) notes a trend in modern textbooks to put more emphasis on cultural and historical background and, on occasion, oversimplify linguistic matters. While this approach is well-suited for the

majority of Old English learners today, who come to Old English out of a cultural or historical interest and with no knowledge of (or taste for) linguistics, it leaves some students uncatered for. Scheil warns that “some graduate students, particularly confident ones thoroughly committed to language study, might be put off by such lowest-common-denominator rhetoric” (2007: 52). Those students, more interested in learning linguistic matters for their own sake rather than as pragmatic translation aids, will be pleased with the keen attention to philological detail offered by Fulk’s *Introductory Grammar*.

As noted in Fulk’s preface, his *Introductory Grammar* takes its cue from Marckwardt & Rosier’s *Old English Language and Literature* (1972). This influence is particularly clear in the organizing principle of its twenty-one individual chapters. Like Marckwardt & Rosier, Fulk has decided against chapters that deal exclusively with one facet of language. Rather, the chapters always deal with a variety of subjects, seemingly placed together at random, interlaced with brief exercises and concluded by an Old English reading from the Gospels or *Apollonius of Tyre*. As a result, the seven classes of strong verbs are discussed in four subsequent chapters, interlaced with information about prefixes, absolute constructions, *i*-stem nouns and negative concord. The organizing principle of these chapters serves a pedagogical purpose, forcing students to go through the material gradually and offering a variety in aspects of language discussed per chapter, rather than bombarding them with all possible information about a particular part of speech in one go. While this approach may aid cumulative learning, it also makes the *Introductory Grammar*, unlike Baker (3rd edn., 2012) and Mitchell & Robinson (8th edn., 2012), less effective as a reference grammar, despite its brief index of grammatical subjects.

In many ways, Fulk’s *Introductory Grammar* is more than an updated version of Marckwardt & Rosier. Fulk’s explanation of the mechanics and development of Old English and its relation to Proto-Germanic is exceptionally clear and hardly leaves any

detail or exception unexplained, while the exercises and readings in each chapter ensure a proper and thorough understanding of the material at hand. A valuable addition to the *Introductory Grammar* are its three appendices: a summary of sound changes in the history and prehistory of English, an overview of non-Saxon dialects, lavishly illustrated with samples of texts, and a brief introduction to Old English poetry. The *Introductory Grammar* is further supplemented by a rich anthology of sixteen selections of texts, including well-known pieces, such as the “Life of Caedmon” and no fewer than thirty riddles from the Exeter Book (ten times as many as Marckwardt & Rosier), as well as texts which rarely feature in Old English readers, such as *The Vision of Leofric*. All these texts are edited with diacritics, indicating palatalisation and vowel length, explanatory notes and a glossary. Finally, a related website offers a printable overview of paradigms and a bibliographical guide to resources for further study.

Fulk’s *Introductory Grammar* is explicitly aimed at graduate students and advanced undergraduates, and rightly so. With its level of philological detail, this textbook requires a student with a keen linguistic interest and is not likely to appeal to students who are just starting out or those with a taste for the culture and history of the Anglo-Saxons (which is treated in a little under two pages). In fact, Fulk’s *Introductory Grammar* is probably best suited for an advanced course in Old English that follows a course that uses a more approachable textbook. As such, it would form the solution to a notorious problem, also touched upon by Scheil (2007: 57–58), that students who have completed an undergraduate course in Old English are often still ill-equipped to handle a traditional reference grammar, such as Campbell (1959), Hogg (1992) or Hogg & Fulk (2011). Fulk’s *Introductory Grammar* certainly bridges this gap between undergraduate courses and the use of these advanced linguistic tools of the trade. In terms of Bede’s story of John of Beverly, then, Fulk’s *Introductory Grammar* might be the curling iron that the recovering youths need once their growth of hair

has already been inspired by another, less linguistically ambitious, textbook.

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