Terasawa, Jun 2011: *Old English Metre: an Introduction*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press. pp. xiv + 154. ISBN: 978-1-4426-1129-0. 15,41€.

Old English metre is a maze area, full of dead ends. The complexities and subtleties of the metrical system which underlies OE poetic compositions—and which were once intuitively known to the poets as native speakers of OE—starkly contrast with the fragmentary nature of the surviving corpus of OE poetry. In order to bridge the gap which separates the remaining manuscripts from the actual composition of poetry, metrical theories arise.

Of these theories, the one which has had the deepest influence upon Anglo-Saxonists has been that by Eduard Sievers (1885, 1893). The main reason is, no doubt, its powerful descriptiveness: it manages to classify the large number of surviving OE verses—approximately 60,000—into five basic types. But the problem is that, despite its suitability for modern readers to conceptualise the metre, such a descriptive formalism fails at capturing the logic behind the metricality of verses.

The inability of the Sieversian system to go beyond mere description has resulted into a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, many reformulations and refinements of Sievers's theory, as well as a variety of new paradigms, have appeared. But this has, at the same time, made the field of OE metrical studies become so complex and specific that most basic readers, beginners' books and introductions to OE either dispense with metre or present a clearly insufficient, often hacked account of it.[1] It is the purpose of Jun Terasawa's book, *Old English Metre: an Introduction* (hereinafter cited as *OEM*), to compensate for such a disproportion by offering a straightforward introduction to OE metre for students, as well as

[1] Notable exceptions are Cassidy & Ringler (1971: 274–288), Pope-Fulk (2001: 129–158), McCully & Hilles (2005: 143–185), and Baker (2012: 123–155), which contain ample introductions to Sieversian metrics.

a state-of-the-art presentation of current debate.[2] The aim of this review is to assess if Terasawa fulfils his twofold purpose, and how.

Maze areas need elaborate, well-organised maps, so the first thing to consider is whether Terasawa's book offers a trustworthy guide to such a labyrinthine field. This leads us to evaluate the book's general structure.

OEM is organised into seven different chapters. The basics of the metre are described in the first three while the remaining four are devoted to more specific and ambiguous aspects, ranging from the phonological processes of contraction, parasiting, and syncopation through textual criticism, and currently controversial issues such as the dating of texts, authorship, and the difference between verse and prose. Thus, this book is arranged according to a principle of increasing difficulty, so that its overall structure unequivocally reflects the author's twofold purpose. The complexity of its contents is not only regulated at book-level but also within each chapter. The signs ★ and ★★ are used to mark intermediate and advanced topics respectively, so that more complex chapter-sections might be skipped at a first reading.

After the general introduction given in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 focuses on alliteration—which basically means that the author has decided to begin his study from above. Instead of giving attention first to the manner in which syllables are regulated at the level of the foot or the half-line, Terasawa opens his guide by paying heed to the structure at line level. The beneficial point of this choice is that the student—who is usually faced with the common expression "alliterative verse"—will encounter the most noticeable feature of OE poetry at an early stage. The disadvantage is that, despite being its most noticeable feature, alliteration is not the most fundamental characteristic of OE verse (cf. Tolkien 2006: 66; Cable 1991: 2). Nevertheless, it is made clear all throughout Chapters 3 and 4 that the most essential aspect of OE

[2] Alan Bliss's *An Introduction to Old English Metre* has been in existence since 1962. Nevertheless, the large amount of OE metrical studies which has appeared since then made the need for a new introduction pressing.

metre is not alliteration but the number of syllables and their rhythmic distribution along the half-line.

OEM is also rich in examples, the majority of which are taken from *Beowulf*—a nostalgic desire for examples from other poems of as traditional a metre as that of *Beowulf*, such as *Daniel* or *Genesis A*, may arise at this point, though. But this book's bid for practicality is not exhausted by its copious display of examples. Far from that, each chapter is also accompanied by a number of exercises—amounting to a total of twenty-six—with suggested answers provided in Appendix A at the end. Some of them will make the student deal with the same difficulties that the poets encountered, while some others will put the reader in the place of modern editors faced with ambiguous, metrically emendable manuscript readings. This is as welcoming an addition as a rare one—as far as I am aware, only Thomas Cable's *A Companion to Baugh and Cable's* History of the English Language (2002: 38–43) and McCully and Hilles's *The Earliest English: an Introduction to Old English Language* (2005) incorporate practical exercises on OE metre. (These exercises are not, however, as plentiful and elaborate as those provided by Terasawa in *OEM*).

Two other appendices are added: one provides practical tips for scanning verses and the other consists of a useful glossary of technical terms. Moreover, each chapter is opened with a short overview and closed by a "further-reading" section. All the works cited in these sections are gathered in the book's final bibliography, which would constitute by itself a valuable contribution to the field of OE metrical studies.The meaningful structure and the intelligent organisation of *OEM* effectively contribute to the book's practical bias, which is at the same time one of its most attractive assets.

The theoretical standpoint Terasawa adopts is essentially Sieversian. In this respect, *OEM* fulfils Cable's recommendation that more work should be done in order to contribute to Sievers's theory rather than developing brand-new formalisms (Cable 2008: 396). But Terasawa, besides making continuous references to other

points of view different from Sievers's, also recurs to arguments from other theoretical models which prove useful for explaining specific aspects of OE metre. (For example, in Chapter 2, he accounts for the nature of alliteration in terms of Geoffrey Russom's word-foot theory). This provides *OEM* with an eclecticism which will be useful for students to get a panoramic view of the metre. However, although this is a very appropriate feature for an introduction, the reader should bear in mind that *OEM* is not a theory of OE metre in itself, but the hall which opens the way to different rooms—and that a deeper understanding of OE metre will in the end mean getting to know the different theories.

Chapter 1 offers a general introduction to the whole book. It is like a condensed version of the entire work. The author highlights from the very beginning that the two most conspicuous aspects of OE verse texts, alliteration and rhythm, are regulated by strict rules. This is, no doubt, a positive aspect, since it helps counteract the old view that the language of OE poetry is the language of everyday use rather tidied up (Daunt 1946: 64). There is a real poetic metre underlying OE verse texts, and this is manifested in systematic rules, such as the four-syllable principle (which is presented early in the book), as well as in the poets' avoidance of certain words and syntactical constructions—I will focus on this below.

Despite its emphasis on rules and constraints, the section on rhythm in Chapter 1 opens with a commentary which might be thought unfortunate (Terasawa 2011: 7):

> Each half-line normally contains two lifts or rhythmically stressed syllables whereas the number of unstressed syllables may vary. Thus, unlike post-Conquest poetry, Old English verse texts do not strictly regulate the number of syllables either in the half-line or in a line: some half-lines consist of four syllables [...] and others of nine or even more [...].

That the number of syllables in OE verse texts does not remain constant but varies from one half-line to another does not necessarily mean that it is not strictly regulated. In fact, as some

recent theorists have demonstrated, the syllabic variability of the OE half-line is regulated by a principle whereby the foot-structure mimics the word-stress patterns of OE, allowing a maximum of four extrametrical syllables to occur between feet (Russom 1987: 8–24). Even Cable, who is an advocate of the Sieversian essentials, acknowledges the importance of Russom's word-foot theory in accounting for constraints on the number of weakly-stressed syllables (Cable 1991: 2). Nevertheless, this minor inconsistency does not affect the overall coherence of *OEM*, which very successfully conveys through repetition and exemplification the idea that OE verse was highly systematic and strictly governed by rules.

In his study on early English metre, Thomas Bredehoft (2005a: 8, 51) complained about the deficiency in our understanding of OE metre derived from both a too exclusive overemphasis on alliteration and the neglect of end-rhyme as an occasional structural element. Donka Minkova (2008: 675) acknowledged the importance of this contribution in her review of Bredehoft's work. Terasawa's Chapter 2 includes a section on end-rhyme (2011: 24–25), as well as a subsection on secondary patterns of alliteration (2011: 18–19).This is a positive good of *OEM*, which will no doubt help students get a more comprehensive understanding of OE metre.

Chapter 5, which deals with the relation between metre and vocabulary, is one of the most valuable and interesting parts of *OEM*. Three general points are tackled: (1) the poets' preference for words with a lower number of syllables; (2) their choice for certain morphological variants of words to the detriment of others equally native to the OE language; and (3) their avoidance of certain kinds of compounds depending on their phonological structure.[3] That the

[3] Especially relevant is Terasawa's appreciation that the poets avoided the use of compounds requiring resolution at the start of the second element if this was immediately preceded by an unstressed syllable (cf. Terasawa 2011: 73–74). This general tendency has been defined by R. D. Fulk as Terasawa's Law (cf. Fulk 2007: 304). On the importance of Terasawa's Law for delimiting the range of influence of oral tradition upon OE poetic composition, cf. Fulk 2007: 304–312.

poet makes choices as to what OE simplexes and compounds fit into his poem unmistakably means that there are strict rules restraining the number of syllables to the half-line. (Paradoxically, such a core feature of OE metre has often been overlooked in the past.) Further, *OEM* benefits from the fact that its author is one of the few scholars who have gone deep into the relation between vocabulary and metre, which makes this book unique.

That the four-syllable principle is the gist of the metre is not only manifested in the poets' lexical choices, but also in the grammatical constructions of the poetry—as Chapter 6 emphasises. The relaxation of certain grammatical features in the poetry which are clearly observed in the prose, such as the concord between subjects and adjectival complements, the use of weak forms of the adjective without the presence of a demonstrative or possessive in the noun phrase, or the blurring of syntactically distinctive word-orders—among other factors—undoubtedly means that the grammar of the poetry is subservient to the rules of the metre. Cable has remarked on the necessity of accounting for the rules of the metre in terms of the linguistic structures of OE (2008: 396–397). By devoting two whole chapters to the particular shapes that OE vocabulary and grammar adopted in order to conform to the requirements of the poetry, as well as by describing all throughout Chapters 3 and 4 the phonological constraints into which the language of poetry had to fit,[4] *OEM* offers a solid introduction to the workings of OE metre which, in my opinion, anticipates the character of future studies on OE metre.

In Chapter 7, a state-of the-art overview of the main controversial areas of OE metre and the study of OE verse texts—namely, dating, authorship, and the difference between verse and prose—is offered. In his prefatory remarks to C. L. Wrenn's 1940 edition of J. R.

[4] For instance, Kaluza's Law—with which some recent metrical theories dispense—is devoted a subsection in chapter 4 (Terasawa 2011: 55–56). Nevertheless, Terasawa speaks of the "metrical structure" of the resolvable sequence as the key to understand if resolution is applied (2011: 56). "Phonological structure" would be, in my opinion, a more appropriate expression.

Clark Hall's prose translation of *Beowulf*, J. R. R. Tolkien pointed out that, due to the approximately equal metrical weight of the half-lines, the OE line could be defined as a balance (Tolkien 2006: 63). As if in keeping with this structural principle of OE poetic practice, Terasawa (2011: 103) explicitly states that he intends to maintain a balance among the different stances held by the scholars—which I think he manages to do successfully. Thus, this chapter contributes to the author's second purpose (i.e. to introduce the advanced student to the current state of OE metrical studies, which is controversial). Nevertheless, that the author does not affirm that *Beowulf* is an early poem is, in my opinion, a negative aspect, since the conformity of *Beowulf* to the first part of Kaluza's law furnishes strong evidence that the poem was composed either before ca. 725 if originally Mercian, or before ca. 825 if Northumbrian (see Fulk 1992: 12–13, 31, 36, 164–168, 349, 381–392). Seiichi Suzuki (1996: 207–233), B.R. Hutcheson (2004) and Roberta Frank (2007) have questioned the validity of Kaluza's law as an indicator of the poem's antiquity, but their arguments have been convincingly refuted by Fulk (2007: 317–329) and George Clark (forthcoming). In the light of the latter studies, it appears unreasonable to regard the phonological conditioning of the *Beowulf* poet's adherence to Kaluza's law as anything other than a clear sign of the poem's early composition.

Hopefully, this review has made clear that because of its organisation, its abundance of examples and exercises, its theoretical standpoint and eclecticism, its increasing complexity, and the balance it maintains among currently controversial issues, *OEM* constitutes a firm introduction to OE metrical studies as well as a proper overview of state-of-the-art research in the field—and subsequently its author's twofold purpose is effectively achieved. Jun Terasawa's *OEM* serves as an excellent introduction to the field of OE metre, an understanding of which is essential in order to properly assess OE poems (cf. Bredehoft 2005b).

Recently, another remarkable elementary book on OE has appeared: Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson's eighth edition

of *A Guide to Old English* (2012). I should like to finish this review by pointing out that, in my opinion, an understanding of the phonological and morphological basics of the OE language as presented in Mitchell and Robinson's *Guide* (cf. §§26–32; §§15–25 and §§33–35, respectively), followed by the study of Terasawa's *OEM*, would constitute a most formidable training in OE metrical studies—a swampy yet incredibly fascinating area, at the end of whose interlaced paths lies, irrespective of its complexity or low appeal to modern taste, highly significant information about OE literary texts.

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