

A Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Studies. Edited by Jacqueline Stodnick and Renée R. Trilling. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. Pp. 320. ISBN: 9781444330199.

This collection of fresh and compelling essays presents innovative scholarship linking the study of Anglo-Saxon England with key themes in contemporary critical theory. Chapter titles use key terminology familiar to those who work in critical theory; thus, Elaine Treharne writes on “Borders,” Christina Lee on “Disability,” Stacy S. Klein on “Gender,” Robin Norris on “Hegemony,” Scott Thompson Smith on “Historicism,” Andrew Rabin on “Law and Justice,” R. M. Liuzza on “Literacy,” D. M. Hadley on “Masculinity,” Martin K. Foys on “Media,” Catherine E. Karkov on “Postcolonial,” Stephen Harris on “Race and Ethnicity,” Carol Braun Pasternack on “Sex and Sexuality,” Andrew Scheil on “Space and Place,” Kathleen Davis on “Time,” Mary Louise Fellows on “Violence,” Benjamin C. Withers on “Visual Culture,” Helene Scheck and Virginia Blanton on “Women,” and E. J. Christie on “Writing.” Each chapter begins with a discussion of the pertinent term and, indeed, even the introduction opens with an historical analysis of the key word in the title: “handbook.” This leads into an analysis of the way that critical theory does not simply explain but also “reflects back upon and restructures the initial terms of inquiry” (4). The book is intended to be a comprehensible introduction to novices in the field of Anglo-Saxon studies, but it also has much to offer more advanced scholars, who I am sure will benefit from such an organized and concise discussion of theory as it pertains to the Anglo-Saxon world. Some subjects will, of course, be of more interest to feminist scholars than others, and it is these that are discussed in more detail here.

Klein’s chapter on “Gender” discusses the set of social phenomena—warfare, militancy, and the supporting roles that enabled martial life—that are intimately linked to Anglo-Saxon understandings of gender and sexual difference. The chapter focuses on the ninth- or tenth-century Old English poem *Judith*, which recounts the militant activities of the eponymous biblical heroine. Klein argues that the depiction of Judith’s martial activities in the poem does not turn her into some kind of an “honorary man,” but that her representation in the poem actually exceeds expected historical gender norms and imagines alternatives. Yet, the poem does not simply discard gender norms and celebrate female militancy, because Judith’s military success is attributable to God’s will. The poem highlights spiritual fortitude as a military asset, suggesting that as much as gender and sexual difference can be fluid and open to change, so too can the

complex web of values and ideas responsible for producing those phenomena in the first place.

Hadley's discussion of "Masculinity" examines Anglo-Saxon material culture, specifically swords, and the way that they were entwined with masculine identity. The sword was central to many aspects of Anglo-Saxon secular life, from negotiating lordship and familial business to interaction between cultures and religious conversions. Likewise, in the life of the religious, the absence of the sword was a significant factor in the construction of their identity. Although swords were actually only owned by the secular elites, their manufacture, use, display, and deposition remained relevant across the social spectrum as a marker of "masculine aspirations and identity" (130).

Pasternack's chapter on "Sex and Sexuality" focuses on the way that texts can create sexual as well as textual community. In the textual space free from the realities of social life and physical bodies, texts create communities with a certain outlook, and sex and sexuality is a significant aspect of the behavior, identity, and ideas informing, and informed by, that outlook. Pasternack examines the story of Cynewulf and Cyneheard, told in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* annal for 755 AD. Unlike most incidents in the *Chronicle*, which are only reported as stark factual statements, this is a more fully developed story. King Cynewulf exiles Sigeberht, who subsequently dies, and Sigeberht's brother, Cyneheard, then catches Cynewulf when he is unprotected by men, this because he was in *wifcyþpe* (literally "woman-knowledge" or having sex) with a certain lady of Merton. The sex scene provides "a fleshy opening for death" (190) in this bloody tale in which there are two big fights in which everyone dies, including both Cynewulf and Cyneheard, save a sole survivor in each case. Whether "woman-knowledge" implies an illicit or short-term encounter is unknown, but the sex is not without relevance to the broader theme of dynasty that is central to the *Chronicle* at this stage.

Fellows's discussion of "Violence" centers on the aggressors of sexual violence and how the Christian man's inability to control his lust subsequently wrecks disorder in his community. She examines Old English homilies, hagiographies, law-codes, and riddles in the light of a broader emphasis on the Anglo-Saxon obsession with disorder and order in a way that demonstrates that sexual violence breached the mores that, in order to achieve salvation, encouraged the denial of sexuality, to such an extent that the rapist's lack of individual discipline became emblematic of the Fall.

Scheck and Blanton's chapter on "Women" opens with a reminder that the category "women" is not universal, and even for Anglo-Saxon women there is a

great diversity of experience. With this caveat in place they go on to explore what can be known about women's involvement in Anglo-Saxon intellectual culture in the seventh and eighth centuries, and in particular that of Hild of Whitby (ca.614-80). From the writings of Bede we have some indication of Hild's work as a teacher and her influence in the spiritual and political lives of both men and women. Whitby was a double monastery (i.e., for both sexes). A number of the men trained there went on to become bishops, and women, such as Hild's successor, Ælfflæd, were also educated to a high standard. Hild's successes at Whitby caution us not to make assumptions about women's involvement in learning in the Anglo-Saxon period based on later models of monastic life.

A Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Studies is a significant contribution to many different disciplines of Anglo-Saxon scholarship, but it could also be enjoyed by those interested in other periods of medieval studies for its lively and informative discussion of trends in critical theory. The volume succeeds admirably in its stated goal of opening up a "more spacious" conversation about what constitutes Anglo-Saxon studies, which will now undoubtedly include critical theory as an integral and entwined aspect of that endeavor.

Tracey-Anne Cooper
St. John's University