displayed in this book, along with Millar’s meticulous testing of theories against
textual evidence, make this an ideal starting-point for any researcher hoping to
make further discoveries. *Contact* is directed at experienced scholars, since,
despite the glossary in the front matter, many other linguistic terms are not
glossed or explained, one example being the reference to the Scottish Vowel
Length Rule (ch. 3, 67). However, it would make an excellent source of secondary
reference for advanced undergraduate or postgraduate teaching, where the pre-
sentation of different viewpoints, theories and models would provoke discussion.
It is a pity that the price of the hardback volume puts *Contact* beyond the reach of
individual students, but I would recommend this and/or the e-version to any
research library.

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https://doi.org/10.1515/ang-2017-0070

Emily V. Thornbury’s monograph, first published in 2014, has deservedly re-
ceived a paperback edition. The book, which reworks much of the author’s
dissertation, was widely reviewed upon publication. The goal of this review is
therefore to re-examine Thornbury’s text, noting both features of its argument not
previously discussed in the literature and articles of evidence that might reconfig-
ure the terms of the author’s analysis.

Concerned with the inter-related problems of who wrote poetry, what those
writers intended to accomplish by writing, and how they expected their writing to
be judged, Thornbury draws on a wide range of vernacular and Anglo-Latin texts
in order to persuasively dispel the myth of the professional Anglo-Saxon poet and instead situate poetry in relation to communities of criticism and exchange. She introduces her project by noting a series of epistemological quandaries. Who counted as a poet in the Anglo-Saxon milieu? What counted as a poem? The first chapter attempts to bring some semantic clarity to these problems, correcting the work of predecessors like Sharon Turner and Jeff Opland. First, Thornbury demonstrates how the long-lived notion of the bardic scop derives from a tightly circumscribed corpus of Old English texts. Then, using information gleaned from Old English and Latin corpus searches, she tabulates the occurrence of different words for ‘poet’. Significantly, she shows that the term scop likely referred to a broad range of composers of oral and written verse. Less convincing is her discussion of the Anglo-Latin usage of terms like poeta and uates. Although Thornbury claims a similar pattern of nomination in both linguistic traditions, this claim would seem to be countered by the fact that Latin texts clearly discriminate between the sorts of figures who should be so described. Nevertheless, the chapter’s central claim that “there is no solid evidence that a professional class of poets existed in Anglo-Saxon England” is well supported (34). To be a poet, Thornbury argues, “was a matter of what one did rather than what one was” (36).

The second chapter nevertheless aims to describe what sort of people became poets. Indeed, this step is crucial for the author’s broader claim that Anglo-Saxon poems were firmly embedded in specific communities, where they performed functions related to the ‘social roles’ of their writers and readers. Noting the disparity between named Latin authors and anonymous authors of Old English, she argues that the same kinds of people (teachers, scribes, musicians, and courtiers) would most commonly have been poets in either language. As Thornbury notes, an in-depth discussion of each of these categories would require (at least) a monograph, but her survey of each occupation provides valuable descriptions of phenomena like the poetic ‘core curriculum’.

The third, fourth, and fifth chapters turn specifically to matters of community. If, as Thornbury’s second chapter concludes, “certain genres or modes are characteristic of certain activities”, and if those activities are intimately bound up with the social position of teacher, scribe, musician, courtier, then it stands to reason that a history of Anglo-Saxon poetry must also be a social history of communities and their discontents (94). Thornbury takes a sociolinguistic approach to the reconstruction of poetic communities, drawing on models offered by twentieth-century studies of American dialect groups and working-class Belfast communities (cf. 97). These models productively inform her case studies – particularly her innovative analysis of The Battle of Maldon – but stand in some tension to her opening definition of ‘community’ itself. Citing Benedict Anderson’s seminal study (1983), she considers “a community to be any group that a member would –
however reluctantly – call ‘us’” (95). The problems of applying Anderson, who treated the Middle Ages with a good deal of condescension, to medieval topics have been discussed elsewhere. Here, I will simply note that much of the chapter works to reconstitute social groups that have left little poetic evidence of their own existence beyond what can be inferred from Thornbury’s inventive manoeuvres. Our capacity for discerning any unambiguous verbal self-nomination is severely constrained. (There are, of course, many physical traces left behind by teachers and scribes which might inform her speculations.) And so, paradoxically, the chapter’s analysis often takes ‘community’ as a given category before setting out to prove its very existence. While many of Thornbury’s narrower claims about the ways that specific poems anticipated communal judgement are suggestive and thought-provoking, this reviewer does not find the third chapter’s general analytic model convincing.

The fourth chapter takes up those poets who find themselves isolated from literary-social communities – a potential stumbling-block for a study that conceives Anglo-Saxon poetry as “chiefly a social phenomenon” (161). The chapter’s first case study examines the poem Christ and Satan, a welcome investigation of a long, anonymous work in a monograph largely devoted to named authors. Parsing the alliterative preferences disclosed by the text, Thornbury persuasively describes the strategies employed by two authors who worked at the Old English poem. The second author (usually referred to as the “Renovator” but confusingly called the “Redactor” on page 197) “relied mainly on written texts and his own powers of induction” to patch up the work of the earlier poet (177). The second case study envisions Bede as a prolific author whose “idiopathic standards” seem to have resulted from a form of self-segregation (195). The two authors are connected by the “inability to submit one’s work to the judgement of others”, albeit for quite different reasons (197).

The fifth chapter, devoted to the notion of ‘spectral communities’, describes the verse production of three social communities in terms of their relative isolation. Thornbury opens with the example of Boniface and his missionaries, who were deeply influenced by Aldhelm before their departure for the continent. Once there, Boniface’s verse style “grew more and more reliant on a limited set of phrases and tropes [...]. This relatively closed community entered a literary feedback loop as its members reinforced each others’ stylistic tics” (199). The small circle of missionaries is therefore taken as “perhaps the nearest we come in the Anglo-Saxon period to a pure community” (199). After a discussion of Wulfstan Cantor, Thornbury charts the complex series of changes that took place over the course of the Anglo-Saxon period in Southern England, with the work of the Menologium poet evidencing the confidence and cosmopolitanism of West Saxon hegemony.
Previous viewers have noted the value of the book’s first appendix, a handlist of fifty named authors from Anglo-Saxon England (243–247). But it is also here that a series of problems reveal themselves. Abbo of Fleury, whose tenure in England was limited to a few (influential, to be sure) years, is included alongside figures like Alcuin and Boniface, who spent much time apart from England. I do not mean to suggest that Thornbury errs in including such figures – particularly when the evidence is so slim and continental connections so rich – but rather that the juxtaposition of these figures without comment is puzzling in a study that embeds poetic practice so firmly in social communities. Alcuin and his (non-Anglo-Saxon) interlocutors at the Carolingian court appear repeatedly throughout the text, playing an important role in the discussion of Latin poetic appellations. Given the sizable discrepancies of education, access to foreign models and modes, prestige, and social position between Alcuin and, say, Æthilwulf or Cumma of Abingdon, I am unpersuaded that their experiences can form a common ground for generalizing about Anglo-Saxon poetic self-conception. Similarly, skaldic poets working in Anglo-Saxon England form a second appendix but figure only briefly in the book.

This said, Thornbury’s synthetic study is rich in provocative case studies and broadly convincing in most of its claims. Her attention to the relationship between poet, text, and community might also profitably inform our understanding of a corpus of Anglo-Saxon verse that, despite her admirable range and facility, Thornbury omits in this monograph. The history of poetry in Anglo-Saxon encompasses, as Seeta Chaganti (2010: 48) puts it, a plethora of inscriptions on bone, stone, and metal. Not only have these inscriptions been carefully chronicled, edited, and published (see Elisabeth Okasha’s sterling work in this area), but their two-way interaction with materials, shapes, and surfaces has been productively examined.1 Thornbury mentions, in passing, tituli composed by Alcuin and Aldhelm, and includes figures like Cuthbert of Hereford, author of epigrams in hexameter for a cross-cloth and a tomb, in the book’s appendix. She even notes that “many Anglo-Saxons, and not just monastics, may have lived with or regularly used things inscribed with verse” (38). Attending to some of these inscriptions, such as the commemorative runes arranged into alliterative long-lines on the stone monument described as Thornhill 2 in the Western Yorkshire volume of the Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, may have enabled Thornbury to flesh out some of her规格ulations.2 I anticipate that her study will, in turn, be of service to historians attempting to make sense of the larger world of Anglo-Saxon verse.

1 See, for example, Teviotdale (1996).
2 For more discussion of these inscriptions, together with a handlist, see Kopár (2015).
This book is a landmark achievement in the on-going reassessment of the place of French in medieval English culture. In historical linguistics, the old view that Anglo-Norman represented a debased form of Continental Old French has been revealed to be the product of an erroneous comparison between Anglo-Norman and a “standard” now acknowledged to be chimeric: Francien.1 In a parallel move, the expiration date of the Insular dialect, once set to the mid-thirteenth century, has now been moved forward to the mid-fourteenth.2 The interpenetration of French and English lexes has been re-illuminated via the continuing compilation of the Anglo-Norman Dictionary, now into its second edition, and the imbrication of French and English cultures has been demonstrated throughout the Middle Ages. Perhaps most interestingly, as Ardis Butterfield has argued, as French and English, and England and France, begin to separate out from one another over the protracted period covered by the Hundred Years War, French

1 The re-assessment of Anglo-Norman has been a long-term, collaborative project. For seminal treatment of the topic, and for further bibliography, see Trotter (2003).

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https://doi.org/10.1515/ang-2017-0071