Oliver M. Traxel
Monika Kirner-Ludwig (eds.)

Old Sources – New Creations: Modern Takes on Past English Language Stages

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Preface and Acknowledgements

On 9 September 2022, a symposium titled *Old Sources – New Creations: Modern Takes on Past English Language Stages* was held at the University of Stavanger (Norway) which invited a range of papers dealing with the incorporation of past language stages within a modern context. It was this event that served as a starting point for the present volume. Besides a selection of papers given on the occasion, it also contains some articles that were specifically commissioned for that purpose.

Bringing this book to an end has taken significantly longer than intended. Planning started in 2018 with a paper given on linguistic medievalism at the *Middle Ages in the Modern World* (MAMO) conference in Rome (cf. Traxel 2021). Needless to say that our volume's realisation was substantially delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Significantly more lamentable, however, was that we lost our long-time mentor and friend Prof. Dr. Hans Sauer (University of Munich) on the way – he passed away on 31 May 2022. Originally, this volume was going to be co-edited together with him. The only solace that remains – and this is utterly ironic – is that Hans Sauer, who would, for as long as we knew him, finish his submissions and publications in the nick of time, had in fact sent us the full paper that he was going to present at the symposium. We thus have the privilege to include this contribution of his in this volume – a book that we would like to dedicate to him and his memory.

The 2022 symposium has also served as the predecessor to a larger, interdisciplinary project at the University of Stavanger, founded in 2023 and funded by the initiative *Forsking – Utdanning – Innovasjon* (Research – Education – Innovation) at the Department of Cultural Studies and Languages, i.e. *The Middle Ages in the 20th and 21st Centuries: Relevance, Reimagination, Inspiration* (MARRI). This project joins various disciplines, such as English and Nordic Philology as well as His-

torical and Cultural Studies, and seeks to provide a broader picture of modern approaches towards the Middle Ages from different angles. Dealing with the linguistic past, as covered in this volume, is an integral part of this venture.

Oliver M. Traxel (Stavanger) and Monika Kirner-Ludwig (Innsbruck)

An Introduction to Modern Takes on Past English Language Stages

Monika Kirner-Ludwig, University of Innsbruck, and
Oliver M. Traxel, University of Stavanger

1. Scope and Rationale of this Volume

Language(s), literatures and cultures of previous eras have long been a source of artistic inspiration and fascination – traditionally more so for non-academics than scholars.[1] In 1986, however, Umberto Eco was already

> witnessing, both in Europe and America, a period of renewed interest in the Middle Ages, with a curious oscillation between fantastic neomedievalism and responsible philological examination (63).[2]

In fact, the phenomenon of 'New Medievalism' (or Neo-medievalism), which overarches the contributions to this volume, has been occupying a particularly prominent position in popular culture and pop cultural research conducted

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1   Possibly even more so for the latter.

2   It turns out challenging to trace back the original Italian version of this much-quoted dictum. Apparently, it featured in a speech given by Eco at the University of Indiana in Bloomington in 1984 but never part of one of Eco's published essays. The only publication including this passage is the one edited in translated paraphrase by William Weaver, first published in 1986. We thank Francesca Nicotra for painstakingly retrieving this information.

mostly by historians and medievalists (cf. Selling 2004). Even before the beginnings of talking films, medieval motifs and narratives had been adapted for the audiences of modern times, responding to popular demand.

We argue that a fruitful way of understanding and finding new perspectives on the present is through exploring and understanding the past (also cf. Sauer and Kirner-Ludwig 2021). This volume implements this exact notion and, in doing so, taps into interdisciplinary realms of scholarly interest that have so far not received much significant attention from linguists in particular. In doing so, this volume contributes to filling a lamentable gap concerning specifically linguistic research into neo-medieval phenomena. Traditionally, it has been scholars of historiography and (pop)cultural studies that have dedicated focused attention to modern receptions of medieval themes (cf., e.g., Elliott 2014; Kapell and Elliott 2013; Scala and Federico 2009).

Phenomena of interest from a linguistic point of view have been dealt with in multiple ways and with various research foci in mind. One obvious occurrence is interference into a primary text in order to make it accessible to a modern audience, in particular in the form of editions and translations. But the approach to past language stages can also go into the opposite direction, namely the creation of material that merely suggests belonging to a previous language stage by adding an archaic twist. This approach can reach from whole textual stretches down to mere words within a modern text.

We encounter respective phenomena in a wide range of resources, such as historical or fantastic novels, poems, websites, blogs, movies, TV series, video games and teaching materials. There have even been translations of entire modern books back into (neo-)Old, (neo-)Middle and (neo-)Early Modern English, e.g., Manfred Görlach's various renditions of Wilhelm Busch's *Max & Moritz* (1979, 1981, 1992, 1997, 2014). A recent essay collection elaborating on (pseudo-)Old English with a focus on uses in the 20th and 21st centuries has been published by Fletcher, Porck, and Traxel (2022).

The following subsections provide a brief overview of creative involvement with the linguistic past. These concern post-medieval approaches to Old and Middle English and also modern engagement with Early Modern English.

2. Terms of Interest and Relevance

Every medievalist has to make their peace with the fact that most of the research-relevant data possibly accessible and obtainable comes in written, sometimes in drawn, never, though, in audible form. The striving for fully reconstructing the latter is the historical linguist's quest for their very own Holy Grail: ever-ongoing and probably never to be fully grasped. While uncountable and extensive academic approaches have been taken to reconstruct diachronic varieties such as Old and Middle English, this long tradition of linguistic research seems to have been mostly separate from what lay persons today tend to assume about 'how people spoke in the Middle Ages'.

With the birth of the medieval film genre, one could have certainly expected ample opportunities to open up for finally experimenting within the dimensions of 'spoken medieval speech'. However, it seems that hardly any attempts have been made in this direction until relatively recently: while codeswitching has been a well-established feature of telecinematic discourse for decades and across subgenres, few movies and TV series have dared to tread the shaky grounds of employing medieval varieties (also cf. 3.2.2 below). One prominent counter-example is the Irish-Canadian series *Vikings* (2013–2020), which uses reconstructed and idealized stretches of, amongst others, Old Norse, Old English and medieval Latin speech. Further attempts to weave in Old English utterances have been made in the British TV series *Merlin* (2008–2012) or, to a very small extent, in Zemeckis' British-American 3D computer-animated fantasy-adventure film *Beowulf* (2007). Whereas the average viewer of these productions will in most cas-

es not have sufficient knowledge about medieval Latin or Old English to distinguish between what has been correctly reconstructed or not with regard to, e.g., syntax and morphology, even the medievalist themselves will not be able to fully assess the phonetic accuracy the actors will perform with. We are thus facing a highly complex build-up of intricate levels entailed in adding pseudo-medieval speech to screenplays.

While there has been a general discussion going on about to what extent screenplays represent spoken or written text, post-production transcripts of telecinematic discourse may be available in written form, too, but are in fact, in some sense, spoken discourse in transcribed form. At the same time, they can be so only partially, as actors will also have systematically embedded idiosyncratic features into their 'delivery' of the written screenplay text, including, e.g., prosodic and paralinguistic features (not to mention particular accents of English). When 'lay' transcribers (i.e., fans with presumably no linguistic training) transcribe the spoken discourse back into a written form, though, they may not be taking these specific features into account at all. While these layers certainly deserve to be addressed when sketching out the process of (a) writing a screenplay ⇨ (b) acting the screenplay out ⇨ (c) transcribing that telecinematic discourse back into written text, the present study will only use the text level resulting from step (c) in the process just described. In ignoring prosodic and paralinguistic matters, the post-production fan transcripts adhered to in this study will merely be used as a means to an end and shall be considered faithful recoveries of the pre-production screenplays.

A closer look into the language used in medieval films will necessarily have to make its approach one that is based on what has been reconstructed and come to be conventionally believed about 'medieval speech' (cf. Davis 2001; Rosen 2001; Vincendeau 2001). Concretely, any assessment of marked linguistic features occurring in medieval films must inevitably be canvassed against 'rules' or conventionalities that have been established for the diachronic varieties of Old and Middle English so that one will be able to identify and discuss any pseu-

do-features to begin with. Several such attempts have been made in the course of the last fifteen years and a number of valuable linguistic studies have been produced, focusing on pseudo-archaisms and pseudo-medieval features in modern media including video games, computer mediated texts and, of course, film (cf. Bryant 2010; Harris 2004; Kirner-Ludwig 2018; Traxel 2008, 2012). Yet, not nearly enough attention has been paid to systematic and pragmatic implications that pseudo-medieval linguistic features convey.

Archaisms may be defined as "linguistic forms that used to be common but then went out of fashion" (Traxel 2012: 42), while pseudo-archaisms are such "linguistic forms that never existed but [...] evoke the impression as if they could have" (ibid.: 42f.). Traxel proposes a distinction of two subcategories of pseudo-archaisms, namely

a. "mock-archaisms [composed on the basis of] no or only limited knowledge of English language history [and] created mostly for humorous reasons"; and

b. "neo-Old or neo-Middle English by authors with an educated knowledge of English language history [and thus] intended as more serious recreations" (Traxel 2012: 43; cf., e.g., Görlach 1979, 1981, 1992; Lenard and Walker 1991).

Traxel's type a. overlaps with Eco's category of "the Middle Ages as a pretext", a "mythological stage on which to place contemporary ([1967/1984] 1986).[3]

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3   It is certainly fair to assume that, in general, writers involved in producing screenplays (henceforth referred to as *pre-production screenplay scripts*), even if these are for medieval films, are not specifically educated or trained in any medieval or related discipline (e.g., linguistics, history etc.).

3. Making Medieval English Texts Accessible Today: a Current State of Research

3.1 Translating Old English sources for modern audiences

One of the most salient and oldest ways of making especially Old English texts accessible to modern audiences that may not otherwise be able to read them in their original has been the strategy of translation.[4] The latter is a notion that is in and of itself understood, defined and implemented diversely by philologists and translators alike: it ranges from word-by-word renditions of an original wording via paraphrasing it while sticking to a higher or lesser extent to that original wording as closely as possible, to attempting to retain the metric verse, alliterative features and lexical choices of what is deemed the closest to an original. Some philologists produce an edited Old English text next to the Modern English translation for transparency and immediate referencing.

Within the canon of Old English texts that have been translated most frequently are the poems *Beowulf, The Dream of the Rood, The Seafarer,* and *The Wanderer* (cf. the selections in Tables 1, 2, 3, 4).[5] Significantly more texts from the Middle English period have received philological attention, e.g., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a late 14th-century chivalric romance in alliterative verse, which we display as one representative example from the Middle English time with some of its editions and translations in Table 5.

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4   Of course, one should not forget that monolingual text editions without translation but with critical commentary, lexicographical index etc. used to be what philologists would be producing for the relatively small ingroup able to penetrate such texts. *The Early English Text Society* (EETS, formerly published by Boydell & Brewer) has been the standard publisher of such text editions since 1867, with currently more than *350 volumes in its Original Series and* over 125 volumes in its Extra Series.

5   Also see the database *Old English Poetry Project*, https://oldenglishpoetry.camden.rutgers.edu/.

Translator/Editor	Year of Publication	Title, publisher
William Morris and A. J. Wyatt	1895	*The Tale of Beowulf [Done Out of the Old English Tongue]* (Kelmscott Press)
J. R. Clark Hall	1901	*Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg* (Swan Sonnenschein and Company, ltd)
Frances B. Gummere	1910	*The Oldest English Epic, Beowulf, Finnsburg, Waldere, Deor, Widsith, and the German Hildebrand* (The MacMillan Company)
Burton Raffel	1963	*Beowulf* (Turtleback)
E. T. Donaldson	1966	*Beowulf* (W. W. Norton & Company)
Kevin Crossley-Holland	1968	*Beowulf* (Macmillan)
Howell D. Chickering	1977	*Beowulf: A Dual-Language Edition* (Anchor)
S. A. J. Bradley	1982	*Beowulf* (in *Anglo-Saxon* Poetry, Dent)
Seamus Heaney	1999	*Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* (Faber and Faber)
J. R. R. Tolkien and C. Tolkien	2014	*Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary* (HarperCollins)
Maria Dahvana Headley	2020	*Beowulf: A New Translation* (FSG/Macmillan)

Table 1: Select Translations of *Beowulf*

Translator/Editor	Year of Publication	Title, publisher
Kevin Crossley-Holland and Bruce Mitchell	1965	*The Dream of the Rood* (in *The Battle of Maldon and Other Old English Poems*, Macmillan)
Richard F. S. Hamer	1970	*The Dream of the Rood* (in *Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse: Selected, with an Introduction and a Parallel Verse Translation*, Faber and Faber)
Michael Swanton	1987	*The Dream of the Rood* (University of Exeter)
S. A. J. Bradley	1982	*The Dream of the Rood* (in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, Dent)

Table 2: Select Translations of *The Dream of the Rood*

Translator/Editor	Year of Publication	Title, publisher
Kevin Crossley-Holland and Bruce Mitchell	1965	*The Seafarer* (in *The Battle of Maldon and Other Old English Poems*, Macmillan)

Translator/Editor	Year of Publication	Title, publisher
Richard F. S. Hamer	1970	*The Seafarer* (in *Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse: Selected, with an Introduction and a Parallel Verse Translation*, Faber and Faber)
S. A. J. Bradley	1982	*The Seafarer* (in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, Dent)

Table 3: Select Translations of *The Seafarer*

Translator/Editor	Year of Publication	Title, publisher
Kevin Crossley-Holland and Bruce Mitchell	1965	*The Wanderer* (in *The Battle of Maldon and Other Old English Poems*, Macmillan)
Richard F. S. Hamer	1970	*The Wanderer* (in *Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse: Selected, with an Introduction and a Parallel Verse Translation*, Faber and Faber)
S. A. J. Bradley	1982	*The Wanderer* (in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry,* Dent)

Table 4: Select Translations of *The Wanderer*

Translator/Editor	Year of Publication	Title, publisher
Brian Stone	[1959]1965	*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Penguin Classics)
James L. Rosenberg and A. C. Cawley	1971	*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the Original Middle English Text and a Modern Verse Translation* (The Limited Editions Club)
J. R. R. Tolkien	1975	*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, and Sir Orfeo* (George Allen and Unwin)
Simon Armitage	2007	*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (W. W. Norton & Company)

Table 5: Select Translations of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

In the present volume, problems in translating from a past English language stage into Modern English are discussed by Hausleitner, Majewski, Schwan and Traxel, together covering translation samples from Old English ranging from the 19th to the 21st century.

Short Biographies of the Contributors

Felix Hausleitner currently lives in Vienna and works as an English and German teacher for an organization that works with people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. As an academic, hebecame interested in historical linguistics while pursuing a teacher training in English and History at the University of Graz. For his PhD, which he finished in 2019, he combined the two subjects and worked with Old English medical texts. Hausleitner is also interested in Semitic languages; he recently obtained a BA in Arabic and Islamic studies at the department of Near Eastern Studies (University of Vienna).

Monika Kirner-Ludwig is University Professor of English Linguistics at the University of Innsbruck and research-affiliated with the University at Albany (SUNY, USA). She holds a venia docendi and a PhD in English Linguistics from the Universities of Innsbruck (2023) and Munich (2013). Her research interests and foci lie within (Historical) Pragmatics, Pop-cultural Linguistics, and Stylistics. Her habilitational thesis on Formulaic Humor (2023) was awarded with the "Preis des Fürstentums Liechtenstein". Recent publications include her co-edited volume *Telecinematic Stylistics* (2020, Bloomsbury) and a handbook chapter titled *Formulaic humor in pop culture* (2025, Mouton de Gruyter).

Patrick Maiwald is a lecturer in English Linguistics at the University of Würzburg. His teaching and research mainly focus on historical linguistics, the history of the English language, corpus linguistics, English lexicology and phonology, stylistics, and fantastic fiction. He earned his PhD in English Linguistics from the University of Gießen in 2016. He has taught at several institutions, in-

cluding the Universities of Gießen, Potsdam, and Erlangen-Nürnberg, and has a certification in teaching competencies in higher education. He also plays in a progressive dark folk band that finds its main lyrical inspirations in English literature from various centuries.

Kerstin Majewski is junior professor for English Medieval Studies at University of Bochum. In 2021, she obtained her PhD from University of Munich. Her doctoral thesis focused on the 8th-century Ruthwell Cross, for which she specialised in Old English and runology; *The Ruthwell Cross and its Texts: A New Reconstruction and an Edition of* The Ruthwell Crucifixion Poem (De Gruyter, 2022) was awarded with the Beatrice White Prize in 2024. Kerstin is interested in historical runes as well as modern adaptations of the runic script and its contexts (medievalism). Her research and teaching encompass Old and Middle English language, literature, and culture in general.

Martina Marzullo holds a PhD in English Studies from the University of Heidelberg. She is a member of the Heidelberg Graduate School for the Humanities and Social Sciences (HGGS), the Colloquium for Early Medieval Studies, the International Society for the Study of Early Medieval England (ISSEME), and the Deutscher Anglistikverband. Her research explores the correlation between early medieval England and contemporary writers. This is her third publication.

Hans Sauer (†) held full and visiting professorships at various universities. At the time of his passing he was emeritus professor of English at the University of Munich (LMU). Other previous posts and assignments include Eichstätt, Würzburg, Dresden, Innsbruck, Palermo, Lodz, Poznan, Katowice, Warsaw, Brno, Columbus, Tokyo, Beijing, Chongqing, and Kuala Lumpur. His research interests and publications included editions and studies of Medieval English texts, word-formation, glosses, glossaries and lexicography, plant names, *Beowulf*, especially *Beowulf* translations and *Beowulf* films, the history of linguistics and of English studies, varieties of English (advertising language; pidgins and creoles), interjections, and binomials. He was co-editor of *MUSE* (formerly

Texte und Untersuchungen zur Englischen Philologie), of *Anglia, LexMA* (*Lexikon des Mittelalters*), *MET* (*Middle English Texts*) and 'English and Beyond' (adapted from https://www.anglistik.uni-muenchen.de/personen/emeriti/sauer/index.html).

Birgit Schwan works as a lecturer at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Munich (LMU), teaching translation from English into German. She is currently working on her PhD in the field of Historical English Linguistics and Medieval Literature. As she has been interested in and fascinated by stories and the art of story-telling her entire life, her teaching and research interests cover a wide area in linguistic, literary, cultural and translation studies, but are always focused on the various how's and why's of language use, on relations and interconnections between language and culture.

Oliver M. Traxel is Professor of English Language and Linguistics at the University of Stavanger, and initiator of the project *The Middle Ages in the 20th and 21st Centuries: Relevance, Reimagination, Inspiration (MARRI)*. He has a PhD in Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic from the University of Cambridge and habilitated in English Philology at the University of Münster. His main research interests lie in English language history, linguistic creativity and medievalism, and he has published widely on the representation of past language stages in the modern world.

Sonya Louise Veck is Associate Professor of English and Catholic Studies at the University of Mary in Bismarck, ND. She holds a PhD in Literary Studies from the University of Denver (2006) and her research interests have included Old English poetry, Insular Romance, along with works by The Gawain Poet and Chaucer. Her recent book *Old Englishness in King Horn and Athelston* compares characteristics of Old English literature to 'Matter of England' romances to determine whether key aspects of the poetry of the former continued in these stories on into the Middle English period.

English and Beyond

herausgegeben von Hans Sauer (†), Gaby Waxenberger, Monika Kirner-Ludwig und Kerstin Majewski

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