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*Cædmon's Hymn: A Multimedia Study, Edition and Archive*, ed. by Daniel Paul O'Donnell, Version 1.1: Internet reprint, SEENET Series A — Editions, 8. Charlottesville, Virginia: SEENET, 2018. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.1198856.

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## Reviews

*Cædmon's Hymn: A Multimedia Study, Edition and Archive*, ed. by Daniel Paul O'Donnell, Version 1.1: Internet reprint, SEENET Series A — Editions, 8. Charlottesville, Virginia: SEENET, 2018. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.1198856.

Daniel O'Donnell comments, tactfully, that 'few modern scholars have shared Bede's enthusiasm for the intrinsic aesthetic quality of Cædmon's work' (§3.1). He makes little attempt to disabuse us of the implication that *Cædmon's Hymn* is quite a pedestrian composition, despite its fame as one of the earliest and most widely attested Old English poems, or its fame for being claimed by Bede as the first Christian Old English poem. I share my colleagues' scepticism as to the poem's literary merits, and this is one of the reasons why, when O'Donnell's edition of the text was originally published in 2005, I did not pay it any attention.<sup>1</sup> Forced by its place in the English canon to deliver a lecture on *Cædmon's Hymn*, however, I belatedly gave O'Donnell's work the attention it deserved, in its 2018 online reissue.

The preface to the reissue says that the work has not been updated, so one might expect a review to focus on comparing the user experience of working with the 2018 internet publication with its precursor, a book with CD-ROM. The fact that I have not attempted this comparison tells its own story: though well stocked, Leeds University Library does not hold the 2005 first edition, and even if it did, I would have had to find a computer with a CD drive with which to consult it. The free-access 2018 internet edition is, then, self-evidently a valuable improvement on its closed-access and technologically outdated predecessor. Moreover, the fact that O'Donnell and his colleagues have succeeded in transferring their electronic edition of 2005 to the Internet with what appears to have been little trouble (§2018.2) indicates that the coding decisions taken twenty years ago were future-proof, and suggests that they will remain so. In this, both the 2005 and 2018 editions of *Cædmon's Hymn* compare favourably with the contemporary *A Digital Facsimile of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Junius 11*, ed. by Bernard J. Muir (Oxford: Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, 2004) (CD-ROM; software by Nick Kennedy), which was unusable on many machines and browsers even when published, and swiftly descended further into obsolescence.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> First published as *Cædmon's Hymn: A Multimedia Study, Edition and Archive*, ed. by Daniel P. O'Donnell, Society for Early English and Norse Electronic Texts, Series A, 7 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Murray McGillivray's review of Muir's edition in *Digital Medievalist*, 2 (2006), <http://doi.org/10.16995/dm.14>. In this respect, Muir's comment in his review of O'Donnell's edition that it 'has missed the opportunity to become a standard reference work' is rather ironic: *Early Medieval Europe*, 15 (2007), 466–69 (p. 469).

## Review

And whereas it was unthinkable that I might routinely send even my postgraduate students to consult the 2005 edition, the accessibility of the 2018 version makes it a cornucopia of opportunities for helping students study linguistic variation in Old English, palaeography, and scribal transmission, to which we can readily include deep links in our course materials (not to mention *Wikipedia*, whose English entry for *Cædmon's Hymn* is currently replete with links to O'Donnell's edition). Admittedly the image-files that comprise the manuscript facsimiles are by current standards quite low-resolution, and since quite a few of the manuscripts of the *Hymn* are now available in their entirety online, it would have been very helpful to link through to them: this is one of the few ways in which Martin Foys's recent '*Cædmon's Hymn: The Seven West Saxon Versions*' supersedes O'Donnell's edition.<sup>3</sup> But O'Donnell's image files remain useful for most purposes — they were indeed evidently good enough for Bernard Muir, reviewing the first edition, to pick up some palaeographic details which O'Donnell had overlooked. On the one hand this indicates that O'Donnell's transcriptions and palaeographical analyses are not perfect, and it would have been good to see the 2018 edition incorporating reviewers' corrections, but on the other Muir's comments indicate that in some ways O'Donnell's edition has done the job it set out to do in making its claims readily checkable.<sup>4</sup> The bibliography of the 2018 edition does include an addendum listing reviews of the 2005 version, which at least provides a starting point for readers wanting to hunt for reviewers' additional insights.

One inconvenience of the 2018 edition is that it does not indicate the page numbers of the 2005 print copy of the edition. Looking back on the 2005 edition in 2010, O'Donnell commented that 'despite our request that readers cite the introduction by paragraph number, most in fact seem to cite by page', and correspondingly it is difficult to track past scholars' citations of the 2005 edition in the 2018 one.<sup>5</sup> O'Donnell's plaintive tone here is perhaps unearned: no Old Anglicist should have been surprised to find that their colleagues' scholarship was conservative, least of all when it came to footnotes; moreover, my search of the 2018 edition (including an electronic search for the word 'paragraph') has not turned up the injunction that O'Donnell refers to, so, if it was in the 2005 edition, it may have been hard to find. But I recognise that introducing page numbers to the 2018 edition would have been fiddly, and, on the bright side, the complete absence of page numbers from this text may mean that O'Donnell at last gets his wish that scholars cite by paragraph number, leading to more useful (and precise) citations in the future.

A more serious omission is a clear indication of paragraph numbers in the table of contents, which will mean that even where they are following up the citation of a paragraph number, readers unfamiliar with the numbering system have to click around the site for a while to track down citations — this would be easy to fix, so one hopes that it will be. Indeed, it took me a while to get a feel for the navigation of the site in general. On the other hand, as I got used to its structure, I was bowled over by the extent and care of its internal hyperlinking. Shortly before reading O'Donnell's edition, I read the (impressive and interesting) discussion of the oral and scribal transmission of *Cædmon's Hymn* by Paul Cavill from 2000.<sup>6</sup> Trying

<sup>3</sup> ed. by Martin Foys (Wisconsin, Madison: The Center for the History of Print and Digital Culture, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2019), <https://uw.digitalmappa.org/12>.

<sup>4</sup> See fn. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Paul O'Donnell, 'Different Strokes, Same Folk: Designing the Multi-Form Digital Edition', *Literature Compass*, 7.2 (2010), 110–19 (p. 112), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2009.00683.x>.

<sup>6</sup> 'The Manuscripts of *Cædmon's Hymn*', *Anglia: Zeitschrift für englische Philologie*, 118 (2000), 499–530.

to follow Cavill's arguments without having transcriptions of all his key manuscripts to hand was all but impossible: reading Cavill's article essentially required a programme of primary reading to understand the arguments he was making. By comparison, following O'Donnell's arguments about the transmission of *Cædmon's Hymn* was joyously straightforward, as it was easy at every turn to click through to his manuscript sources and critical editions of different recensions. While I have not formed an opinion as to whether he is right or not, O'Donnell's argument that the recension of *Cædmon's Hymn* least like Bede's Latin paraphrase of the poem — the 'Æ' or 'eorðan' recension, found in the Old English translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* — is the closest in content to the archetype of the *Cædmon's Hymn* tradition (§5) is, more than fifteen years after its publication, still a stimulating reading of the evidence.<sup>7</sup>

The open-access 2018 edition of *Cædmon's Hymn: A Multimedia Study, Edition and Archive* is a no-nonsense, future-proof website that, while quite inconvenient to navigate, embraces the potential of HTML publication in ways that are still seldom realised in humanities publishing. Its scholarly contributions have not dated appreciably since 2005, but its usefulness as a teaching resource has grown dramatically.

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<sup>7</sup> On this point, I am in agreement with Scott DeGregorio's review for the 2005 edition in *Speculum*, 82 (2007), 223–24 (p. 224) and Peter A. Stokes's in *Digital Medievalist*, 5 (2009), <http://doi.org/10.16995/dm.21> (§6).