

REVIEW

The Lexical Domain of Beauty and its Metaphors in the Anglo-Saxon Formulaic Style. By Francisco Javier Minaya Gómes. Peter Lang, 2021.

Reviewed by Natalia Rzonsowska (Faculty of English, Adam Mickiewicz University Poznań)

Humans are naturally drawn to beauty in all forms. As the author of this book reminds their readers, poets and writers have explored the idea of beauty for centuries. John Keats equated beauty to truth, and Emily Dickinson personified truth and beauty as two people in a grave who are “one”. In recent theories, beauty is viewed as an emotion that is embodied and can be deliberately triggered. In contemporary culture, beauty and physical appearance are often associated with inner goodness, and the terms used to describe beauty vary depending on gender and context.

Old English literature has not been extensively analyzed in relation to the concept of beauty and related emotions. The author’s research aims to examine how Old English poetry triggers the experience of beauty and determine the strategies used to do so. The study uses a scientific approach based on cognitive science and emotion research, rather than understanding beauty as a set of prescriptions or geometric rules. The research is organized into ten chapters, including a literature review on relevant research, a focus on Anglo-Saxon culture, and analysis of different thematic groups of Old English poetry related to beauty. The last chapter provides concluding remarks and analysis of the usage of Old English terms for beauty. The study employs a methodology based on historical linguistics, cognitive linguistics, and emotion research, as well as corpus linguistics and corpus-based lexical semantics. It centres on an adaptation of the Behavioral Profiles methodology, which aims to overcome the traditional disadvantages of corpus linguistics by annotating and categorizing data according to the parameters set by the researcher. The study aims to fill the gap in the study of Anglo-Saxon emotions and lexical domains, specifically focusing on the lexical domain of beauty and exploring early medieval English aesthetic ideas and their relation to culture and individual experience.

The first chapter, “From ‘Beauty’ to the Experience of Beauty” (pp. 15–58), provides an overview of traditional theoretical perspectives on the study of beauty, including ideas associated with it in artworks and writings from the medieval period, and from the disciplines of philosophy, art history, and history of ideas. It explores beauty as an aesthetic emotion and presents recent findings in the field, contributing to a deeper understanding of beauty as a phenomenon experienced through the body. The author investigates different historical perspectives on the concept of beauty, examining, among others, the Greek “Classical Conception” that perceives beauty as a harmonious arrangement of parts, and Plato’s “Idealistic Conception” which defines beauty as an unattainable ideal. Beauty is seen as an abstract set of ideas and judgments that are configured in the subject’s psychology, partially inherited from a larger and older cultural and social tradition, which should be distinguished from desire as desire obeys a biological impulse and the experience of beauty does not necessarily entail bodily satisfaction.

The subsequent chapter, “The Anglo-Saxon Mind, Senses, and Aesthetic Sensibility” (pp. 59–110), endeavors to examine the emotional and psychological processes of the Anglo-Saxon culture in order to provide insight into their perception of reality and cognitive interpretation of sensory information and affective experiences. The author uses linguistic study of emotion-related terms and the ways in which Anglo-Saxons talked about the senses and their bodily experiences to gain insight into their culture. The author argues that the expression of sensory data is culture-specific and that in Old English, the senses are treated differently compared to contemporary standards. The study also highlights the connection between sight and understanding in Anglo-Saxon culture and how there existed a progression from touch, to sight, to understanding, to remembering. Additionally, the study examines the concept of “sensescapes” and how it helps in reconstructing and recapturing the senses. It also suggests that there is a hierarchy between the senses in Anglo-Saxon culture with sight being the most important sense.

In chapter three, “The Lexical Domain of Beauty and Appearance” (pp. 111–164), the author analyzes the lexical choices used in Old English literature to describe beauty and appearance, highlighting the prevalence of visual aesthetics as a key concern in Western culture. The terms used for beauty in Old English literature often convey a sense of pleasing outer appearance, with a particular emphasis on the visual sense. The first section of the chapter discusses the Old English noun *ansýn*, which means “what is looked upon” and is a polysemic noun. The main sense of this noun is “face, countenance”, but it can also describe a beautiful or ugly appearance as certain subdivisions for this term evidence. The author also looks at the Old English terms *cým-* and *cýmelic(e)* “fine, comely, handsome”, which are practically identical and are mostly found in the

Paris Psalter. The next section is about the adjective *fæger*, which is one of the most frequently attested aesthetic emotion markers in Old English verse. It is the etymological root of the Present-Day English adjective *fair*, which in Old English times was mostly used in the sense of ‘beautiful’. The text discusses the use of the *fæger* in relation to the emotion of awe in Anglo-Saxon poetry. It provides examples from texts such as *Beowulf* and *The Dream of The Rood*, where the adjective is used to describe both animate and inanimate objects, and how they trigger the experience of awe through their vastness, need for accommodation, and beauty.

The fourth chapter, “Beauty is Cleanliness” (pp. 165–170), scrutinizes the terminology used in Old English literature to express aesthetic emotion by exploring the lexical field of cleanliness. The author argues that the metaphor “The External is an Index of the Internal” (Harbus 2012: 61) is responsible for the usage of these terms in the context of aesthetic emotion. The author goes on to analyze some excerpts in the OE poetic corpus where terms for cleanliness, mainly OE *clæne*, are used as aesthetic emotion markers, and aims to clarify the underlying linguistic and figurative processes that facilitate this mapping and determining the meaning of ‘clean’ as semi-synonymous with ‘beautiful’. The chapter also discusses how Anglo-Saxon poets used the sensory qualities of OE *clæne* and terms derived from OE *wamm* to convey spiritual and moral evaluations.

The fifth chapter, “Beauty is Color” (pp. 171–179) examines the role of color in medieval aesthetic experience. It explores the significance of color in medieval art and literature as a means of evoking aesthetic emotion. Selected passages from the Old English poetic corpus are analyzed to clarify how color-related terms were used to convey aesthetic emotion. The author studies specific Old English terms such as *blēo*, *hīw*, and *wearg* to determine how they were used in different contexts. The author finds that color-related terms can be used as aesthetic emotion markers, but they can also be used in a more complex manner involving cognitive and moral judgments. The author also notes that references to specific colors are rare in original Anglo-Saxon texts, and when they do appear, they are found in translations and adaptations from foreign sources. Overall, the author concludes that color-related terms can be used as aesthetic emotion terms but they are not always used in a positive context.

Chapter six, “Beauty is Uniqueness and Excellence” (pp. 179–188), investigates the use of two Old English terms, *āenlīc* and *sellīc*, in relation to aesthetic experience. The author finds that these terms are used to refer to the unique and excellent qualities of things in Old English literary works, and often appear alongside other aesthetic emotion lexis. It is also noted that these terms are used to describe the natural world and religious contexts in unique and poetic ways as well as to convey aesthetic emotion. The author studies the usage of these

terms in passages from Old English literary works, in order to determine how they were used to convey aesthetic emotion. The author also finds that these terms are used in similar domains as most other aesthetic lexis, namely, the natural, human, or religious.

The next chapter, “Beauty is an Intricate Pattern” (pp. 189–198), focuses on an in-depth analysis of the Old English term *wrætlīc*, which conveys the concept of beauty in Anglo-Saxon literary works. The term is etymologically related to the Old English verb *wrītan* “to write” and is associated with the intricate design found in Anglo-Saxon artwork. The author argues that *wrætlīc* is used to indicate manual skill and intricacy in Anglo-Saxon literature, specifically in references to stonework, jewels, and battle gear. The author also notes that though in some instances the choice of OE *wrætlīc* may be influenced by alliteration with the noun it modifies, it also evokes the idea of strangeness. The term is found to have a polyvalent meaning; it can refer to intricacy, beauty, wonder and, strangeness. The author also discusses its usage in the Physiologus poem *The Panther and The Whale*, where it is used to describe the beauty of the panther’s fur and the whale’s ability to emit a pleasant smell respectively. Overall, the term plays an additional role in the aesthetic emotion episode as an elicitor of wonder and mystery, setting the tone in the riddles and other poems.

Chapter 8, “Beauty is Light” (pp. 199–212), investigates how light-related terms are utilized in Old English poetry to express beauty and aesthetic emotions. The author argues that light and beauty were intrinsically connected at a conceptual and spiritual level in medieval times, and that this is reflected in the use of light-related terms in Old English poetry. The study examines how these terms are used in different poetic genres and finds that they often describe the beauty of religious figures and evoke specific emotions in the audience. It is also noted that while light-related terms are mostly used in a positive manner to convey beauty, they are also sometimes used in a negative manner to describe things that are not beautiful or even ugly.

The ninth chapter, “Beauty is Nobility” (pp. 213–222), scrutinizes the utilization of the Old English term *æðele* as a marker of aesthetic emotion in religious poetry. The term has a primary meaning of nobility, but when used in religious poetry, it often takes on figurative meanings that refer to aesthetic experiences. The author analyzes the use of *æðele* in the poem *The Panther*, which is an allegory for Jesus’ resurrection, where the panther (Jesus) emits a pleasant smell that is described as *æðele*, meaning “splendid” or “beautiful”. The term is also used in Psalms of the Paris Psalter as a metric filler and for the purposes of alliteration, rather than for meaning. Overall, the author concludes that *æðele* is a polysemic term that primarily denotes nobility, but also alludes to beauty and other religious ideas in additional senses, and its role as an aesthetic emotion marker is limited and unclear.

Chapter 10, “Beauty is Aesthetic Pleasure” (pp. 223–236), delves into the notion of pleasure as it relates to aesthetic emotions in the context of Old English literature. The author argues that aesthetic pleasure is present at a basic and foundational level in every positive aesthetic emotion episode. They also raise the question of whether there is a hyperbole implicit in the descriptions of beauty in Old English poetry and suggest the need for a full analysis of the lexical domain of pleasure in Old English poetry to understand the conceptual differences in the expression of aesthetic pleasure. The author explores the usage of the term *æðele* in the poem *The Phoenix*, where the land is described as beautiful and pleasant through various sensory cues. In Anglo-Saxon culture, plain fields and serene landscapes are considered more pleasant than high mountains or stone cliffs. The poem also describes other objects as pleasant through their smell, using terms related to pleasure and sweetness. The author also discusses the use of the Old English word *wynsum* in describing sensory experiences in Anglo-Saxon poetry and how it conveys pleasantness and sweetness in relation to visual, olfactory, and tactile experiences. Terms for pleasure are often used to evoke sensory and bodily responses to the figures present in Anglo-Saxon poetry and that they are an important group of aesthetic emotion markers.

The author’s concluding remarks on the use of terms for beauty and positive aesthetic emotions in Old English literature are divided into thematic groups, highlighting prevalent patterns of description and conceptualization in Old English poetry. Furthermore, the lexical domain of appearance and its relation to light-related terms as aesthetic emotion markers is examined, and it is observed that some Old English terms have retained their original doctrinal ideas in poetry, which are absent in Present-Day English usage. The Conceptual Blend Theory is identified as a helpful tool in illustrating the intersection of appearance, morality, and light in Old English poetry. The study reveals that adjectives are the most frequent aesthetic emotion markers in Old English poetry, followed by adverbs and nominal or verbal markers. The lexical domains of aesthetic pleasure, beauty, cleanliness, color, excellence, intricacy, and nobility in Old English poetry all demonstrate a trend of conceptualizing beauty by mapping it onto more accessible or easily conceptualizable source domains. The book’s most important conclusions are that the figurative expressions used in Old English poetry to describe beauty are complex blends of concepts, such as the metaphor “morality is beauty” and “beauty is light”, which convey a deep connection between aesthetics, morality, and light that is central to Anglo-Saxon culture. Additionally, the Anglo-Saxon approach to beauty and aesthetic experience differs from that of Germanic origin, with the former emphasizing the material recreation of objects of beauty and wonder and religious poetry to generate imagined worlds and people that trigger embodied aesthetic experiences. This approach serves to entertain, instruct, educate, and fascinate, rather than

moralize. Overall, the book highlights the rich and complex language of aesthetic emotions in Old English poetry and its significance in Anglo-Saxon culture.

The book under review offers a significant contribution to the study of Anglo-Saxon emotions and lexical domains, specifically focusing on the concept of beauty and its relationship with culture and individual experience in early medieval English aesthetic ideas. The author's use of accessible language makes it easy for readers to understand the main arguments and conclusions. The study adopts a scientific approach and explores how Old English poetry triggers the experience of beauty and the strategies used to achieve this. The study is well-structured and organized, with ten chapters that include a literature review, a focus on Anglo-Saxon culture, and an analysis of thematic groups of Old English poetry related to beauty. The author also examines the lexical choices used in Old English literature to describe beauty and appearance. The book provides a fresh perspective on the concept of beauty in Old English literature and fills a gap in the field of Anglo-Saxon emotions and lexical domains. Overall, this study is a valuable addition to the field and offers a new and unique perspective on the concept of beauty in Old English literature.

REFERENCES

Harbus, Antonina. 2012. *Cognitive approaches to Old English poetry*. Boydell & Brewer.