

NORTH, Richard & ALLARD, Joe (eds.) 2007: *Beowulf and Other Stories. A New Introduction to Old English, Old Icelandic and Anglo-Norman Literatures*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited. 525 pp.

A call for the “Anglo-Saxon awakening”. This is how one should read and interpret *Beowulf and Other Stories. A New Introduction to Old English, Old Icelandic and Anglo-Norman Literatures*: as a warning and a wake-up call against the increasing displacement and oblivion apparently suffered by the Anglo-Saxon and Old English literature and knowledge in the general academic curricula.

The book has been designed as a compilation of articles (being the different chapters) which clearly show us the necessity of digging up the Old English period and its literature and giving them the importance they really have. In fact, in each chapter the authors highlight a concrete aspect or feature why the Anglo-Saxon tradition should not be forgotten and lost forever. Personally, I could not agree more with them. In the introduction of the book, the two editors and David Crystal himself worry about the current situation: “in 99% of schools not only the world over, [...] but also in the UK [...], the coverage of Old English literature is zero” (page 2). Therefore, it is high time that things make a big change. And *Beowulf and Other Stories...* could be a good start.

This is a book which can be perfectly suitable for specialized scholars as well as for the general public. Its style is so clear and close to the average reader that even laymen will enjoy it and they will get hooked by the OE matter, especially thanks to the attractive topics carefully chosen for each of the chapters.

As for the structure, it is a volume composed of 15 essays dealing with the OE and the Anglo-Saxon tradition, as well as the Old

Icelandic and Old Norse themes. Chapters 1 to 10 are devoted to the Old English language and literature, both treated from interesting and lighter points of view for a general audience. In this sense, we will find articles with “catchy” and even ironic titles such as “Why read Old English literature?” (chapter 1), “Is it relevant? Old English influence on *The Lord of the Rings*” (ch. 2), “Is violence what Old English literature is about?” (ch. 3), “Were all the poets monks?” (ch. 8) and the typical question any of our students in English Philology could pose: “How difficult is the Old English language?” (ch. 10). In my opinion, one of the most notable features of this book is the easiness with which the authors have brought the topics nearer, sometimes by relating them to *The Lord of the Rings* phenomenon, and others by approaching the splendid *Beowulf*, specially now that it is in vogue again, after the 2007 release of the latest movie, starring Sir Anthony Hopkins and Angelina Jolie among others.

Following a chronological sequence beginning with the very start of Old English, *Beowulf and Other Stories...* goes on by focusing on the Viking peoples in Britain. Therefore, chapters 11 to 13 deal with Old Norse and Old Icelandic. Interesting topics arise from here, such as “Old Norse mythology” (ch. 12) and “Sagas of Icelanders” (ch. 13). The last chapter of the book, “What happened when the Normans arrived?” (chapter 15), presents the rich mixture of literature and languages emerged from the Irish, Welsh, Anglo-Norman and French blend, preparing the way for Middle English. Finally, the volume is masterfully closed with an epilogue signed by linguist David Crystal. Under the title “The end of Old English?”, he makes us think over the true importance of the Anglo-Saxon language and its influence on the subsequent development of the English language.

It would not be fair to finish this review without mentioning a few details about the edition of the book. *Beowulf and Other Stories...* is wonderfully edited: the cover photograph and the printing of pages are a pleasure for all those who really love books in general. What's more, the set of plates and maps accurately illustrate the time and place where the OE language and literature took place. The captivating pictures and manuscript reproductions will surely fascinate all readers, and especially those who enter the medieval theme for the first time.

In short, the articles in this volume perfectly discuss all the possible topics related to Old English and Anglo-Norman literatures. It is praiseworthy how the authors and editors have been capable of covering such a wide subject and, moreover, make it accessible to all kinds of audiences. But... now that I come to think about it... isn't this the way all vindications should be? Should they not influence everyone? Because this is what *Beowulf and Other Stories...* is about: a vindication for a return to the truly importance Old English has, to the place it deserves in the curricula.

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