

Catherine E. Karkov, Anna Kłosowska & Vincent W. J. van Gerven Oei eds. 2020: *Disturbing Times: Medieval Pasts, Reimagined Futures*. California, punctum books. Pp. 384. ISBN 9781950192755.

Reviewed by ERIK WADE, Universität Bonn

As this marvelous new collection from punctum demonstrates, disturbance does not need to be negative, especially when aimed at the ossified hierarchies within medieval studies and the sexist, colonialist, and racist misuses of medieval narratives. The medieval field has finally begun to wrestle with its exclusion of scholars of color and its protection of sexual predators (a matter this collection addresses head on, criticizing the “continuing tolerance of senior academics such as Andy Orchard, who are known harassers of their students” in its first few pages) (p. 17). In the last few years, scholars in medieval studies have confronted a bevy of issues that once seemed a fixture in the field’s landscape: from racist jokes, to conferences that engage in colonialism, to the use of the term *Anglo Saxon* (commonly a synonym for white) as a designation for both Old English literature and early medieval English people, to the continued scholarly use of *Saracen*, an Islamophobic medieval term, instead of *Muslim*.¹

Disturbing Times turns towards the problems within global pre-modern studies, a welcome decentering of medieval English studies, which has dominated these recent discussions. As Vincent W. J. van Gerven Oei recently argued, there is an “urgent need, especially for those identifying as medievalists

¹ The book’s introduction does an excellent job of summarizing many of these issues (pp. 15–20). See also S. Lomuto, “Public Medievalism and the Rigor of Anti-Racist Critique”, *In the Middle: Peace Love & the Middle Ages* (blog), 4 April 2019, <https://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2019/04/public-medievalism-and-rigor-of-anti.html>; A. Miyashiro, “Decolonizing Anglo-Saxon Studies: A Response to ISAS in Honolulu”, *In The Medieval Middle*, 29 July 2017, <http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2017/07/decolonizing-anglo-saxon-studies.html>; S. Rajabzadeh (2019) “The Depoliticized Saracen and Muslim Erasure”, *Literature Compass* 16.9–10; M. Rambaran-Olm, “Anglo-Saxon Studies [Early English Studies], Academia and White Supremacy”, *Medium*, 27 June 2018, <https://medium.com/@mrambaranolm/anglo-saxon-studies-academia-and-white-supremacy-17c87b360bf3>; M. Rambaran-Olm, “Misnaming the Medieval: Rejecting ‘Anglo-Saxon’ Studies”, *History Workshop*, 2 November 2019, <https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/misnaming-the-medieval-rejecting-anglo-saxon-studies/>

of color but certainly not only, to shift away from the canonical, Western topics and languages in Medieval Studies and turn their attention to the rest of the world”.² The anthology is a rare instance in medieval studies of true interdisciplinarity: it assembles scholars from Old Nubian studies, medieval African art history, medievalisms, literary studies, history, art history, Byzantine studies, and more. The topics range from the Middle Ages to the science-fictional future, but all concern narratives about the medieval. The anthology has few generalizable claims beyond its commitment to examining and disturbing the racist histories of medieval studies and medievalisms. Indeed, to borrow a phrase from Anna Kłosowska’s essay, the anthology returns again and again to the framework of a “pointillist approach” that emphasizes local context as the best guide (p. 172). Andrea Myers Achi and Seeta Chaganti, for instance, push for museums to label African artworks with their specific points of origin, while Eva Frojmovic demonstrates the violence of severing a Hebrew manuscript from its original context and origins (pp. 98–99).

The book begins with Vincent W. J. van Gerven Oei’s haunting essay on Nubiologist Gerald M. Browne’s death by suicide. Van Gerven Oei meditates on Browne’s scholarly oeuvre as an example of scholarship as autobiography, tracing a current of loneliness through Browne’s work. Van Gerven Oei poignantly points out that Browne received a single critical engagement by another scholar in his lifetime, leaving Browne to act as his own audience and interlocutor: issuing corrections and criticisms of his own previous scholarship and even inventing his own interlocutors in the form of his “stuffings”, a set of stuffed animals who he claimed dictated essays to him in their own scholarly specialties (p. 50). Van Gerven Oei draws out the various layers of Browne’s claim that Old Nubian studies “needed” him, leading van Gerven Oei to highlight the political nature of the mental health crisis in academia, both in the general form of the neo-liberal university and the specific pressures of Old Nubian studies (pp. 33–34, 61–63). Van Gerven Oei concludes with an account of the Old Nubian scholarly community’s pretended neutrality, even as it participates in state violence in Egypt and the Sudan (pp. 62–66). Van Gerven Oei critiques Old Nubian scholars’ willingness to cooperate in colonial violence against contemporary Nubian populations in order to “rescue” Old Nubian artifacts from destruction. Van Gerven Oei argues that the purpose of Old Nubian studies

² V. W. J. van Gerven Oei 2020: Finding Old Nubian, or, Why We Should Divest from Western Tongues. *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* 11.2–3: 301–309, at p. 304.

(and medieval studies in general) is not simply to (in Browne's words) "extend the limits of human thought" but—in van Gerven Oei's words—"also to expand the possibilities of human life", and to recognize that the field "scrutinizes the past that we might imagine a future" (p. 63).

In the second essay, art historian Andrea Myers Achi and literary scholar Seeta Chaganti draw on the theories of W. E. B. Du Bois to argue that recent American art museum exhibits on medieval African art performed epistemological and racial violence by severing northern African art from western and sub-Saharan African art, presenting "African heritage viewed through colonial eyes" (pp. 81–85). Art from medieval Egypt and Ethiopia appears in the "medieval" sections of these museums, aligned with the Byzantine Empire and divorced from its African context (p. 79). Achi & Chaganti draw upon Du Bois' writing on African diaspora in order to argue for returning their objects to their context through detailed labels that situate them as being "from" Africa and "of" Byzantium (pp. 96–99). Du Bois provides a temporal framework for the authors through his ideas of pan-Africanism and temporality; as Achi & Chaganti argue, "[h]e compels us to ask how focusing on the cultures of African countries might contribute to the creation of" a new world, "a meaningfully new, racially just, and anticolonial world" (p. 75). Ultimately, Achi & Chaganti provide a detailed, thoughtful roadmap for how art museums can begin to "dismantle the structures of dispossession around us" (p. 87).

The third essay shows the deep roots of Orientalism and racism in Western academic practice: Eva Frojmovic argues that narratives extolling early modern Christian Hebrew scholars for saving Hebrew manuscripts from the flames ignore the violence of their collecting projects. Christians who "saved" or copied Hebrew *manuscripts* rarely did so in order to preserve Jewish *people*. Instead, as Frojmovic ably shows, Christian Hebraists studied Judaism in order to refute it and to convert Jewish people to Christianity (p. 114). Moreover, Frojmovic argues that the present-day archives where these texts reside continue this violence. The archives label Arabic, Hebrew, and Ge'ez manuscripts "Oriental" (even if they are European) and separate them from Christian "Occidental" manuscripts: "in this way, the classification system denies that Hebrew and Yiddish (as well as Arabic, of course) have historically been among European languages" (p. 137). The Orientalization of European manuscripts and religions reproduces the violence of seemingly neutral Christian Hebraists' Orientalism. As Frojmovic notes, "by questioning traditional library classification categories, I hope to disrupt invocations and political (populist; extreme right wing) mobilizations of 'Judeo-Christian civilization'" (p. 109). Such insights have

implications for many fields, as “Oriental” studies often overlapped with fields such as Old English. Seventeenth-century scholar Abraham Wheelock, for instance, was a professor of Arabic paid specifically to do work towards converting the “Easterne[sic] nations”, and his pioneering work on Old English was paid at least in part by sponsors eager to throw “a stone at the forehead of Mahomet that grand imposter”.³

In the fourth essay, Anna Kłosowska examines the persistence of slavery in medieval Europe and considers its terminology. Moving between Arabic, French, Italian, Latin, and Slavic, Kłosowska shows that non-Slavic words for the Slavs almost always also designated both literal and metaphorical enslavement. In the course of this detailed, virtuosic (though at times dense) analysis, Kłosowska contests the dominant narrative of serfdom replacing slavery in Europe after 1100. This argument is not new: Cedric Robinson, for instance, famously made it in his 1983 book *Black Marxism*, stating that “[n]either feudal serfdom, nor capitalism had as their result the elimination or curtailment of slavery. At the very most (it is argued by some), their organization served to relocate it”.⁴ Nonetheless, Kłosowska makes an important elaboration of this argument as a medieval specialist who ties the myth’s persistence to gendered narratives. Kłosowska argues that scholars have failed to recognize that slavery continued throughout late medieval Europe because they focused on changes in the status of medieval *men*; late-medieval women were more likely to be enslaved, while men were predominantly serfs. Moreover, by the time variations of the word *slave* entered European languages, its connotations of slavery were already metaphorical, used most commonly from one lover’s enslavement to another, rather than referencing the actual ongoing slavery still at work in Europe. In this way, Kłosowska suggests that there was a “continuity of the practice of unfreedom” throughout medieval European history into the early modern period, and thus the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans—rather than a return to an ancient sin—represented a continuation of a process that never entirely went away: the “opening of the transatlantic slave trade [...was] prepared by the medieval slave trade” (p. 191).

Roland Betancourt’s essay seeks to examine and argue for the Byzantine-ness of Black artist Kehinde Wiley’s *Iconic* series. Wiley draws on medieval Byzantine

³ M. Murphy & E. Barrett 1985: Abraham Wheelock, Arabist and Saxonist. *Biography* 8.2: 163–185; quotes at p. 166 and p. 169.

⁴ C. J. Robinson 1983: *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. Chapel Hill, NC, The University of North Carolina Press, at p. 12.

portraiture conventions when depicting Black subjects. While Betancourt's desire to claim the label *Byzantine* for these artworks—and for a series of global artworks ranging from medieval Ethiopian to eight-century Mayan—verges on imperial, Betancourt subtly undoes *Byzantine* as a category by showing that Wiley's *Byzantium* is a global one: Wiley cites paintings and tropes from Byzantine colonies and from Byzantine-influenced art in a much larger global world, rather than from within a bounded empire called *Byzantium*. Betancourt thus follows Wiley in decentering the Byzantine and also challenging the “history of racialized erasure that Wiley confronts” (p. 235). Betancourt's desire to label a wide variety of global artwork *Byzantine* would benefit from further engagement with the problems Achi & Chaganti raise about how museums' labeling of African art as “Byzantine” divorces African art from its context in an act of racial violence.

While Betancourt describes how Wiley's medievalisms do anti-racial work, Joshua Davies argues that the white architects of the “Confederate Gothic” conjure medievalisms to entrench racial hierarchy. Davies situates the Confederate Gothic's pseudo-medieval revival architectural style in the American south alongside racist Confederate narratives of the “Lost Cause” that seek to erase the centrality of slavery to the Confederacy: “Medievalist aesthetics was a means of generating an imprecise sense of historicity. A diversion tactic. Confederate Gothic was a means of not thinking about history” (pp. 265–269, quote at p. 269). Davies shows that the medievalisms of Confederate Gothic are part of the legacy of museums and universities in the US, particularly the Smithsonian, on whose Board of Regents Jefferson Davis had sat prior to the Civil War (pp. 257–267). Ultimately, drawing on Sylvia Wynter's work, Davies argues that “the European Middle Ages has been and continues to be overrepresented as white and male”, describing contemporary medievalism as a politics of white male overrepresentation (p. 273).

Similarly, Alison Elizabeth Killilea's essay reminds us of the conservative Reaganite use of the medieval in service of a colonial and sexist agenda.⁵ Killilea examines Larry Niven & Jerry Pournell's (1987) science-fiction novel *The Legacy*

⁵ One slight point of confusion emerges here, since the book's backcover states that it includes discussion of “Reagan's AIDS policies”, while the introduction states that Killilea's essay “explores the anti-women and anti-gay politics of the AIDS crisis period” (p. 24). Yet I can discern no reference to Reagan's AIDS policies or anti-gay politics. This is not a criticism of Killilea's excellent, intersectional essay, but instead seems to be an infelicity of the book's editing.

of *Heorot*, in which Niven & Pournell repurpose the *Beowulf* story and Arthurian legend as a kind of “western frontier novel” in which humans must wrestle control of a planet away from its inhabitants, called the grendels (p. 292). Killilea points out that Niven & Pournell feminize the grendels in a continuation of long-standing colonial tropes of indigenous peoples being “feminized and emasculated” (p. 296). Killilea shows how the novel also reproduces white supremacist ideas about white women’s roles in perpetuating “their race”: after the death of many men in the novel, the remaining men argue that they must return to traditional gender roles to keep their “race” alive, reducing the women to second-class citizens whose sole job is to have children (pp. 297–298, 302). Helen Young and medievalpoc have written about the similarities between the recent conservative backlash in the science fiction community, and a similar backlash in the medievalist community.⁶ Killilea’s scholarship shows that these are more than parallels: the recent resurgence of conservatism in the science fiction community has roots in medievalism and has always been dangerously close to the halls of power. Niven & Pournell advised the Reagan administration on the theoretical creation of a military force in space (pp. 305–306). Their imagined extension of American imperialism is now coming true in Trump’s “Space Force”, a reminder of the importance of Killilea’s work.

The next section consists of the collected papers from a 2018 Leeds International Medieval Congress roundtable on how “Anglo-Saxon Studies” has changed since the first IMC conference in 1994. The result is a series of short meditations on the changing roles of the digital, the non-human, non-canonical Old English texts, feminism, intersectionality, and the white supremacist appropriation of medieval runes. Editor Catherine Clarke chose to leave the contributors’ pieces unchanged, rather than update their arguments and terminology to reflect the field’s subsequent progress, so that they could serve as a snapshot of a conversation the field was having (pp. 317–321). Two particular highlights are the pieces by Adam Miyashiro and Diane Watt. Miyashiro contextualizes white supremacist movements’ ongoing appropriation of medieval runes in the light of ongoing colonialism in the Americas and the

⁶ H. Young, “Where Do We Go From Here?”, *In The Medieval Middle: Peace, Love, and the Middle Ages*, 28 September 2017, <https://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2017/09/where-do-we-go-from-here.html>; medievalpoc, “The Dumpster Summer of Racism in Medieval Studies”, *People of Color in European Art History*, <https://medievalpoc.tumblr.com/post/164827417508/the-dumpster-summer-of-racism-in-medieval-studies>

south Pacific (p. 322). White supremacists appropriate the language of indigenous struggle by positing a pseudo-medieval paganism as the authentic, indigenous European religion and culture, all in service of a racist and colonialist enterprise against *actual* indigenous peoples (pp. 323–324). Watt reads the forgotten histories of intersectional feminism within early medieval English studies, demonstrating how the field has largely chosen to forget how some feminist medievalists have been examining the interlocking systems of race, gender, and sexuality for decades (pp. 339–341).

Carla Maria Thomas' concluding essay aims to provide a tutorial on classroom practice. Thomas argues for an intersectional pedagogy that recognizes the interwoven nature of systems of oppression and that meets our students (and ourselves) where they are, in all of their complicated particularity. She provides examples of her inclusion statements and sample classroom exercises, in which students work in pairs to produce creative translations of medieval English texts into modern languages. Encouraging them to write from their own positionality, Thomas helps her students become comfortable translating medieval literature into their own languages or into others. All of the described student translations are into colonial languages like Spanish, French, and English, however, and the essay would benefit from further unpacking of the role of colonization in American language heritage issues. Colonists often invoked medieval European literature as proof of European linguistic superiority in order to justify violently suppressing Indigenous languages. This makes the medieval classroom an important space to address the brutality of colonialism past and present.⁷ The essay could also do more work examining the differences between how the erasure of linguistic heritage affects white students versus Black and Brown ones, but Thomas' suggestion that "our bodies do not tell the whole story about who we are" is an excellent reminder of how the assumed monolingual nature of US classrooms disappears certain parts of students' backgrounds (p. 363).

⁷ On this, see K. Biddick 1988: *The Shock of Medievalism*. Durham, NC, Duke University Press; A. Jahanara Kabir 2005: Analogy in Translation: Imperial Rome, Medieval England, and British India. In A. J. Kabir & D. Williams eds. *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages: Translating Cultures*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 183–204; M. Warren 2003: Post-Philology. In P. C. Ingham & M. R. Warren eds. *Postcolonial Moves: Medieval Through Modern*. London & New York, Palgrave: 19–45, especially pp. 31–34.

While *Disturbing Times* generally deserves praise for its fearless tackling of racist narratives, a few moments in its troubling of medieval studies strike an uneasy note. In Daniel Thomas' essay in the "Anglo-Saxon Studies" cluster, he suggests that senior scholars advise young scholars not to propose certain topics for conference panels, since they may not be chosen as quickly as "popular" suggestions (p. 329). Editor Clarke —despite noting that she wishes the essays to remain unedited to preserve the conversation— responds to this suggestion of conference bias with a footnoted rebuttal:

It should be noted here that this is a misapprehension, and there is no policy of preference or noticeable bias towards particular topics or areas of scholarship in the paper selection and programming process at the IMC — Catherine Clarke. (p. 329)

This overt editorial interjection sounds a discordant note of institutional refutation in a book about disturbing and questioning institutional narratives. Another such discordant note occurs in how the book treats the women of color who have done much of the work of pushing conversations on the field forward. *Disturbing Times* repeatedly names and praises Mary Rambaran-Olm's important work in the field, yet often treats her as a symbol for the field's progress, rather than as an actual scholar and critic to be engaged with (pp. 15, 317). Both Clarke and the introduction mention Rambaran-Olm's name, but never quote or address her actual critiques. This is hardly unique to *Disturbing Times*, as several recent books by white authors—such as Donna Beth Ellard's *Anglo-Saxon(ist) Pasts, postSaxon Futures* and the collection *Dating Beowulf* (edited by Dan Remien & Erica Weaver) have invoked Rambaran-Olm's name as a figure for the field's ongoing work while confining her work to footnotes.⁸ As scholars of color continue to drive the necessary changes to our field, scholars all must do the work of actually engaging with them and treating their interventions the same way we treat white scholarly interventions. Similar small moments in several of the other essay —such as a reference to Renaissance Orientalism's "dark face"— trouble the otherwise excellent work that the pieces are doing (p. 142).

⁸ See, for instance, the citations of Rambaran-Olm in D. B. Ellard 2019: *Anglo-Saxon(ist) Pasts, postSaxon Futures*. California, punctum books, at pp. 16.n2, 54, 254.n31, 338–339.n3; D. C. Remein & E. Weaver eds. 2020: *Dating Beowulf: Studies in Intimacy*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, at pp. xii, 26–27.n48. The prevalence of footnotes among these citations illustrates the problem.

Ultimately, however, *Disturbing Times* does the job it sets out to do and does it well. As its title evokes, its methodological disruption of periodization pushes us to see the revolutionary potential in disturbing disciplinary and temporal boundaries. Karkov, Kłosowska, and van Gerven Oei have carefully edited the print and digital version, with the attention to detail and aesthetic that has become a hallmark of punctum books. The collection is flush with copious illustrations (in gorgeous color in the digital version) that make the book a pleasure for the eyes as well as the mind. Its availability in open-access digital format will make the book's important interventions easily available for scholarship and teaching. punctum continues to set the high watermark in terms of accessibility, scholarship that actually pushes the intellectual envelope, and work that centers marginalized voices. It avoids the blinding whiteness of many other recent anthologies that purport to be doing boundary-pushing work. The collection should be a must-read for anyone interested in contemporary medievalisms, the history of the discipline, or the urgent work of transforming the discipline. It is rare for a collection of medieval scholarship to be "timely", but *Disturbing Times* arrives at just the right moment. We should all have it on our shelves, to disturb us—and our fields—for years to come.

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Rory Naismith, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh & Elizabeth Ashman Rowe eds. 2020: *Writing Battles: New Perspectives on Warfare and Memory in Medieval Europe*. London, Bloomsbury Academic. Pp. 266. ISBN 9781788316743.

Reviewed by ANDREW BREEZE, University of Navarre

Battles are dangerous things, in which violence is used to obtain power. Books, another (if less dangerous) means to power, may likewise end in triumph or disaster. Which of these is *Writing Battles*?

Before answering the question, we list contributors and subjects. Robert Bartlett begins with the naming of battles in the middle ages, a subject more practical than he realizes. Toponyms may actually locate engagements (as with *Degsastan* in 603 or *Maserfelth* in 642 or the *Unued* in 655 or *Brunanburh* in 937). Jenny Benham writes on monuments to conflicts. Matthew Strickland, in the book's longest piece, attends to Anglo-Saxon battles. Rory Naismith discusses London's defences and the events of 1066. Elizabeth Rowe turns us to medieval Scandinavia; Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, to medieval Ireland. Natalia Petrovskaja explains how the Crusades influenced Insular and Nordic war-narratives. The three editors then offer a joint account of Stamford Bridge in 1066. Two final chapters bring us to modern times. Tony Pollard indicates how directors (Eisenstein, Laurence Olivier, Mel Gibson) have represented medieval battles in their films; Robert Tombs considers memories of the Great War.

Now for a verdict. The essays fall into three classes. Some of them, concentrating on the twentieth century, hardly concern medievalists, as with Tony Pollard, who is illuminating on modern attitudes but says almost nothing on the middle ages themselves. Others rehearse familiar themes without offering anything novel. (Examples: Robert Bartlett, Elizabeth Rowe, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh.) Despite the advertiser's claim of 'new' perspectives, medievalists will find nothing very new in this book.

In the third class are papers with serious defects, both of errors and of failure to cite research by others. By far the worst offender is Matthew Strickland of Glasgow. Most of his previous work is on the post-Norman period, where he may well speak with authority. But he now deals with the pre-Norman period and the results are disastrous. In the following list of the volume's inaccuracies and omissions, he is conspicuous.

It starts with Jenny Benham. She discusses (p. 28) *Brunanburh* in 937 with no word on its whereabouts, which was certainly near Durham, on the River

Brune or Browney. See Alistair Campbell's *The Battle of Brunanburh* (1938: 61.n2). Professor Strickland similarly refers to "the unknown location of *Brunanburh*" (p. 41), when it is perfectly well known. He thereafter speaks of how King Alfred saw parallels "to his own wars" (p. 44) in the Old English translation of Orosius. He is unaware that Alfred's authorship of this text was discredited decades ago. See Janet Bately's *The Old English Orosius* (1980: lxxv), an edition replacing the antiquated one of 1883 cited by Professor Strickland. He then speaks of Arthur as "a legendary figure" (p. 51), when Arthur was completely historical: a North British warrior killed at *Camlan* (near Carlisle) in 537, as stated by Welsh annals.

Worse follows. In a single paragraph (on p. 52) we find this. Mount "Badon" is dated to about "500", even though David Woods of Cork proved in 2010 that the year is 493, the site being above Braydon Forest, Wiltshire. Arthur's "Twelve Battles" then figure, with nothing on eleven of them as in North Britain. The Welsh poem *Armes Prydein* (its title misspelt) "The Prophecy of Britain" is dated to "937–950", when it has long been dated to late 940, immediately after the West Saxon capitulation to Vikings at Leicester (alluded to in its text). All this is well understood by others. On the date and site of "Badon", see Nick Higham's *King Arthur* (2018: 155–158, 288); on Arthur's battles, the same at Higham (2018: 225, 287–288); on *Armes Prydein* and 940, Gwyneth Lewis & Rowan Williams' *The Book of Taliesin* (2019: 215). Although Professor Strickland thanks his colleague Professor T. O. Clancy (p. 70) for advice on matters Celtic, that advice was clearly defective.

We continue. Professor Strickland, after referring to Deira as "Diera" (p. 53), confuses *Denisburne* or Rowley Water, where Welsh invaders were massacred in 634, with the English camp of *Hefenfeld* twelve kilometres north of it, by Hadrian's Wall. Nor is *Hefenfeld* "Heavenfield" a name "afterwards" given to the site. Bede proves the opposite. Stating that it predated the battle, being "an omen of future happenings", Bede imposed religious implications on a (demonstrably secular) form. Compare Julia Barrow's "Oswald and the Strong Man Arned" in *The Land of the English Kin: Studies in Wessex and Anglo-Saxon England in Honour of Professor Barbara Yorke* (2020: 183–196).

However, Professor Strickland cannot be accused of carelessness when he refers "Degsastan" in 603 to a nearby landmark, a "stone which gave the place its name" (p. 56). He had no reason to know that the stone is still there. It is a monolith in meadows by the River Tweed, eleven kilometres west of the town of Peebles (and is shown on the cover of the reviewer's recent *British Battles 493–937*). This standing stone proves that English troops laid in wait for Scots

and Irish invaders as they advanced down Tweeddale. Professor Strickland is yet quite misleading when he goes on (p. 57) to link King Oswald's defeat at *Maserfelth* in 642 with Oswestry, Shropshire. The place-name scholar Margaret Gelling was categorical that King Oswald and Maserfelth had no link with Oswestry, as in her *Signposts to the Past* (1978: 187). *Maserfelth* will have been further south, on the Roman road through Meisir, a region north the River Severn upstream from Welshpool, Powys, as one deduces from comments in Jenny Rowland's *Early Welsh Saga Poetry* (1990: 589).

Other omissions include the following. The anonymous Whitby Life of St Gregory is mentioned by Professor Strickland (p. 58), but with nothing on it as the work of a woman. On her, England's earliest female author, compare Colin Ireland's "Some Irish Characteristics of the Whitby Life" in *Early Medieval Ireland and Europe: Chronology, Contacts, Scholarship* (2015: 139–178). The Battle of the *Uinued* in 655 figures (p. 56) with no word on its site, by the River Went near Doncaster, Yorkshire, as correctly stated in Thomas Charles-Edwards' *Wales and the Britons 350–1064* (2013: 394). A further remark on *Brunanburh*, on how "no record survives" of the victory's celebration by "religious foundations" (p. 61), is unfounded. North of Durham and its nearby battlefield is Chester-le-Street, its monks richly rewarded by King Athelstan after his triumph. This is proved by records of his "many and diverse" gifts to them, including a life of St Cuthbert which is now MS 183 in the library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. See A. E. Redgate's *Religion, Politics, and Society in Britain 800–1066* (2014: 84–85). But Professor Strickland pays no attention to that.

Compared with the scarlet of the above, other contributors are white as snow; it is yet strange that Robert Tombs writes of "crowds of mourners" at "Douglas Haig's funeral in 1922" when that famed warrior survived until 1928.

So this is not a book to recommend. Its best contributions add nothing substantial to historical knowledge. Its worst ones confuse and mislead. It is not an "outstanding" volume (as claimed on its cover) but a rather poor one. Far from being "on the reading lists of students and scholars" (as prophesied), it should not be used. True, an important-sounding title and attractive design may delude some into buying *Writing War: Medieval Literary Responses to Warfare*. If so, one knows what will happen. It will soon be lingering on the shelves, unread and forgotten, like all the ill-researched and unnecessary books that come a reviewer's way.

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Edurne Garrido-Anes ed. 2020: *A Middle English Version of the Circa Instans, edited from Cambridge, CUL, MS Ee.1.13*. (Middle English Texts Series, 59). Heidelberg, Universitätsverlag Winter. Pp. lvi + 209. ISBN 9783825347666. €70.00.

Reviewed by J. CAMILO CONDE-SILVESTRE, University of Murcia

In 2020 Universitätsverlag Winter celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the collection “Middle English Texts”. Currently edited by Margaret Connolly, William Marx and Hans Sauer, it was established in 1975 by Manfred Görlach and Oliver Pickering to publish Middle English texts hitherto unedited or to improve on existing editions. Fifty-nine volumes have been published since then, “both poetry and prose, including religious prose, historical writing, and scientific and medical texts” (Middle English Text Series, n.d.(a): n.p.). Despite this comprehensive outlook, some areas are obviously privileged and medicine is not one of them, with only three of the volumes printed so far covering the field: a Middle English version of William of Saliceto’s *Anatomia* edited by Christian Heimerl (2008); a collection of medical recipes based on Glasgow University Library MS Hunter 185 by Francisco Alonso Almeida (2014), who is a Professor at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria; and this version of the *Circa Instans* in charge of Edurne Garrido-Anes, a Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Huelva. The fact that two out of three of these mediaeval medical texts are edited by Spanish scholars attests to an enduring interest in Middle English *Fachsprosa* among English philologists from our country.⁹

⁹ At the University of Huelva, María José Carrillo Linares has edited Middle English versions of the *Antidotarium Nicolai* (1997). In Las Palmas, further editions of Middle English medical texts have been carried out by Vega Déniz (2009), Litzler Jerman (2011), and Alonso Almeida himself (2020). At the Jaume I University, María José

The *Circa Instans* was undoubtedly one of the mediaeval medical texts with the widest circulation. The abbreviated title stems from the first words of the prologue to the *Liber de Simplici Medicina*: a Latin treatise composed at the medical School of Salerno in the mid-twelfth century, attributed to Matthaëus Platearius. Due to its privileged geographical position in the south of Italy, the Salernian School was instrumental in the transmission of both the Greco-Byzantine Galenic and Dioscoridean principles of medicine and of Arabic and North-African advances in the field. The practical application of these medical essentials was based on the operation of simples: vegetable, animal, or mineral elements found “as they were produced by nature” with “allegedly curative

Esteve Ramos has also worked extensively on mediaeval English ophthalmological treatises (2003). In this Spanish context, the compilation of *The Málaga Corpus of Late Middle English Scientific Prose* has to be highlighted (2007–). This funded project, involving scholars from Jaén, Glasgow, Málaga, Oviedo, and Murcia, has resulted in an online repository of twenty-eight Middle English manuscripts dealing with medicine and pharmacopoeia both from the Hunter collection at Glasgow University Library and from the Wellcome Library in London. Diplomatic editions based on digitised images of the manuscripts (also available on the webpage) are provided, together with an annotated corpus based on this material. Some of the editions have also been printed, either as Ph.D. dissertations (Marqués Aguado 2008, Obegi Gallardo 2012, Carmona Cejudo 2019) or in book format at international publishing houses like the University of Liverpool Press —where Javier Calle-Martín, the project coordinator, has just edited an early fifteenth-century version of John Arderon’s *De jucidiiis urinarum* (2020)— or Peter Lang, where five Middle English medical texts have been edited so far: Benvenutus Grassus’s *Practica oculorum & De probatissima arte oculorum* (Miranda-García & González Fernández-Corugedo 2012; see also Marqués Aguado, Miranda-García & González 2008), *De Viribus Herbarum* (Calle-Martín & Miranda García 2011), *System of Physic* (Esteban Segura 2012), *Lelamour Herbal* (Moreno Olalla 2018), and a remedy book from Wellcome Library MS 542 (Calle-Martín & Castaño-Gil 2013). The scope of the project has extended to Early Modern English scientific prose and editions of twenty additional manuscripts from the same collections have been published online, relying on the same methodology and with the same aims (*The Málaga Corpus of Early Modern English Scientific Prose*, 2012–). In this same vein, incipient research is being conducted at the University of Alcalá on mediaeval medical, astrological, and alchemical materials at the Ferguson and Hunter collections of Glasgow University Library. To the best of my knowledge, an edition of the Middle English pseudo-Hippocratic text in GUL Hunter MS 513 has been accomplished by Irene Diego Rodríguez (2020) and work on GUL Ferguson 147 is well advanced (de la Cruz Cabanillas 2017).

virtues” (p. xiv). Collections of remedies using these simples were gathered in pharmacopoeic compilations. As such, the Latin *Circa Instans* by Platearius, which was directly inspired by Dioscorides’ (c. 40 – c. 90) *Vulgaris* and *De Materia Medica*, contains between 400 (in the longest surviving version) and 273–276 entries, with information about “complexion, provenance, location [...] the best harvest time and the different existing species”, the diseases for which they were prescribed, the “appropriate dosage”, and “other aspects that explained how to use [...] them effectively” (p. xiv).

Such a comprehensive treatment of simples made of *Circa Instans* a most popular textbook for over four centuries: from the twelfth to the sixteenth, when Paracelsus (1493–1541) introduced (al)chemical remedies and early manuscripts were ousted by the increase of printed editions of new herbals, with realistic plant illustrations. The Latin text was popular both in academic spheres, among apothecaries and medical practitioners, as well as among the aristocracy and royal family members. This popularity is also attested by the high number of translations and adaptations preserved in many European vernacular languages —English, German, Dutch, Danish, French, Catalan, Hispano-Provençal— as well as in Hebrew. Once translated, possibly by the doctors and surgeons themselves, the vernacularised versions definitely reached a wider reading public which included “experienced and young doctors, poor scholars, travelling practitioners and also [...] lay people such as nuns, upper-class women and [...] anyone caring for the sick” (p. xxxi, fn.69). Only in England, for instance, nearly sixty manuscripts containing the *Circa Instans* are preserved, both in Latin and Middle English—a complete list is given on pages ix and x (see also Garrido-Anes 2005, 2005–2006). Despite this popularity, no recent edition of the Middle English text is available, which certainly justifies the urgency of this undertaking.¹⁰

A comprehensive “Introduction” (pp. xiii–lvi) precedes the edited text. Garrido-Anes deals with a varied range of topics, from the origins of the *Circa Instans* within the Salernitan School, its sources, and analogues to the codicological, palaeographic, and even linguistic descriptions of both codex and text. A substantial part of the “Introduction” is devoted to the presence of the *Circa Instans* in England, especially to the Middle English versions. Garrido-

¹⁰ An exception is the abridged version from Glasgow University Library MS Hunter 307 edited by Laura Esteban Segura in *Manuscripta* (2015). Comprehensive catalogues of scientific and medical texts in mediaeval English, with information on editions, are offered by Voigts & Kurtz (2000, 2006).

Anes organises all the existing texts into three groups on the evidence of their relation to the Latin original and, in this operation, she emphasises the dynamic transmission of the text in England and the textual processes used by scribes and compilers, who “often added or removed information and even arranged the contents according to the intended use of each particular copy” (p. xxviii). The elimination of references to sources and the omission of medical theory to concentrate on remedies undoubtedly contributed to its popularisation as a practical guide in the context of domestic health care (p. xxxii, fn.74).

The edition is based on Cambridge, CUL, MS Ee. 1.13, a composite manuscript whose 151 folios contain, in addition to the *Circa Instans* (ff. 1r–91v), thirteen minor collections of recipes copied by at least seven different scribes; all the texts were possibly gathered together in the late sixteenth century. Garrido-Anes points to the possible ownership by a landowner or ploughmen, even a yeoman, rather than by a trained physician or a professional practitioner: the absence of references to authorities and of theoretical materials and the inclusion of recommendations for other household tasks—dyeing cloths, working with plants in the fields, etc.—are convincing arguments in this respect. The editor explains her reasons for choosing this witness: “it presents the complete series of simples, [...] contains the greatest number of chapters and is one of the best preserved and less damaged extant manuscripts” (p. xxxii). Nevertheless, she does not rely exclusively on this copy, but collates it with three contemporary clearly related versions, which were probably based on the same Latin source: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ahsmole 1477 (ff. 114r–195v), London, British Library, Additional 29301 (ff. 55r–89r), and London, Medical Society, MS 131 (ff. 3r–56v). Incidentally, Garrido-Anes concludes that none of the twenty-nine Latin copies preserved in England can be ascertained as the original, which is either lost or has to be found elsewhere.

The descriptions of both codex and manuscript are comprehensive (pp. xxxiv–xlvi) both in codicological—cover, binding, physical characteristics, decoration, annotations, and marginalia—and palaeographical terms: the script showing a mixture of Anglicana and Secretary, which Garrido-Anes dates to the second half of the fifteenth century (p. xxxvi). A sizeable section is concerned with linguistic matters, touching on both punctuation practices and dialect localisation (pp. xlvi–liii). In undertaking this, Garrido-Anes follows the methodology developed for the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English* project (McIntoh, Samuels & Benskin 1986; see also e-LALME). She compiles a complete Linguistic Profile of the whole text (152 items) and then applies the fit technique. This confirms the existence of an East Anglian layer—as already

advanced in *LALME* on the evidence of the first fifteen folios— and, at the same time, shows ample evidence of southwestern influence and relics of northern origin. Garrido-Anes makes her best to make sense of this dialectal disarray by assuming that “a southwestern scribe may have been using a Suffolk source text with a previous northern, though not immediate antecedent” (p. liii).

An account of “Editorial policy” follows (pp. liv–lvi). In this section, Garrido-Anes closely follows the “Guidelines for Editors” demanded by Winter Universitätsverlag. These guidelines are devised with the final aim of representing “the scribe’s final intention” (Middle English Texts Series, n.d.(b): 5), or, as the editor puts it, “presenting the [...] version [...] as it was read and perceived by its medieval readers” (p. liv). Most of the decisions adopted contribute to this aim: respect for the original spelling, avoidance of editorial emendations except in very obvious cases, etc. However, the “Guidelines” are adamant (and the editor must adhere to them) in advising “to introduce modern capitalization, punctuation and word division, and to expand contractions and abbreviations silently (with the exception of &, which is normally left unaltered” (Middle English Texts Series, n.d.(b): 4). In my opinion, these and other recommendations —like transcribing long <y> and short <i> as <i>, lowering superscript letters <þʳ>, <þᶜ>, <hʳ>, or <wʳ> to the line, etc.— do not seem to respect the scribe’s original practices and, in this way, they may hinder —in being silently implemented and left unmarked in the text— future linguistic and orthographical analyses. This obviously benefits access to the text by non-linguists or non-philologists, particularly literary scholars, historians of medicine or science, and book archaeologists. One can only wonder why, at a time when word processing techniques are highly advanced, diplomatic critical editions are still the exception.

The edited text in Middle English (pp. 1–89) comprises 257 entries arranged in alphabetical order —from *Aloen* to *Zvcarium*— with the Latin headwords occasionally translated when a name for the simple existed in the vernacular. As stated, this version of the *Circa Instans* is devoid of information on authorities and theory, but pointedly concentrates on the elements themselves —complexion, origin, diseases for which they are prescribed, etc.— and on how to apply them effectively. The edition based on Cambridge, CUL, MS Ee. 1.13 (ff. 1r–91v) is accompanied by textual footnotes based on the collation with the three related manuscripts mentioned above: Bodleian Ashmole 1477, BL Additional 29301, and Medical Society 131. As a critical edition, the book also includes a thorough “Commentary” (pp. 90–123). Garrido-Anes offers a well-

informed and comprehensive critical apparatus with more than 350 notes on diverse issues, ranging from the explanation of words and concepts of special interest or difficulty and the justification of editorial decisions, to remarks on purely linguistic matters: spelling, morphology, syntax, dialect, vocabulary (particularly Middle English words unregistered in the canonical historical dictionaries), and even translation techniques used by the scribe. The range of topics addressed by the editor is wide and attests to her professional training in both philology and the history of English. Quite a number of notes refer to the background and cultural context of the *Circa Instans* and this allows Garrido-Anes to display her erudition and expertise in the history of both classical and mediaeval medicine.

The edition is accompanied by a “Glossary” (pp. 124–175): “a comprehensive compilation of the anatomical, medical and botanical terminology [...] and of words of a less specialised nature when the meaning may not be obvious from the spelling or the context” (p. xxxiv). The editor’s background in English historical linguistics is also displayed at its best in an introductory note, where the vernacularisation of vocabulary in this Middle English *Circa Instans* is briefly analysed by contrasting the deployment of Latin and French borrowings with the use of native resources: derivational strategies based on Germanic vocabulary, loan translations, and renditions or explanations of concepts using the vernacular. Two appendices close the volume. The first one is a table comparing the entries in the Latin version with those in CUL Ee. 1.13 and the other three related manuscripts (pp. 176–180). The second is a complete description of the marginalia (pp. 181–195). Finally, a bibliography of relevant literature is added at the end (pp. 196–209), including “Early Printed Editions” (from 1486 to 1688), “Modern Editions and Secondary Sources”, and “Theses and Dissertations”.

One must necessarily conclude this review by congratulating Winter Universitätsverlag on the editorial decision to publish this valuable text and on the choice of Edurne Garrido-Anes as the scholar in charge of the neat, careful, and well-informed edition: another outstanding contribution to the history of mediaeval English medicine by an English philologist from Spain.

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John Garth 2020: *The Worlds of J. R. R. Tolkien: The Places that Inspired Middle-earth*. London, Frances Lincoln. Pp. 208. Hardback. ISBN 9780711241275.

Reviewed by STUART D. LEE, University of Oxford

John Garth is a well-established figure in the field of Tolkien studies. He is probably best known for his seminal study of the writer's early life and how these experiences helped shaped his mythology (*Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-earth*, 2004) but, in addition, has also published several articles on Tolkien, not least his complementary study on Tolkien's time at Exeter College as a student. Understandably, then, when the announcement did the rounds on social media that he was soon to produce a book on Tolkien's 'worlds', there was considerable expectation —thankfully, we were not to be disappointed.

The title of the book, however, poses an immediate question – what 'worlds' (notably plural) are being referred to? Is this the world of Arda, the host to Tolkien's Middle-earth, and all the geographical changes it goes through during the development of the legendarium? Is it the real world that we, and Tolkien, inhabit? Is it the historical events he witnessed or lived through —the

twentieth-century world that moved from Edwardian to Georgian and through two World Wars? Or is it the realms across which his imagination and scholarly work roamed—the ‘North’, or to be more exact, the ‘North-West of Europe’ in the Middle Ages with all of its languages and literature and myths that Tolkien encountered in his studies and reading? The answer, as the reader discovers, is all of these.

The book opens by quoting Tolkien’s objection that many people did not realise that his Arda is in fact our own planet (and ‘heavens’). This immediately makes it clear that the thrust of the book will be a comparison of here (Earth) and there (mainly Middle-earth). Garth seeks then to intertwine Tolkien’s sub-created world with the real world and real world events (often those Tolkien personally witnessed). In addition, it is the real world as seen in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but also that of the medieval (and Classical) world, and the changing landscape over the millennia. This, then, is not a simple travel guide that takes us through South Africa, Sarehole, Leeds, and Oxford. Instead it is a detailed and enlightening tapestry of ideas—some undeniable, some suggested as possibilities—that traverses time, and the boundaries between history and myth.

The dominating theme of the book is ‘place’, and at its core are key topographical features. The first chapter, “England to the Shire”, in part gives us some biographical details of Tolkien’s childhood, but in so doing sets the message of the book by positioning us immediately in the fictional Shire and looking out beyond its boundaries, but also in the shires of England. Whilst the village of Sarehole and countryside of Warwickshire where Tolkien grew up dominated his vision for the Hobbits’ Shire, this is not the whole story, and we are taken by Garth to 1923, with Tom Bombadil’s emergence, to see how Oxfordshire, through a simple but effective analysis of placenames, also blended with these early influences to produce the topography of that area of Middle-earth. As with the rest of the book, ideas leap off the page at the reader. For example, we are asked to consider how similar might the Hobbit-holes be to Icelandic turf-houses? Or could ‘the Hill’ in the Shire be influenced by popular images from a contemporary advertising campaign for Shell?

Chapter Two, “Four Winds”, uses the intriguing framework of the North, South, West, East Winds to show the influences of the ‘blow-in’ myths from the Germanic world, the Classical world, the Celtic world, and the Middle East respectively. Chapter Three, “The Land of Lúthien: From Faërie to Britain”, allows Garth to engage with the complex changes in Tolkien’s thinking around the links between the geographical features of Middle-earth and Europe (as the

former morphs to the latter), the history of Tol Eressëa (the island of the Elves), and the interweaving with Anglo-Saxon history. Garth utilises a simple, but very effective method here to illustrate the argument: that of overlaying maps of Middle-earth (notably Eriador) on those of North-west Europe and Britain to show how one became the other. It is an excellent example of how a concept (in this case one which many readers struggle to imagine) can be made more understandable by the use of a simple graphic.

The next four chapters focus on elements in the natural world and parallels with Tolkien's created landscapes. We move from "The Shore and the Sea", to "Roots of the Mountains", "Rivers, Lakes and Waterlands", and conclude with "Tree-woven Lands". The key points one would expect are all here, but in addition Garth poses (and answers) all kinds of questions (e.g. the location of the mythical Dorwinion, or the origin of the name *Radagast*). Again intriguing ideas are raised: for example, could Tolkien's glimpse of Tenerife as a boy have been an inspiration for other volcano-centred islands in his mythology?

Moving on from the natural world, we engage with the man-made landscape through four chapters — "Ancient Imprints", "Watch and Ward", "Places of War", and "Craft and Industry". Space does not allow a thorough review of each chapter so I will simply focus on one of these: "Ancient Imprints". The chapter opens with a quote from Tolkien on the joys of walking through ancient archaeological sites and the "alliance of Philologia and Archaeologia". We then move quickly to a brief discussion of the placename Fawler that Tolkien encountered and his joy in discovering its roots in the Old English *fæg flór*. We are then presented with one of Tolkien's early illustrations — "Before" (1911–1912)— reminding us that Tolkien was an accomplished artist, an area that often, alongside his poetry, is overshadowed by his fiction. This depicted a stylised Trilithon entrance, which Garth proposes were influenced either by illustrations in Rider Haggard's *Ayesha – The Return of She*, or by images of the barrows at Uley and West Kennet. Noting that folklore often suggested fairies lived in such barrows, Garth uses this to lead into a discussion of Tolkien's engagement with earlier theories around a "pygmy" race of ancient people that first inhabited the British Isles — a theory Garth suggests Tolkien quite rightly dismissed and indeed parodied with his Hobbits.

A good example of the way the author handles suggested influences emerges with his discussion of Lake-town. Noting a real-life 'lake-town fever' in the mid-nineteenth century that possibly rippled down later on to Tolkien through artistic impressions of discoveries in Switzerland, Garth observes that models of these recovered villages were on display both in the Swiss National Museum

during Tolkien's visit in 1911 (citing Bridoux) but also (possibly) in the Ashmolean in Oxford around the time when *The Hobbit* (which features the settlement) was beginning to take shape. We then progress to a detailed analysis of the Barrow-wights that appear in *The Lord of the Rings* and the links with the discoveries in Maiden Castle in Dorset; and the chapter is completed with discussions of the influences that possibly led to the giant stone sculptures of Tolkien's Argonath, and what impact the real-life White Horse of Uffington may have had on the writer.

The style and feel of the book may come as a surprise to those more used to monographs with very few images and denser prose. The typesetting is more spaced, and the book is replete with wonderful illustrations throughout (nearly no page goes without a photograph, painting, or map). However, one should not be deceived into thinking this is in any way a less serious piece of scholarship. As noted earlier, the engagement with source material and the apparatus and further reading attest to the rigour here. Furthermore, it is clear that the subject matter (place) and tone (accessible) lend themselves to a less formal style. The successful making of comparisons, explanation of complex points, and suggesting influences (the *modus operandi* of the book) through the use of a carefully selected graphic is demonstrated amply throughout. Moreover, the style of the book allows the author to use 'pop-outs' (small separate windows of texts) where a point may have been more difficult to weave succinctly into the main narrative. In the chapter discussed above, a good example of this is the insert on "Doom-rings". In a standard monograph this may have been relegated to a footnote (and thus overlooked), but here it is highlighted by a different shaded box and the reader's eye is drawn instinctively towards it. As a result they are then rewarded with a discussion of doom/moot-rings, as seen both in Icelandic sagas and also in *The Wanderings of Húrin*.

This is an impressive book that will be read and reread by both Tolkien scholars and interested members of the public alike. The production value is second-to-none and it now sits on my bookshelf alongside the equally impressive catalogues from the recent exhibitions on Tolkien in Oxford and Paris.

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Maria Dahvana Headley 2020: *Beowulf: A New Translation*. New York, MCD x FSG Originals. Pp. xxxiv + 140. ISBN: 9780374110031. £9.99.

Reviewed by ALISON E. KILLILEA, Independent Scholar

In the course of *Beowulf*'s translation history, we have seen hundreds of translations of the early medieval poem, from John Kemble's first translation in 1837 to one of the most recent offerings by Maria Dahvana Headley. Of course, while Headley's iteration is one of among hundreds of translations of *Beowulf*, it is one of only a handful of translations by women. The history of *Beowulf* translation by female scholars and poets began in 1899 with Clara Linklater Thomson's abridged version of the poem; since then, we have seen translations by Constance Hieatt, Marijane Osborn, Ruth Lehmann, and Meghan Purvis, among others. The addition to this small tradition is very welcome, especially one that has really captured the popular imagination with rave reviews in publications like *The New Yorker* and by authors such as Neil Gaiman and Margaret Atwood. In a field that has been dominated by male scholars and poets (McLemore 2021), Headley's success may hopefully stir encouragement in more women to pursue *Beowulf* as a topic of research.

Headley's translation begins as it means to go on; bold and daring in its use of modern slang and internet-culture language: "Bro! Tell me we still know how to speak of kings!". She displays a confidence in her work that bursts through the lines of verse and which is also particularly evident in her introduction, where she tells us of her love affair with *Beowulf*, which, like my own, started with Grendel's mother, a character who fascinated Headley enough to go on to write the much-acclaimed *The Mere Wife* in 2018. The introduction succinctly and successfully describes the complexity of a poem that appears simple at first glance: "an intricate treatise on morality, masculinity, flexibility, and failure" in which "old men try to plot out how to retire in a world that offers no retirement", "[q]ueens negotiate for the survival of their sons, attempt to save their children by marrying themselves to warriors, and, in one case, battle for vengeance on their son's murderers" (pp. viii-ix). Headley also argues the point that *Beowulf* is not just a poem of the past, but it is one whose message and meaning are relevant in the twenty-first century: "The poem, is after all, a poem about wilfully blinkered privilege, about the shock and horror of experiencing discomfort when one feels entitled to luxury" (p. x). Headley is correct in expressing the fact that some of the messages in *Beowulf* are relevant even today, although the idea of privilege and "shock and horror when one feels entitled to

luxury” may be somewhat overstated and anachronistic, given that this is a society which frequently experiences discomfort in terms of various conflicts.

It is important to note that translation is subjective and a matter of re-interpretation. This is iterated by Headley, who notes that “what the translated text says is a matter of study, interpretation, and poetic leaps of faith. Every translator translates this poem differently” (p. xv). We must also remember both the crucial relevance of audience and particulars of who translations are aimed at. It is important therefore to pay attention to both the potential audience of the reading culture and the author’s intended audience.

John Crane provides a sort of rubric for categorising types of translations in “To Thwack or be Thwacked” (1970–1971), outlining four different categories of translation: those intended for general readers, those for the non-specialist student, translations intended for the specialist with a background in Old English, and lastly, those that are produced as a new work of art, for example those by Edwin Morgan and Thomas Meyer. Headley’s translation, I believe, fits somewhere between the first and fourth categories, intended for the general reader and also as a new work of art; praise by those like Margaret Atwood, Kelly Link, and Carmen Maria Nachado suggest that this is a text to be enjoyed by the casual reader, and the bold cover art also suggests a less scholarly and more artistic intended audience. As Crane (1970–1971: 339) also notes, “most current translations of *Beowulf* have some merit, as long as the merit is realised within the terms established for it by the translator himself”, or indeed herself or themselves.

In this regard, Headley’s aim was to render the story “continuously and clearly, while also creating a text that feels as bloody and juicy as [she thought] it ought to be” (p. xvi). In a manner that may be described as more instinctual than academic, Headley says that she spent “a lot of time imagining the narrator as an old-timer at the end of the bar, periodically pounding his glass and demanding another” (p. xvi). Headley’s aims, then, are “poetic voice and communicative clarity” (p. xx) and these she achieves, with a translation that is easy to digest for those both familiar and unfamiliar with the poem and one that, for the most part, captures the reader with beautifully rendered alliterative imagery.

Consider, for example, Headley’s translation of lines 157–162:

Ringless, Grendel’s fingers, kingless,
his country. Be it wizened vizier or beardless boy,
he hunted them across foggy moors, an owl

mist-diving for mice, grist-grinding their tails
 in his teeth. A hellion's home is anywhere
 good men fear to tread; who knows the dread this
 marauder mapped?

This is a translation of the Old English:

Ac se æglaca ehtende wæs,
 deorc deap-scua, duguþe ond geogoþe
 seomade ond syrede; sin-nihte heold,
 mistige moras; men ne cunnon
 hwyder hel-runan hwyrftum scriþað (ll. 159–163)

There is no doubt some looseness to the translation here with the addition of “Ringless, Grendel’s fingers, kingless, his country” and the detail concerning the owl, but Headley is not the first to expand on the Old English, and indeed, it is not aimed as a direct, scholarly edition. We see this throughout *Beowulf’s* translation history, such as Burton Raffel’s addition of “dripping claws” to Grendel’s mother (2008: ll. 1294–1295) or Heaney’s addition of “powerless” in a scene describing Grendel (2002: ll. 962–965).

Of course, there are sections here, as in other translations, where additions to the text arguably change the intention of the poem, or are inserted with a specific agenda; for example, we see the addition of one line after l. 52 of the Old English text, where Headley includes “but the poor are plentiful, and somebody got lucky”, and the addition of two full lines after l. 125 of the Old English text, after Grendel has seized thirty men before returning to his home. Headley includes “for the Danes had slept sweetly in a world that had woken him, benefited from bounty, even as they’d broken him” (p. 8). These lines are no doubt a reflection of Headley’s view of the poem being about “wilfully blinkered privilege” (p. x), or as the backmatter claims, “a tale of entitlement and encroachment”, and the second addition here holds the suggestion of a post-colonial reading, reminiscent of Heaney’s translation which casts the Grendel-kin as the dispossessed Irish. Indeed, Headley makes reference to colonialism in the context of her own US homeland, as well as the ever-increasing plight of refugees who are claimed by the current day Heremods to be “criminals, monsters” (p. xxxi), in a clear parallel to the Grendel-kin. This is no doubt a *Beowulf* for the twenty-first century, and one which seeks, as do the majority of translations and adaptations, to use the Old English poem as a

foundation on which to lay down criticisms and anxieties surrounding the society, politics, and culture of our current day.

We see also some additions to the text and some arguably very free translation when it comes to the character of Beowulf himself; along the lines of Meghan Purvis's (2013) translation, Beowulf is cast as somewhat of a "fratbro" and an epitome of toxic masculinity. In l. 1268 we see his strength, the "gimfæste gife ðe him God sealed" ('the ample gift that God had given him'), rendered as "Beowulf saw himself as God's gift". Similarly, "Beowulf [...] nalles for caldre mearn" (l. 1442, 'Beowulf [...] worried not for his life') is translated by Headley as "Meanwhile, Beowulf gave zero shits". Nowhere is this more evident than in his first *beot*, or boast, to Hrothgar — "[...] because where I'm from? I'm the strongest and the boldest, and the bravest and the best [...] Anyone who fucks with the Geats? Bro, they have to fuck with me" (ll. 416–421). While these lines are not an exact translation of the Old English text, they do sum up the general feeling often felt by students of the poem who are unused to the function of the ritualised boast. To a twenty-first century ear, the *beot* sounds an overly wrought and ridiculous expression of arrogance, and one that many may associate with the performative toxicity of masculine behaviour, such as MMA (Mixed Martial Arts) trash-talking. While the *beot* may not have been composed in a satirical fashion by the poet, there are some hints that Beowulf's, and indeed Heorot's, patriarchal response to threat is subtly criticised in the repeated allusions to future failures and feuds and arguably in the Danes' response to Grendel's mother (see Trilling 2007). Headley's construction therefore, is not without licence, albeit for some may be a bit excessive and unobvious.

This brings us to the opening of the translation, and a big selling point for Headley's *Beowulf*, her translation of *Hwæt*: "Bro!". As Headley notes herself in her introduction, "bro" is used to keep us thinking about "the ways that men can afford (or deny) one another power and safety by using coded language, and erase women from power structures by speaking collegially only to other men" (p. xxi). Of course, this is also a way of "satirizing a certain form of inflated, overconfident, aggressive male behaviour". Some confusion arises in the use of "bro" and the voices that wield this word and similar language —while it makes sense for Beowulf and the thanes to use this coded language, I am not so confident in its use by a narrator who, in Headley's translation, is critical of these characters and their privilege, and who is openly sympathetic towards the Grendel-kin. The use of "bro" would work better if its use was restricted only to the more problematic and hyper-masculine characters of the poem, as there

appears to be a confusion between the narrator and Headley as it currently stands.

While the use of slang and internet-culture language created much hype on platforms like Twitter, when passages of the translation were initially released, this, for some readers, may also be its weak point. The majority of the poem is composed in beautiful language that evokes a solemn and transient feel embodied by so many Old English poems that other translations often fail at achieving, but the occasional “bro”, “shit-season”, “zero shits”, “daddy”,¹¹ and “Hashtag: blessed”, is jarring for the reader. For example, the passages following Grendel’s mother’s attack on Heorot are filled with some of the most atmospheric language in the translation:

It’s not far from here, the mere
but it’s a world away, a forest frosted
even in green months, old wood, wicked
and well-rooted. Water reflects trees
like tangled teeth, a gaping maw that, at night,
is lit with flames in the flood. No one’s ever
touched the bottom. No one born of man, anyway.
Men can’t go in. Even animals, a heath-hopping hart,
held to mere’s edge by hounds, would sooner spin
on hooves and fight, lower horns, and ready itself for death
than step upon that stinking sod and dive into the dark.
This is a bad place. Waves roil, and taste the sky’s edge,
winds gust, clouds spit and spark, and when it storms,
mere mixes with mist, geysers up, and Heaven moans. (ll. 1361–1374)

This is followed soon after by the description of the mere-creatures, slung by a bowman’s arrow:

This monster they could control.
They cornered it, clubbed it, tugged it onto the rocks,
stillbirthed it from its mere-mother, deemed it damned,
and made of it a miscarriage. They examined its entrails,
awed and aggrieved. (ll. 1436–1440)

¹¹ The use of “daddy” throughout the translation is confusing. Given that much of the slang reflects 2000s internet culture, “daddy” often has a sexual connotation, popular in “e-girl” terminology and pornography. In Headley’s translation it is referring to fatherhood.

This is followed in the next line by “Meanwhile, Beowulf gave zero shits”, quite an unsettling sentence compared to the atmospheric description of the mere leading up to it. This has a rather abrasive effect while reading, and the flow of the more elegiac, yet still extremely engaging and readable, passages is pulled from under us. The fact that some of these phrases only appear every few pages only exacerbates the jolting effect they have on the text. Of course, this may be a purposeful effect, never allowing the reader to fully feel comfortable in this text, which encompasses an uncomfortable and complex world. However, I feel that the translation would have been stronger if Headley committed more wholeheartedly to the use of slang, or left it out altogether.

What drew Headley to *Beowulf* in the first place was the alluring character of Grendel’s mother, and much of the focus in the Introduction is on her character and on the disservice done to her by previous translations. Headley questions some of these choices, such as the translation of *aglæca* and *brimwylf*, and no doubt these are some of the terms which led to her “unearth[ing] significant shifts in the understanding of the poem over the centuries, discovering lost nuances and long-ignored dynamics”, as is asserted on the blurb. Headley correctly asserts that *aglæca* is more likely to mean “formidable” (or, “formidable one” even more correctly, given that it is a noun), and that *ides aglæc-wif* is more accurate as “formidable noblewoman”.¹²

While the blurb notes that this is a “radical new verse translation of the epic poem, which brings to light elements that have never before been rendered into modern English”, I fail to easily find these elements never before translated — while Grendel and Grendel’s mother have historically been translated unfairly, John Mitchell Kemble’s (1837) translation may be described as just as humanising as Headley’s.¹³ The only exceptions appear to be in terms like *atolan clommum* (l. 1503a), translated by Kemble as “foul claws”, but untranslated by Headley, and *grundbyrde gryrellice* (l. 2136), which by Kemble is rendered “savage abyss-keeper of the mere”, but once more, left ignored by Headley. Another term that is treated questionably by Headley is *grundwyrge[n]* (l. 1518b), often

¹² This is most notably argued by Sherman Kuhn (1979), who asserted that it should be translated as “female warrior”.

¹³ It is of course pertinent to mention Kemble’s role in the nationalisation of the poem. As Catherine Karkov (2019) notes, “John Mitchell Kemble, the first to translate *Beowulf* into modern English, saw the poem as a direct link back to ‘our’ ancestors, and used his translation to cast the poem as a national narrative and reimagined the nation in the image of the poem”.

translated in monstrous terms, but which I would argue has the translation of “outlaw of the earth”.¹⁴ This is translated by Headley as “reclusive night-queen”. As a feminist translation, which claims to uncover new elements, the avoidance and mistranslation of terms concerning Grendel’s mother is somewhat misleading and rather disappointing.

This brings us to the question of whether or not Maria Dahvana Headley’s translation is worth the hype: Yes, but not for the reasons it has gained such momentum online, rather for the phrasing and imagery that intersperse the instances of slang. Her verse constantly captures the reader with pleasant and often perturbing language and certainly outshines many translations of the poem in this regard. While I would not agree that this should be used in a scholarly setting as a main text, I think it would serve excellently in a class focused on translation theory. In conclusion, Headley offers us an exciting and engaging poetic translation of *Beowulf*, which is unfortunately let down in parts by its use of internet slang. While there are moments of unfaithfulness to the poem, perhaps rendering this a “reading” rather than a “translation”, it is of course necessary to accept that numerous translations also stray from the Old English text quite substantially, and this, as ever, can be disappointing. In describing how she did not want to apply a false metre to *Beowulf*, Headley says that she does not want “to graft peach branches to a cactus”. However, to riff on this metaphor, Headley’s translation unfortunately feels like a peach which has been bristled by the cactus pricks of modern slang, which at times makes unpleasant an otherwise juicy and substantial translation. Nevertheless, it is worth a read to experience Headley’s poetic rendering of the language, which is truly captivating.

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¹⁴ *Grundwygen[ne]* is a combination of *grund*, ‘ground’, and *wyrgenne*, a derivation of the verb *wirgan* or *wyrgan*. *Wirgan* and *wyrgan* are both from Proto-Germanic **wurjan*, ‘to strangle’ (Kroonen). *Wyrgan* is linked by Skeat to the noun *wearg* (or *werg*, *wearb*), ‘i. of human beings, a villain, felon, scoundrel, criminal ... ii. Of other creatures, a monster, malignant being, evil spirit’.

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