

Anglo-Saxon Culture and the Modern Imagination (Medievalism Volume 1) DAVID CLARK AND NICHOLAS PERKINS (Eds.) Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 2010 xiv þ283 pp., ISBN: 978-1-8438-4251-4, £55.00/\$105.00

Given their enduring cultural legacy, the Anglo-Saxons continue to occupy a remarkably low profile in the modern imagination. But the popularity of Heaney's *Beowulf* and the discovery of the Staffordshire Hoard have done much to alter perceptions about preConquest life. Scholarship has also begun to focus on modern responses to Anglo-Saxon culture. While recent studies by Nicholas Howe and Chris Jones assess the reception of Old English in modern English poetry, this welcome collection of essays widens the focus to include textbooks, cinema, comics and crime novels. Chris Jones reads Robert Zemeckis's *Beowulf* (2007) as a "translation" responsive to scholarly debate, as much an act of reception as the sole manuscript copy of the poem. Disappointingly, he overlooks one of the film's more interesting innovations: by making *Beowulf* succeed Hrothgar as king of the Danes, the screenplay fuses the Danish and Geatish sections of the poem, deftly sidestepping the text's most notorious crux. Mark Atherton's study of Henry Sweet demonstrates the importance of textbooks in shaping literary tastes. Pioneering a "living philology" which emphasised the need to master the basics of a language before graduating to literature, Sweet is shown to be the forerunner not only of Old English primers such as Atherton's own but also of the modern "communicative approach" to foreign language teaching.

The next four essays focus on modern literary responses to the writings of the Anglo-Saxons and their neighbours. Auden-scholars have long recognised his debt to both Old English and Old Norse, but Heather O'Donoghue sheds new light on his use of the myth of Ragnarok and experiments with skaldic metrical forms. Similarly, Maria Artamonova examines the (abandoned) Anglo-Saxon setting of Tolkien's early mythology, locating his Old English prose writings in the context of his interest in philology and genre. Anna Johnson explains the presence of Old English, Norse and Celtic motifs in the war poetry of David Jones in terms of his appeal to the shared cultural heritage of English, Welsh and German troops. Clare Lees reads Basil Bunting's *Briggflatts* (1966) through the lens of John Leyerle's contemporary article on interlace patterning in *Beowulf*, noting that both authors use weaving as a metaphor for writing. Drawing on Exeter Book Riddle 51, Lees provides a context for Bunting's interest in orality and sound-patterns, as well as his allusions to the carpet pages of the Lindisfarne Gospels. The focus on visual culture is sustained in Siân Echard's contribution, which explores how images and other visual cues such as font and layout in editions, translations and criticism of *Beowulf* from Thorkelin to Heaney shape responses to the text. Allen Frantzen then takes a critical look at *Grendel: Transcendence of the Great Big Bad* (2006), an operatic adaptation of John Gardner's *Grendel* (1971). Presenting the monster as ethically superior to the Danes but separated from them by a large wall, the opera—Frantzen argues—can only offer a "flat concept of opposed worlds" (p. 156), lacking the nuance of either Gardner's novel or the poem itself. Catherine Clarke shows how the layout of the DC Comics *Beowulf* Series of the mid-1970s addresses the needs of Vietnam veterans to "re-adjust their skills and identities as men" in civilian society (pp. 175–6). John Halbrooks demonstrates how representations of paganism in *Beowulf* and Bede are exploited to provide a counterpoint for a modern crisis of faith in P. D. James's novel, *Death in Holy Orders* (2001). Connecting the Alfredian concept of *cræft* ("skill") with the Protestant Work Ethic and the rise of Victorian "medievalism", Maria Sachiko Cecire investigates responses to the legendary figure of Wayland in Walter Scott, Kipling and even *The Simpsons*. The final essays consider the contrasting Anglo-Saxon inheritances of three modern English poets. Hannah Crawforth discusses the figure of Offa of Mercia in Geoffrey Hill's meditation on sovereignty and royal morality, *Mercian Hymns* (1971). Joshua Davies reflects on the relative absence of Anglo-Saxon culture in Ted Hughes, for whom the usurpation of Celtic Britain constituted a severance from nature akin to the Industrial Revolution. While many of these essays emphasise continuity with an ancient tradition, the collection closes with Rebecca Anne Barr's analysis of Peter Reading, who finds in the anonymous fragments of Old English verse "a position from which to articulate existential meaninglessness" (p. 260).

This volume does not aim to be comprehensive: there is only a footnote on Borges and the appropriation of Anglo-Saxon culture by various nationalist movements from the nineteenth century to the present is not mentioned at all. But the editors are to be commended for producing a handsomely illustrated, rich collection which will prove a fine companion piece to Hugh Magennis's *Translating Beowulf: Modern Versions in English Verse* (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2011) and *The Word Exchange: Anglo-Saxon Poems in Translation*, edited by Greg Delanty and Michael Matto (New York: Norton, 2011).

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