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Fletcher, Rachael, Thijs Porck, and Oliver M. Traxel, eds. 2022. *Old English Medievalism: Reception in the 20th and 21st Centuries*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer. Pp. 312. ISBN 9781843846505.

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The heading of "Old English medievalism" is a potentially broad one, and the volume currently under review does much to sketch out its current extent without attempting to be comprehensive. After a helpful and thoughtful introduction, thirteen essays are divided into four parts. The first section has the rather general title "Reinventing, Reimagining and Recontextualizing Old English Poetry," and in part covers what might be thought of as the most classical cases of medievalism in the book. Toswell considers the familiar medievalist subject of W. H. Auden, along with two more recent Canadian poets, Christopher Patton and Jeramy Dodds. While she focuses on the idea of *play* in their medievalism, her inclusion of Dodds, who has been accused of sexual assault and (by his own account) sent threatening objects to an ex-partner, introduce a darker side to medievalism as a potential venue for expressing a "violent, aggressive, dangerous" dimension of the artist (33). The potential for medievalism as a negative mode of expression recurs a number of times in the volume. Condie turns to *The Wind in the Willows*, tracing out Kenneth Grahame's potential engagement with Old English, and finding echoes of alliterative verse in the chapter "Wayfarers All" (though her attempt to scan parts of the Sea Rat's speech into Sievers' types does not convince). Marzullo's piece takes on a more recent manifestation of medievalism, Hamish Clayton's *Wulf*, set in New Zealand in 1830. This is the only piece in the collection to look much beyond Britain and North America. Allfrey's piece moves beyond literature to museum curation—another traditional locus of medievalism studies—to examine how politically charged anachronism seems to pervade the presentation of the Sutton Hoo archaeological material at the British Museum and (much more blatantly) at the former exhibition of the Visitor Centre at the Sutton Hoo National Trust site.

The second of the four sections in the volume turns to the use of language in historical fiction. Here, Paul Kingsnorth's novel *The Wake*, along with, to a lesser extent, Philip Terry's *tapestry*, recur again and again, threads running through many of the chapters. This begins with Traxel's formal evaluation of the "shadow tongues"—adjustments of modern English to create a sense of strangeness, and perhaps medievalness—in the two novels, contextualizing them and evaluating them with respect to their stated goals. This provides an excellent background for the following chapters, so that even readers who have not read either novel have a concrete sense of what is going on with them linguistically. Traxel's linguistic focus also leads him to note important aspects of Kingsnorth's "shadow tongue" in particular: not merely that the result often seems more reminiscent of Middle English than Old, but that it in some ways seems to evoke (stereotypes of) modern northern English dialects, which, because they preserve a different set of archaisms than do "standard" forms of English, are often perceived as

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more archaic (e.g., 105). Kendall's chapter focuses primarily on Kingsnorth alone, arguing that linguistic critiques of his project miss the point, which is largely to create a sense of strangeness, not a linguistically "authentic" form of language. She responds especially to Gretchen McCulloch and Kate Wiles' discussion of the "shadow language" on *The Toast*, taking them to task for not appreciating Kingsnorth's aims. While Kendall makes some useful critiques of McCulloch and Wiles' discussion, it is not clear that her argument that "the 'sheer strangeness' of anglisc [Kingsnorth's conlang] equates to the sheer strangeness . . . of 1066" (131) really answers the Toastian charge: "does [Kingsnorth's language] succeed at making the words look strange but not entirely unintelligible? Sure. But it's strange in the wrong direction." That is, there remains a suspicion that Kingsnorth's "sheer strangeness" relies on and reinforces ignorant stereotypes about medieval language (and potentially about modern dialects). As Jolly puts it in the follow contribution, "In some ways, Buccmaster [the narrator of *The Wake*] sounds as if he is speaking a 'broken English' similar to the colonialist stereotypes of Pidgin or Creole Englishes" (142). Jolly's critique comes in a much broader discussion of how several writers use language to portray ideas of the medieval past, and how fiction can, if the writer is not careful, "pu[t] a modern mind in a medieval body" (146). This includes a thoughtful reflection on her own work on a historical novel, an approach which is continued in the next chapter, by Aitcheson. He considers the uses of the past and the portrayal of trauma in three novels set in eleventh-century England: Justin Hill's *Shieldwall*, Philip Terry's *tapestry* (again), and his own *The Harrowing*; he leaves aside *The Wake*, a welcome decision as it keeps that one novel from completely overshadowing this section of the book. Overall, though, the chapters in this section provide more depth than breadth, and taken in aggregate suggest a certain preoccupation among current medievalist scholars with a rather small range of historical fiction writers, most of whom have been nominated for or received prestigious literary awards: again and again the credentials of the novels in question are listed, as if to justify their inclusion in academic discourse. Perhaps this partly explains the almost total lack of attention paid to Nichola Griffith's *Hild*,[1] whose nominations and awards have largely come from the world of speculative fiction (Tiptree, Nebula)[2] or queer fiction (Lambda). Despite this lack of literary sanction, *Hild* presents as rich a medieval linguistic[3] and mental landscape as any of the works given more attention in this volume (Griffith's term *gemaecce* in particular makes for a rich intersection of thoughtful linguistic anachronism, medieval realities, and the relationship between research and fiction).[4] Perhaps the recent release of a sequel to *Hild*, *Menewood*, will prompt more academic engagement.

The third section turns from historical fiction drawing on Old English to works composed in (Neo-)Old English. Continuing the admirable practice of including reflections by writers, the opening chapter of this part is by Kemmler, who has rendered two modern texts—the French story *Le Petit Prince* and the German story collection *Der Struwwelpeter*—into Old English. He considers the linguistic challenges (mostly a matter of lexical difficulties) and opportunities (e.g., of incorporating echoes to works such as *Beowulf*) that present themselves to a translator. Similar themes are developed

[1] An exception is Traxel, who provides the only mentions of *Hild* in the book, in two footnotes: (96, fn 4, and 112, fn 93).
[2] The only writer of fantasy to feature is Tolkien, discussed by Jolly, who has by now acquired a traditional licence for study by medievalists.
[3] https://nicolagriffith.com/2013/11/04/the-language-of-hild/.
[4] https://nicolagriffith.com/2012/06/20/hild-and-her-gemaecce/.

in the following chapter, though this time by a commentator, Ferhatović, rather than an author or translator, looking at Peter Baker's Old English rendition of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Ferhatović concentrates on food and drink as an area where a translator's task is potentially at its most complicated, examining the balance of how a translation might seem to reinforce certain stereotypes about "Anglo-Saxon England" (as when Baker turns the tea party into a *bēorscipe*), while also perhaps undermining those stereotypes—as Baker does in his introduction, rendering *bēorscipe* as "beer-party," and presenting the choice as "a send-up of three different cultures:" Carroll's Victorian novel, "the American college campus" and "Cædmon's monastery" (199). The final chapter in this section hands the baton back to a composer of Neo-Old English, this time presenting the first publication of a poem, *The Fall of the King*, by Pascual. He gives the text of the 98-line narrative poem with a metrical annotation (using Sievers' types) of each half-line, followed by a modern English translation and some explanatory notes. The accompanying discussion focuses on the pedagogical value of having students compose in verse, drawing on lessons from the teaching of Latin. Pascual's poem is worth reading in its own right as a work of art, and his contention that the instruction of Old English metrics is not currently valued would seem borne out by the other contributions in the collection: though Kemmler's translations are sometimes into a form of poetry (with a very loose alliterative structure), he does not seem to have regarded metrical verse as a goal or even a point of reference, while Knappe's essay, discussed below, passingly mentions metre when discussing Éowyn's lament, without noting how metrical norms are largely disregarded in David Salo's adaptation of material from *Beowulf* for the film version of *The Two Towers*.

Pascual's pedagogical focus leads neatly into the final section of the volume, on the classroom. The first of the two essays, cowritten by Blanquer, Ellard, Hitchcock, and Sweany, discusses two influential textbooks: Henry Sweet's *Primer* and Bruce Mitchell and Fred Robinson's *Guide*. Their contention is that Sweet's "attempt to normalise the dialects of Old English according to an early West Saxon standard,[5] his replacement of Old English orthography with a system of modern glyphs and diacritics, and his presentation of Old English inflectional patterns from within the visual rhetoric of an authoritarian system of grids [i.e. his use of paradigms]," along with his reference to modern languages such as French in his pronunciation guides, is "built upon colonial ideologies masked by the reasoning of scientific positivism" (240) and in keeping with the project of the British Empire as it stood in his day. Insofar as these approaches are echoed in Mitchell and Robinson, they argue that this colonialist approach has been absorbed into one of today's most widely used textbooks. In a short final section which could have been developed further, they critique Mitchell and Robinson's choice of texts—a selection that "centres on King Alfred's newly converted[6] Christian nation and its imperial inheritance from Rome" (239)—, presented by the textbook authors as "the essential ones for the proper orientation of beginners towards both the literature and culture of Anglo-Saxon England" (238). What might be done about this, particularly given the authors' pedagogical endorsement of techniques such as paradigmatic

[5] The suggestion that West Saxon is unduly dominant in Old English pedagogy is probably justified, but it is not entirely true that Sweet's *Second Anglo-Saxon Reader: Archaic and Dialectal* was "never revised or reprinted": a second edition revised by T. F. Hoad appeared in 1978. A contrast with the "first" *Reader* is nonetheless readily apparent, of course.

[6] "Newly" is a relative term, but is perhaps not an entirely apt description of the inhabitants of Wessex in Alfred's time.

presentation,[7] is left as an explicitly unanswered quandary. The final contribution to the volume, by Knappe, examines the use of Old English in film and TV as pedagogical resources. She gathers and evaluates a range of material, especially from *Merlin*, *Vikings*, and the movie versions of *The Lord of the Rings*, giving a very practical and teaching-oriented evaluation of its opportunities (hearing the languages aloud and in context, examining the translation choices made) and limitations (including very basic problems such as poor audio quality or excessive background noise).

The volume closes with a consolidated bibliography and an index. As should be clear from the discussion, the editors have done an exceptional job in arranging the varied contributions productively. Adjacent chapters sometimes provide contrasting perspectives on a given subject (particularly in the run of discussions on *The Wake*), and the contributions at the end of each section often lay the groundwork for the following section. Cross-references between the chapters help create links across more widely separated discussions. Certain concerns appear repeatedly: the potential for and reality of abuse of medievalist practices by the far right, critical interest in a specific subset of "literary" historical novels (especially *The Wake* and *tapestry*), the potential for productive academic reflection on creative practices "by creators themselves," and the ways that Old English medievalism can (and sometimes can't) be used productively in the classroom. Other concerns are less well represented. In some cases, this represents a healthy advance into new territory, as traditional subjects of English medievalist study (Tolkien, Lewis, Auden, Scott, etc.) appear only briefly or not at all. (I do not mean to suggest that study of these subjects is exhausted, but merely that it is fair for a volume like this to make space for a different range of study). The sidelining of other areas may be more indicative of gaps in scholarly attention at the moment: I have already noted the focus on a somewhat narrow award-winning literary orbit, and while the chapters by Allfrey and Knappe do venture beyond written literature, it is worth noting that music, video games, reenactment, etc. have no substantial presence in this volume. The global reception of Old English is also somewhat underdeveloped, Marzullo's welcome contribution notwithstanding. I do not mention these apparent gaps to criticize either the editors or the contributors; rather, insofar as this volume provides a snapshot of the current state of interests in Old English medievalism, what the collection does *not* cover, or does not focus on as much, can serve as a pointer to where scholars may consider directing more efforts in the future. It is, overall, a fascinating and worthwhile landmark in this research trajectory, both showing how far scholarship has come (especially in terms of the criticism of written medievalist literature), and pointing to some of the areas where future research might still usefully venture.

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[7] Through their praise of Sweet's pedagogical aims, the authors seem to implicitly endorse what is often termed the "Grammar Translation Method" of grammatical instruction, though it is not clear that such an approach really represents best practice in language instruction, even for a highly inflected premodern language. Perhaps a textbook that really breaks with tradition and draws on evidence-based methodologies drawn from second-language instruction research might alleviate some of the authors' concerns, as well as representing an improvement in the teaching of Old English. To the best of my knowledge, none of the very many textbooks on Old English are satisfactory in this regard.

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