Tolkien, J. R. R. 2023. *The Battle of Maldon Together with the Homecoming of Beorhtnoth.* Edited by Peter Grybauskas. London: Harper Collins. Pp. 188. ISBN 9780008465827.

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The volume under review consists of three main parts and six appendices. Part one contains a historical note by Tolkien on "Beorhtnoth's Death," *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son* (Tolkien's play in alliterative verse on the aftermath of the Battle of Maldon), his essay "Ofermod," and a series of explanatory notes by Grybauskas. Part two comprises an "Introductory Note" on *The Battle of Maldon* by Tolkien, his prose translation of the poem, and a selection of notes by Tolkien on several aspects and cruces of the text. Part three is Tolkien's lecture on "The Tradition of Versification in Old English" (as the subtitle indicates, "with special reference to *The Battle of Maldon* and its alliteration"). And these are the six appendices:[1]

1. Old English Prosody
2. The Tradition of Versification in Old English [continued]
3. Alliteration on "g" in *The Battle of Maldon*
4. An Early *Homecoming* in Rhyme
5. Noteworthy Developments in the Drafts of *The Homecoming*
6. Proofing the Pudding: *The Homecoming* in Dialogue with the Legendarium

This review will be concerned only with parts two and three and with appendices 1–3, both because they will be of special interest to medievalists and because they have never been published before.

Tolkien's translation of *The Battle of Maldon* was produced, according to Grybauskas, sometime in the mid-to-late 1920s, and a partly obliterated note pencilled by Tolkien at the top left of the first page of the translation reads: "this . . . affair . . . intended . . . attempt to reproduce the poetic effect of the original" (56). The editor believes that the missing words would reverse the meaning of the note, since the translation is in prose and more concerned with conveying the meaning of the original than with its poetic effect. Grybauskas's assumption receives support from Tolkien's "Prefatory Remarks" to C. L. Wrenn's revision of John R. Clark Hall's translation of *Beowulf*, where he said:

> To use a prose translation for this purpose is, nonetheless, an abuse. *Beowulf* is not merely in verse, it is a great poem; and the plain fact that no attempt can be made to represent its metre, while little of its other specially poetic qualities can be caught in such a medium, should be enough to show that "Clark Hall," revised or unrevised, is not offered as a means

of judging the original, or as a substitute for reading the poem itself. The proper use of a prose translation is to provide an aid to study. (1950, ix–x)

There is little doubt that Tolkien thought of *The Battle of Maldon* as a great poem, and so it makes sense to assume that he saw his prose translation as an aid to its study. Tolkien's text is easy to read and not marked by archaisms (except for "God alone knoweth," for example, which translates the proverbial "God ana wat" of l. 94b).[2] It is also quite close to the original, though he does not hesitate to provide less literal renderings every now and then if these are deemed useful for clarification. Thus, ll. 17–19 of the poem are translated as follows:

> Ða þær Byrhtnoð ongan   beornas trymian,
> rad and rædde,   rincum tæhte
> hu hi sceoldon standan   and þone stede healdan

> "There then Byrhtnoth began to dispose his men and rode from point to point giving advice and orders, how they should place themselves and hold that position."

The addition of "from point to point," which is not in the original, helps the reader to visualize the scene in greater detail. Similar additions are "keen" (ll. 12–13), "in the front rank" (l. 16), and "again" (ll. 40–41). A more periphrastic or interpretive approach is adopted, for example, with "Het þa bord beran, beornas gangan" (l. 62) and "to lang hit him þuhte" (66b), which are translated as "He then gave orders to advance the ranks, and for the men to march forwards" and "They were impatient" (cf. Ashdown's "He bade the warriors advance, bearing their shields" and "All too long it seemed"). I can see the text being fruitfully used in class (an interesting exercise would be to read the original poem alongside Tolkien's version and Ashdown's more literal rendering).[3]

Tolkien's translation of ll. 84–90 (a key passage for the overall interpretation of the poem) deserves special mention.[4] Here is the text in the original:

> Þa hi þæt ongeaton   and georne gesawon
> þæt hi þær bricgweardas   bitere fundon,
> ongunnon lytegian þa   laðe gystas:
> bædon þæt hi upgangan   agan moston,
> ofer þone ford faran,   feþan lædan.
> Ða se eorl ongan   for his ofermode
> alyfan landes to fela   laþere ðeode

And here is Tolkien's rendering:

> When then they perceived this and saw clearly that they had there come upon no gentle guardians of the bridge, those vile invaders made a plausible appeal (to Byrhtnoth's chivalry) and asked they might have opportunity for coming up on his bank and leading

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[2] The text of *The Battle of Maldon* is here cited from Mark Griffith's edition (2024). For the text of *Beowulf* I have relied on *Klaeber IV* (Fulk et al. 2008), though I have omitted length marks and other diacritics (except in the discussion of alliteration of *g*, where I have retained a superscript dot to indicate palatal articulation).

[3] For Ashdown's text with facing-page translation, see Ashdown (1930, 22–37).

[4] This critical passage is illuminatingly explained in Griffith (2016).

their troops over the ford. Then the earl in his overconfident chivalry conceded too much land to that hateful people. (59–60)

As can be seen, an understatement, "no gentle guardians of the bridge," is used to translate *bricgweardas bitere*. This translation choice emphasizes the Vikings' reversal of expectations upon encountering Wulfstan, Ælfhere and Maccus on the causeway (and so aligns them more closely with Grendel, see *Beowulf* ll. 728–755). Even more remarkable is Tolkien's rendering of *ongunnon lytegian* (which is normally rendered as "used guile" or similar) as "made a plausible appeal," with "to Byrhtnoth's chivalry" added in parentheses (the idea of course is that the Vikings are taking advantage of Byrhtnoth's deep sense of honour, which they seem to know well). In keeping with this translation, he then glosses *ofermod* as "overconfident chivalry." Grybauskas believes that use of this jarringly anachronistic term perhaps called attention to Byrhtnoth's mistaken judgement in granting the Vikings their request (37). I think that it is possible to see it instead as an instance of "domestication" (see Magennis 2011, 7–13): the best way for Tolkien's readers to understand the character of Byrhtnoth was to think of him as a late medieval knight (a figure that on account of his popularity would have been more familiar to them than that of an earl from Late Anglo-Saxon England). A similar strategy can be seen in Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf*, in which Old English words for *warrior* are often translated by terms associated with chivalric romance and Arthurian legend (l. 160b, "duguþe and geogoþe" is given as "both knights and young"). The underlying assumption is that Germanic heroic legend was for Old English audiences equivalent to what Arthurian romance is for contemporary ones. Thus, the *Beowulf* poet is called "the Mallory of the Heorot legends" (Tolkien 2014, 206).

The series of notes on the poem on pp. 68–81 bears witness to Tolkien's extensive expertise in Old English language and literature (though it is regrettable that considerable technical linguistic commentary has been excluded from the selection). He accounts for the expression "on hyra sylfra dom" (l. 38b) as bearing on the Vikings' characterization as a tyrannically greedy people. In order to show that the adjective *ealde* is a compliment when applied to swords (l. 47), a parallel is established with the "eald sweord eotenisc" with which Beowulf kills Grendel's mother (as he puts it, "Battles are won by old swords," 70). Use of the adjective *cald* in l. 91b, Tolkien explains, is particularly meaningful, since it refers literally to the temperature of the water and metaphorically to the fateful crossing that resulted in disastrous defeat for the English. He then adds that "OE verse use of words is full of subtleties of this sort for those who will observe" (71). The word *brun* (part of the compound *bruneccg* in l. 163a) in the context of the poem does not mean "brown, dark, dusky," but "white-gleaming," since that is its significance in Germanic poetic tradition (e.g. *Judith*, *Beowulf*, and the *Chanson de Roland*). The compound *scyldburh* (l. 242), cognate with Old Norse *skjaldborg* and Old High German *sciltburg* (corresponding to the Latin gloss *testudo*), refers to an intimidating array of soldiers standing very closely to each other with shield touching shield, as described in *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* in connection with the Battle of Stamford Bridge. That "Eadweard se langa" managed to break into such an impressive defensive formation (ll. 273–79) was thus a most astonishing feat (77).

Tolkien thought that, for all of the poem's traditional style and diction (see, for example, his remarks on the author's use of poetical *hælæð* on 77), the account there given of the battle is close to historical fact. Thus, he believes that there is no reason to doubt that Wulfmær was really Byrhtnoth's *swuster sunu*, even though the relationship

between nephew and maternal uncle was a prominent one in Germanic heroic tradition (e.g. Fitela and Sigemund in *Beowulf*, Hildeburh's son and Hnæf in *Finnsburg*). Actual events, he argues, should not be dismissed as fabrications just because they happen to coincide with recurring motives of legendary traditions. As he puts it, "Things do not become legendary unless they are common and poignant human experiences first" (73). Similarly, he thinks that there is no need to suspect that Byrhtwold was not an *eald geneat* and that the words that he spoke were very dissimilar from the ones found in ll. 312 ff. As he says (80), the old retainer is in literary tradition more protective of the honour of his house than even its master is, and the reason is that that was the state of affairs in real life. Tolkien's reasoning here is more or less the same that made him identify the Hengest of the *Finnsburg* Fragment and Episode with Horsa's namesake brother in historiographical tradition (1982, 63–76). He believes that the expression *gehyrde ic* (l. 117a) is formulaic and does not necessarily imply that the poet did not witness the events that he recounts (73). He takes *Sturmere* in l. 249a to be a reference to Sturmer in Essex (77), and he regards it as a "grain of evidence" in support of the East Saxon origin of the poem (Tolkien's argumentation here is reminiscent of scholarly attempts to identify the origin of medieval works such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the *Cantar de mio Cid* on the basis of their authors' topographical knowledge). In connection with l. 286a, "Offa þone sælidan," Tolkien wonders which of the Vikings was slain by Offa, and suggests that the killer of Byrhtnoth might have been the one intended. He was right to wonder which among the multitude of Vikings is being referred to, since the linguistic context is one of definiteness, as unambiguously indicated by use of the demonstrative *þone*. As Mark Griffith (2022) has demonstrated, however, the reference is not to the killer of Byrhtnoth, but to the notorious messenger who defiantly tried to blackmail him at the beginning of the poem. We are here, therefore, before a climactic scene of poetic justice.

Eric Stanley, in his memoir of Lewis and Tolkien, recalls from regularly attending the latter's weekly seminars at Merton that he had a deep interest in metre (2014, 137). Part three and appendices 1–3 of the book under review testify to Stanley's recollection. In the lecture on "The Tradition of Versification in Old English," Tolkien advances the important argument that metrico-stylistic divergences between *Beowulf* and *The Battle of Maldon* are not to be attributed in the main to the passing of time or to the later poet's inferior skill (as has been and still is often done), but to an essential difference in mode of composition. *Beowulf*, Tolkien argues, is in the compact epic manner, a scholarly and written style whose metre has been polished, even down to the smallest detail, in a laborious and consciously artistic way. *The Battle of Maldon*, on the other hand, is in a freer, less compacted mode that was only rarely committed to writing, and which was used "to celebrate events while the news of them was still hot" (93).[5] That chronology is not as important as mode of composition to account for differences between *Beowulf* and *The Battle of Maldon* is shown by the fact that *The Death of Edward*, a poem composed seventy years or more after *The Battle of Maldon*, is in the same compact style as *Beowulf* (88). Tolkien's view that Anglo-Saxon poetic culture was metrically and stylistically more diverse than the written records suggest is very interesting, and closely parallels scholarly consensus about the dialectal situation in the Old English period. Tolkien's influence can,

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[5] The difference between the two styles would thus be analogous to that between the *mester de clerecía* and the *mester de juglaría* of medieval Spanish literature. The *Battle of Maldon* and the *Cantar de mio Cid* have in fact been productively compared: see Bravo García (1992).

I think, be detected behind such classics of medieval English scholarship as Dorothy Everett's (1955) "Laȝamon and the Earliest Middle English Alliterative Verse" and A. Campbell's (1962) "The Old English Epic Style."

Tolkien's argument is a sophisticated one, and the possible role of chronology in the development of a looser mode of poetic composition is given serious consideration (115). As the syntax of Old English became more analytical, and as there was a consequent increase in the number of elongated phrases (e.g. "mid prasse bestodon" for earlier *prasse bestodon*), poets may have felt the need to create a different but related metre that was more tolerant of anacrusis in the second half of the line, and which was therefore more suitable for rapid composition. This freer style, however, might have begun to emerge relatively early in the period, as elongated phrases always existed in the language. The old compact style, moreover, would have remained intact and available for later poets (as attested, for example, by *The Death of Edward*, discussed above), even though of course long compositions in it would have been linguistically more challenging than at earlier times. The development of the freer style in Old English is compared to that of *málaháttr* in Old Norse, and *The Battle of Maldon* (a poem with close stylistic affinities to both earlier Old English and Middle English alliterative verse) is said to be analogous to *Atlakviða* (whose metre is intermediate between the older *fornyrðislag* and the more recent *málaháttr*). Tolkien in fact often relies throughout the essay on his knowledge of Old Norse in order to shed light upon the poetic culture of Anglo-Saxon England (as when he explains how the rules of metre would have been acquired by Old English poets by reference to Icelandic sources, 105–7).

A considerable amount of space and effort in the lecture is devoted to disproving the widespread belief that metrical change results, inevitably and straightforwardly, from linguistic change. Language change takes place beyond the consciousness of speakers, but metre is an abstract and artistic pattern consciously imposed upon language, and so even though linguistic change will of course put pressure on metrical structure, the integrity of this can be (and in fact was) preserved by the poets' deliberate determination. At least three parables are used to illustrate this notion (those of the man tying his necktie, the woodman weaving a garland, and the recipe as an entity independent of the pudding). This method of exposition will be familiar to readers of "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics," where Tolkien famously used the allegory of the tower to exemplify the chasm between the artistry of the Old English poem, on the one hand, and its inadequate critical reception, on the other (1936, 248–49). That metre is not wholly dependent on phonetics means that the metrical rules are not fundamentally altered by the passing of time, as is often believed. Instead, the abstract metrical pattern handed down by tradition is allowed to be occupied by linguistic material in ways that are new and would have displeased earlier poets. For example, the adverbial suffix *-lice* always occupies two metrical positions in *Beowulf* (as in 2899a, "ac he soðlice," a Type C verse with half-stress on *-li-* and no stress on *-ce*). In *The Battle of Maldon*, on the other hand, owing to the progressive weakening of tertiary stress, adverbial *-lice* is allowed to occupy a single drop. Thus, l. 25b, "stiðlice clypode," scans as a regular four-position Type A verse with both *-li-* and *-ce* unstressed, whereas for the *Beowulf* poet that same verse would have scanned as the irregular five-position / \ x / x. For both poets, however, the required minimum of positions per half-line was four (and so "stiðlice clypode" furnishes no evidence that the basic pattern of four positions was disintegrating when *The Battle of Maldon* was composed).

It should be noted at this point that a number of scansions in the piece will fail to command the assent of metrists. L. 177b, "siðian mote," is analysed as an instance of Sieversian Type A2a, with a half-stress for an unstressed drop in second position (/ \ / x). The reasoning behind this analysis is that l. 251b, "ham siðie," can scan only as a Type D verse, with a metrical half-stress on -ði-, and so -ði- should be identically scanned in 177b. Tolkien's interpretation is unsurprising, since it was made at a time when the metrical behaviour of words like *siðian* had not yet been fully explained. As R. D. Fulk discovered in 1992 (169–235), however, trisyllabic non-compounds with short medial syllables (e.g. *siðie*, *siðian*) evince an ambivalent behaviour in poetry: placed at the end of the verse, their medial syllables receive a half-stress (as in 251b), but if placed at the beginning the medial syllables are then metrically unstressed. Thus, l. 177b is a regular Type A1, not a Type A2a, because the word *siðian*, which appears at the verse's beginning, scans / xx (i.e. with -ði- unstressed). Similarly, the medial syllable of *forhtedon* in 21b, "and ne forhtedon na," fails to receive a metrical stress on account of its placement before the verse's second lift (*na*). There is then no need to adhere to Tolkien's analysis of that half-line as a Type E with disyllabic anacrusis: the half-line is a regular Type B with a disyllabic verse-internal drop. Tolkien's interpretation of *Beowulf* 93b, "swa wæter bebugeð," and 402b, "þa secg wisode," as Type A and D half-lines with verse-initial anacrusis will not persuade some readers, who will instead prefer the analyses respectively put forward by Daniel Donoghue (1987) and by Eduard Sievers (1885, 256).[6] That Tolkien (91) takes *ne* and *ge-* to be anacrustic in *Beowulf* 109a, "ne gefeah he þære fæhðe, " implies that he saw that verse as a Type A1 with stress on -*feah* and *fæh*-. The finite form *gefeah* is clause-initial and precedes a particle (*he*), and so the verse is better scanned as a Type A3.[7] These defects of scansion are minor, and do not detract from the strength of Tolkien's arguments or from their value to contemporary metrical scholarship (more on this below).

A fundamental question that Tolkien seeks to answer in the lecture is this: "What can tradition preserve, and what can it not?" (99). In addition to metre (understood as an abstract artistic pattern independent of language), poetic tradition can preserve elements of diction. As he puts it, "there always was a tendency or a desire [in northern antiquity] to differentiate the language of verse from that of daily speech" (100). The preservation in poetry of a specialized diction that does not occur in everyday speech can naturally lead to the fossilization of certain words. This point is illustrated by reference to *Beowulf* l. 924, "medostigge mæt mægþa hose." Modern scholars can, with the assistance of comparative Germanic philology, confidently conclude that *hose* (a hapax legomenon) means "company" or "troop" (cf. Gothic and Old High German *hansa*), but the word is likely to have caused semantic difficulties to the native learner of Old English verse, who might have, as a result, felt reluctant to use it freely, outside similar syntactic contexts (101–3).[8] What tradition cannot preserve, even in fossilized form, is archaic

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[6] Conjunctions and adverbs are not normally found in anacrusis (on this, see most recently Pascual 2024). Donoghue ingeniously explained off-verses like *Beowulf* 93b as having verse-internal (*be-*) as opposed to verse-initial anacrusis (*swa*). Sievers cancels *þa* in l. 402b on the strength of l. 9b, in which textual *þara* is most likely the result of scribal tampering (see also Fulk et al. 2008, 333).

[7] *Beowulf* 109a belongs to Bliss's group (5): the verb is the last particle but one before the first stressed element (1967, 14–17). Grybauskas dates the lecture to the late 1920s or early 1930s (85). This dating receives support from Tolkien's scansion of 109a, which shows that he had not read Hans Kuhn's seminal work on poetic syntax, published in 1933.

[8] For Tolkien's views on the Old English comitative dative, see Tolkien (1982, 92–93).

pronunciation or bygone sounds. This allows Tolkien to set a *terminus ante quem* for the composition of *Beowulf*: the contraction of words like **þeoan* (from earlier **þeohan*) into monosyllabic *þeon*.[9] The reasoning here is that verses like "man geþeon," in which the uncontracted form must be assumed for the verse to scan, are common in *Beowulf* but are said to be absent from poems known to have been composed after contraction took place.[10] He also reflects on the question of alliteration on *g* in Old English verse (which is also the subject of appendix 3). Alliterative practice shows front and back varieties of *g* to have been equivalent in much Old English verse. After back *g* became a stop word-initially, however, the two varieties ceased to be alliteratively analogous (in *The Battle of Maldon* l. 192, for example, *ġymdon* does not alliterate with *Godwine*, *Godwig*, and *guþe*). Confronted with l. 1 of *Beowulf*, "we Gar-Dena in ġeardagum," a tenth-century Anglo-Saxon would have probably carried the plosive articulation of *Gar-* across the line, pronouncing *ġear-* as [ɡɑːr] rather than [jɑːr]. This would have sounded quite artificial and had nothing to do with genuine poetic practice, which is reflective of contemporary phonetics, not of "an impossible tradition of lost sounds" (119–120).

The Battle of Maldon is in the freer or looser style, not originally intended as a written composition, but that does not mean that it is an extemporized poem. It is too long, and it obviously does not consist of a string of stock phrases. Presumably the poet, like Cynewulf and Egill Skallagrímsson (125), spent several sleepless nights working on its composition before delivering it. The poem was then transmitted by word of mouth before being put down to writing by fortuitous chance (88). This process of oral repetition, Tolkien hypothesized, gave rise to a number of imperfections of a kind different from the scribal errors of a poem like *Beowulf* (conceived from the beginning by its author as a written work). These imperfections, along with errors of a typically scribal nature (which the text of the poem also contains) and metrically interesting verses, are dealt with in appendix 2. They are there grouped into six distinct categories: (a) probably or certainly corrupt (ll. 7, 75, 183, and 224); (b) alliteration on *weak* words (127, 128, 189, 239, 240, 242, 282); (c) misplaced head-stave (45, 288); (d) minor irregularities of alliteration (57, 80, 242, 266, 298, 308); (e) rhyme (271); (f) minor defects of scansion (13, 50, 93, 195, 212, etc. are given as instances of *overweighting*, while 54, 264, 299, and 270 are classified as examples of *over-lightness*).[11] It is noteworthy that l. 271, "æfre embe stunde he sealde sume wunde," seems to be seen as authentic in Tolkien's notes on the poem (69), but in the lecture (both on p. 123 and in

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[9] A phonetic change that possibly took place towards the end of the eighth century. Loss of *i* and *u* is seen by Tolkien as the *terminus a quo*, since there cannot be found in the text of *Beowulf* irregular verses whose lack of metricality would be fixed by restoration of those two vowels. Note that there are in *Beowulf* verses for which contracted forms are metrically required (see Fulk 1992, 98). For example, in l. 910b, "geþeon scolde" (a Type C verse), non-contraction of *-þeon* would result in Type A with anacrusis, but anacrusis is not used in Type A half-lines that consist of two disyllabic words (Bliss 1967, 40–43). For a detailed and comprehensive account of contraction in verse, see Fulk (1992, 92–121). On the dating of *Beowulf* more generally, see Neidorf (2014) and Neidorf and Pascual (2014, 2019).

[10] If monosyllabic *þeon* is not understood to stand for disyllabic **þeohan*, then the verse "man geþeon" would consist of only three positions (/ x /). Genuine three-position verses unambiguously occur in Old Norse, and it has been argued that they should also be considered authentic in Old English: see Weiskott (2013) and Suzuki (2017). For critical responses, see Pascual (2013–14 and 2017a, respectively).

[11] A good exercise for students of Old English poetry would be to compare Tolkien's appendix 2 with the sections on textual criticism in the editions by Laborde (1936), Gordon (1937), Scragg (1981), and Griffith (2024).

appendix 2, 143–44) is regarded as spurious. In particular, he sees it as a non-authorial interpolation from a style more similar to that of the *giedd* passages of the *Chronicle* (such as *The Death of Alfred*). This latter interpretation receives support from the fact that a very similar line occurs in Laȝamon's *Brut* (l. 3250, "and auer vmbe stunde felleð hine to þe grunde"), and that the style of the *Brut* has often been associated with that of *Chronicle* verse (Everett 1955, 26).

I have left for the end discussion of appendix 1, "Old English Prosody," because therein Tolkien makes two points that have an important bearing on contemporary metrical scholarship. The first is about the reliability of Sieversian metrics:

> The proof of the pudding is not only in the eating but in the making or at any rate reproduction. Only a *correct recipe*—though it may be expressed in words and in manner quite different from those of the original cook, and even perhaps unintelligible to him—will produce the same pudding. Only using a recipe founded on Sievers' analysis—with modifications perhaps, but not fundamental alteration—can Old English verse be *written*: by which I mean can anyone who knows the OE verse language write new matter in it, which is not only a string of half-lines actually found in our records (this can be done without any metrical knowledge or theory at all!), and which does not only contain *some* lines of a pattern actually found, but also contains *no lines* which are *not* found. (130)

And the second is about the functionality of alliteration (a point that he makes when discussing the interdependence of syllable length, stress, and alliteration):

> These were not isolated but indissolubly connected—*stress* and *length* were only considered *together*, and alliteration was infused in connexion with both, sometimes dictated by them, sometimes colouring the words, and determining as it were the rhythm in doubtful cases. This function of alliteration is most important, and is frequently overlooked by critics who perceive the interconnexions of our artificially isolated types. But as a matter of fact enormous numbers of OE half-verses are susceptible of various analysis if the *alliteration* is unknown. Where the full line is set out and the alliteration known only in rare cases is there any doubt—except purely as to nomenclature. (132–33)

Twenty years ago, Thomas A. Bredehoft (2004, 2005) argued that Sieversian metrics was too complicated to reflect the poets' actual practice and put forward a simplified version of it that was purportedly truer to historical reality (for a critical response, see Pascual 2014).[12] Three years later, Nicolay Yakovlev, in his Oxford DPhil dissertation (2008, 24, 77), proposed a new theory of Old English metre according to which alliteration is an ornamental, non-functional property of the verse (for critical responses, see Pascual 2017b and 2018, Neidorf and Pascual 2020, and Goering 2024). By eloquently asserting the empirical sufficiency of Sieversian metrics and the rhythmically discriminating role played by alliteration within the system of versification, Tolkien made a valuable contribution to a scholarly debate about Old English prosody several decades before it took place. It is not inconceivable that, given Tolkien's well-known authority on philological matters, the debate would have proceeded along very different lines (or maybe never have occurred) if his views had been published earlier.

Overall, the volume under review contains a substantial amount of material that will be of interest not only to Anglo-Saxonists, but also to scholars of Middle English and Old

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[12] On the empirical sufficiency of Sieversian metrics, see also Pascual (2020).

Norse, and so, to the question "is this a book worth purchasing by a medievalist?," the answer is an enthusiastic *yes*.

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(Received 12/06/2024)