Book Review

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BOOK REVIEWED: LESLIE LOCKETT, _ANGLO-SAXON PSYCHOLOGIES IN THE VERNACULAR AND LATIN TRADITIONS_ (TORONTO: UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS, 2011): XIV + 495 PP. ISBN 978-1442642171.

Leslie Lockett's thorough and impressive study of the cultural conceptualizations underlying texts produced in Anglo-Saxon England is perhaps the best representative of the cognitive turn in medieval studies in the past decade. She is not the first philologist to apply cognitive science to early medieval (especially Old English) sources – many scholars have set the ground for her.[1] However, the valuable contribution she brings to the discussion is, on the one hand, a clearer parting of the

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[1] M. Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind', in M. Lapidge and H. Gneuss (eds.), _Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday_ (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 271-8. S. A. Low, 'Approaches to the Old English Vocabulary for "Mind"', _Studia Neophilologica_, 73 (2001), 11-22. A. Harbus, 'A Mind for Hagiography: The Psychology of Resolution in Andreas', in K.E. Olsen, A. Harbus, T. Hofstra (eds.), _Germanic Texts and Latin Models: Medieval Reconstructions_ (Louvain, 2001), pp. 127-40. A. Harbus, 'Cognitive Studies of Anglo-Saxon Mentalities', _Parergon_, 27 (2010), 13-26. A. Harbus, 'Thinking in Metaphors: Figurative Language and Ideas on the Mind', _Sydney Studies in English_, 30 (2004), 3-20. M. Matto, 'True Confessions: The Seafarer and Technologies of the Sylf', _Journal of English and Germanic Philology_, 103 (2004), 156-79. B. Mize, 'The Representation of the Mind as an Enclosure in Old English Poetry', _Anglo-Saxon England_, 35 (2006), 57-90. E. Jager, 'Speech and the Chest in Old English Poetry: Orality or Pectorality?', _Speculum_, 65 (1990), 845-59. For more general anthropologic approaches, see M. Dunn, _The Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons_ (London: Continuum, 2009); A. Hall, _Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: Matters of Belief, Health, Gender & Identity_ (The Boydell Press, 2007); J.D. Niles, 'Widsith and the Anthropology of the Past', _Philological Quarterly_, 78 (1999), 171-213; G. Halsall, 'Anthropology and the Study of Pre-Conquest Warfare and Society: The Ritual War in Anglo-Saxon England', in S. Chadwick Hawkes (ed.), _Weapons and Warfare in Anglo-Saxon England_ (Oxford, 1989), pp. 155-77; S. Glosecki, _Shamanism and Old English Poetry_ (New York, 1989).

waters from the previous scholarly tradition, and on the other, a more wide-ranging and integrative model of the Anglo-Saxon mind.

The cognitivist trend in medieval studies is emerging now because recent developments in the social sciences (transcultural psychiatry, cognitive linguistics, cognitive anthropology) provide tools and methodologies which fulfill an age-old need felt by Anglo-Saxonists (but also medievalists in general) to understand the Anglo-Saxon way of perceiving and explaining the world (including natural phenomena, bodily and psychic functions) before attempting to interpret Old English texts. In the 1970s, Wormald summed it up best: 'it thus seems reasonable to use heroic literature as a window on the mentality of a warrior-aristocracy, whose existence and whose importance is reflected in other sources, historical, legal and archaeological, but whose preoccupations do not seem to be described elsewhere'.[2] The only window available to us is the same as ever − the texts which have been preserved. Yet the latest evolutions in cognitive science allow us deeper and more informed views to what can be seen through the window. For cognitive linguistics sees language and texts not so much as a means of communication, but rather as an instrument for organizing and processing knowledge which thus directly reflects the nature and structure of thoughts and mental patterns.[3]

Lockett's aim is to bring to light the mental structures and patterns that are at work in Anglo-Saxon literary texts, highlighting the implicit conceptions of their authors, and the society of which they were part, about the human body and psyche. But this involves quite a bit of preliminary work uprooting venerable preconceptions and assumptions about them − manifested throughout the Anglo-Saxon critical tradition − that are sometimes the greatest obstacles to their full understanding and correct interpretation, especially since they are made unconsciously (from an inability to surpass the confinements of a modern cultural mindset). Hence, one of Lockett's preliminary goals is to 'minimize the reader's dualist biases and to increase the reader's receptivity to the nuances of Anglo-Saxon psychologies'.[4]

She groups these assumptions and preconceptions under two headings: the 'modernist bias' (the strong mind-body dualism that is so deeply rooted in the modern Western mind that we unconsciously project it onto the psychologies of other cultures) and the 'medievalist bias' (the assumption of modern readers − rather too well-versed in theology to be sensitive to alternate modes of thought that survive beneath and beyond all dominant paradigms − that all medieval writers shared the Christian and essentially Augustinian psychological model of a carnal body

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[2] P. Wormald, 'Bede, *Beowulf* and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy', in R.T. Farrell (ed.), *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England*, BAR, British Series, 46 (Oxford, 1978), pp. 32-95 at p. 36.
[3] D. Geeraerts and H. Cuyckens, *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 1 ff.
[4] Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, p. 11.

opposed to an incorporeal soul which includes the rational mind). The latter partly coincides with what has been termed 'theologistic bias', namely the idea that the religious representations of a society make up a fully integrated and consistent set of principles.[5] The point is that this is a projection of the unitary, scientific project of modern thinking on that of pre-modern societies: in the Anglo-Saxon cultural world there was always a wide range of different particular beliefs one could share without much cognitive dissonance.

The modernist bias makes modern readers and critics assume that literal beliefs are literary devices – that the depictions of the mind 'swelling' and 'boiling' with rage and 'being constricted' or 'cooling' with sadness are metaphors for processes of the mind. In fact, they reflect literal Anglo-Saxon representations of mental processes that make up what the author terms the 'hydraulic model', which consists in depicting the human mind as a corporeal entity located in the chest cavity, susceptible to dynamic changes of pressure and temperature, thus resembling the behaviour of a fluid in a closed container. This is what chapter 3 (the centerpiece of this extremely wide-ranging study) deals with: Lockett makes a substantial cross-cultural study of the hydraulic model, brilliantly arguing for an Anglo-Saxon holistic conception of the mind. Going deeper into this, she discovers a fourfold anthropology of body, mind (*mod*, *hyge* or *sefa*), life-force (*feorh* or *lif*) and soul (*sawol*, the part of the human being participating in the afterlife) that underlies most of the narrative and lyrical representations of human beings in the Old English corpus.[6] Chapters 4 through 8 explore conceptions of the mind in the Anglo-Saxon Latin tradition, proving that non-Augustinian opinions on the soul, mind and incorporeality persisted even among the learned and theologically-minded (such as Candidus Wizo, one of Alcuin's pupils, and Alfred himself). It is only Ælfric's dissemination of a Platonist-Augustinian anti-materializing agenda in the eleventh century that seriously challenges the hydraulic model in the population at large.

Saying that Lockett's study is wide-ranging is almost an understatement, because throughout this massive tome, she goes from tracing the evolution of the cardiocentric model of the soul in the philosophy of Late Antiquity to analysing Old Norse, Old Irish, even Old Japanese texts in conjunction to Old English ones and from explaining the emergence of the hydraulic model of the mind with the latest developments in cognitive science and neuropsychiatry to arguing for the Alfredian authorship of the *Soliloquies*. Although always thoroughly researched and thoughtfully expounded, this extreme range of topics and approaches may deter some readers (especially non-specialists) from engaging with this brilliant work. And yet, Lockett has succeeded in creating almost single-handedly a theory of the Anglo-Saxon mind that will be henceforth impossible to overlook by any Anglo-Saxonist. Moreover, she brings a sensitivity to alterities which is necessary – though not always to be found – among medievalists and Anglo-Saxonists in particular. For we

[5] Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 17.
[6] Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, pp. 19-52, 57-88, 92-109.

must 'remain attuned to the strangeness of the cultures of the past' in order to 'recognize them as comprehensible systems that have their own integrity, independent of perceptual norms into which we as observers have been acculturated by the accident of our birth'.[7] All in all, Lockett is a truly revolutionary work, and one can only hope it will inspire emulation.

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[7] Niles, '*Widsith* and the Anthropology of the Past', p. 181.