

# REVIEWS

*The English language. Its origin and history.* By Rudolph C. Bambas. Pp. xiv + 241. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980.

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Although we naturally welcome new books on the history of English, Prof. Bambas's work is rather unlikely to be greeted with enthusiasm by those who might have been thinking of introducing it in the classroom. In order to justify this flat rejection, we should perhaps first enumerate the factual errors found in the book and only afterwards proceed to the discussion of its content and design, some aspects of which appear highly objectionable as well.<sup>1</sup>

One apparent mistake in the chapter on Old English is the following comment on the origin of *ea* in *ceaster*:

"In southern Old English /a/ after /k/ broke into the diphthong /sa/ (emphasis mine — A. A.) which brought /k/ into juxtaposition with the front vowel /s/ and caused the palatalization, or fronting, of /k/ to /ç/..." (p. 81)<sup>2</sup>

Another surprise for someone even roughly familiar with the subject is the author's identification of the retention of /y/ and /æ/ in Middle English with Southwestern and Kentish (both subsumed under Southern. — p. 122 ff.) and his not mentioning this feature at all in connection with West Midland. To be sure, West Midland is discussed together with East Midland (p. 124), which does nothing but totally obscure the already vague picture of ME dialects we get from this presentation.

Perhaps less serious, but also annoying, are such terminological inadequacies as the author's use of the term "Old Church Bulgarian" for Old Church Slavonic (p. 26) or the label "Mongolian" for Finnish, Estonian, Hungarian and Turkish (p. 35).

Next in our list come the faults of organization. To begin with, chronology appears a most unfortunate criterion for dividing the book into chapters, since it is notoriously and manifestly ignored. Thus, for example, in chapter 5 ("Early Modern English 1500—1700"), a section entitled "Phonological changes 1400—1600" is found; secondly, syntactic and semantic change in the whole history of English are hinted at only once

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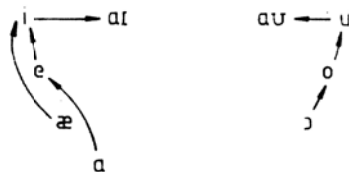
<sup>1</sup> Due to the elementary character of the handbook, we do not find it necessary to give a summary here. To fulfil the reviewer's duty, however, let us enumerate the parts that the book falls into. These are: a preface, a glossary of linguistic terms, eight chapters (the first one constituting a brief characterization of English as a "world language", the following ones tracing the development of the language from PIE to the present), a bibliography and an index.

<sup>2</sup> For the account of this change see, e.g., Campbell §§185—7 and §495. Incidentally, Campbell's is one of the few fundamental books on the history of English that can be found in Bambas's bibliography (unlike Luick, Mossé and many others we might expect to see there). On the whole, the bibliography is rather confined to the first half of our century and, consequently, there is no place in it for the important book by Strang (1970), so closely related thematically.

each (in chapters 6 and 7 respectively) and not discussed within the frame of the consecutive periods. The very employment of traditional labels, such as OE, ME, etc., turns out to be quite misleading, as their use is far from consistent. Very often, undefined notions like Early English appear and almost quite as often no time qualification at all is given, apart from the dichotomous "earlier-later" scale, which can hardly be considered illuminating.

This ostensible casualness seems to have much to do with the treatment that strictly linguistic phenomena receive throughout the book. It can best be exemplified by Bambas's handling of phonology. The appropriate sections are short and sketchy, concentrating mainly on diachronic "correspondences" rather than "changes"<sup>3</sup>. Bambas typically takes as his point of departure some striking divergence between the archaic and the modern pronunciation of a word and then proceeds to the enumeration of the changes responsible for the difference. The problem is that, more often than not, his examples are rather idiosyncratic and, consequently, leave the student completely unable to recognize the generality and regularity of certain processes. This is the exact opposite of what we are likely to encounter in most of the similar manuals, where, as a rule, individual sound changes are discussed at length, each being followed by a list of examples. In such cases, the student may find it difficult to connect various processes and assess the global effects of their operation. The difficulty, however, disappears when we present him with enough material for practical exercises and therefore I for one consider such a systematic treatment preferable to the perspective adopted in the book under review. Certainly, there need not have been anything harmful in the author's having devoted little space to phonology, had it not been for the arbitrary choice of points to be stressed, which has rendered the whole chaotic instead of instructive.

The discussion of the Great Vowel Shift (p. 149) appears to be a case in point. First, Bambas gives the following diagram:



which, as it stands, can be strongly objected to, especially after the reader confronts the symbols used here with the values Bambas assigns them on p. 44 (e. g. "/a/ as in father /faðə/"). This, however, is only a prelude to the discussion which follows. For someone who hears about the GVS for the first time the confusion must be complete. Instead of giving a couple of typical examples, which would illustrate one of the series of changes at a time, the author chooses to deal mainly with isolated words or complex developments, cramming the whole lot into no more than two pages. One cannot help considering it a bit unfair, particularly when juxtaposed with the 25 pages devoted to 18th century prescriptivism in chapter 7 (pp. 162-87).

Another disconcerting practice is the author's occasional using of specialist terms without previously explaining them. This is, for example, the case with umlaut, which he first mentions on p. 7, but leaves undefined until p. 63.

<sup>3</sup> The terms are used here in the meaning given them in Andersen 1972.

Quite exasperating in Bambas's narration are frequent repetitions of both ideas and pieces of information. An example of the former can be the cliché that language change is not necessarily improvement, of the latter — the discussion of the origin of the terms Whig, Tory and Quaker (p. 200; repeated two pages later, as if something never mentioned before). Especially irritating and totally puzzling is the repetition of anecdotes (sic!), e.g., the one about Winston Churchill (pp. 174 and 186).

So far, we have not answered a basic question, namely, for whom the book has been written. The author remains silent on this point, but, after reading even a few pages, one may safely conclude that it was the "general reader" and the beginner student of the history of English (in this order) that Bambas must have had in mind. Unfortunately, the author seems completely oblivious at times of the level his readers are supposed to represent. In other words, there is some kind of ambivalence in his attitude towards his audience. Thus, on the one hand, he finds it necessary to precede the main body of the book with a glossary which defines such notions as grammar, linguistics, phonetics, etc.,<sup>4</sup> or to make a point of commenting on the astonishing fact that the Americans speak English (p. 206); on the other hand, he must have tacitly assumed that his public would have no difficulty in understanding, for instance, ablaut or Grimm's law, perfunctorily as these are presented<sup>5</sup>.

Perhaps another side of the same problem is Bambas's ambiguous attitude towards his subject. He sounds omniscient and condescending when he hastily dismisses the crucial questions of language change as trivial, but on other occasions he adopts the position of a layman and comes up with revelations of the following kind:

"If we reflect on it, we realize that we speak much more than we write, however little we may talk and however much we may read". (p. 37)

It must feel like an insult to the reader's intelligence to be addressed from either of these extreme standpoints, though it is perhaps hard to say which is more annoying.

What is still worse, however, is that this inconsistency sometimes leads to serious contradictions in matters of importance. Thus, Bambas uses all his power of persuasion to convince us that "linguistic change is a fitful phenomenon, one not managed by intelligent design" (p. 116, see also p. 74), but does not hesitate to say that speakers of Proto-Germanic "induced a number of changes in their language" or "invented a simpler inflection for the preterit" and so on (p. 31). Likewise, despite his frequent stressing that all languages are equally good and that the importance of English is contingent, we can hardly believe his concern to be genuine, on finding elsewhere in the book a glorification of American English<sup>6</sup> or statements like the following one: "Other languages [apart from English — A. A.] are noble, too, and deserve our learning them, to our own advantage". (p. 13). On reading something as naively formulated, one cannot help wondering what the author's views on this otherwise self-evident matter really are. The suspicion is even strengthened when we reflect on Bambas's constant preoccupation with "linguistic propriety and decorum" (quoted after the jacket blurb), which does not go too well with his declared liberalism.

<sup>4</sup> There are in all fifteen entries in the glossary. To take just one example, the complete definition of morphology is: "the study of variant forms of words" (p. xiii).

<sup>5</sup> Verner's law, for instance, is only mentioned in passing, during the discussion of Strong Verbs (p. 73).

<sup>6</sup> In this respect, the first seven chapters of the book seem to constitute a sort of introduction to the last one, devoted to American English. The impression one gets from it is that this particular variety of English should be looked upon as some sort of ultimate goal, towards which the language had drifted for ages.

Interestingly enough, for the author of the blurb, who wholly approves of Bambas's concern for "proper" language, another value of the book lies in its "notably clear and readable" style. Perhaps, were the style less "clear", the reader would not have to smile, encountering assertions of the following type:

"Power made the English language attractive everywhere and made Shakespeare more interesting" (p. 6)<sup>7</sup>.

Similarly, had it not been for Bambas's desire to be "readable", the following rationalization of the reasons for semantic change might have been formulated less naively than:

"... man is a fault-finding animal, quick to disapprove of others. This disposition accounts for a number of pejorative semantic changes" (p. 199).

In any case, the present reviewer would rather believe such statements to be due to the author's imperfect idea of what a clear style is than search for some other reasons.

Partly as a result of some of the inadequacies mentioned so far, there arises an issue that requires some comment. It is my deep conviction that an untrained reader is bound to finish the book with distorted ideas both of what has already been or still can be achieved in the study of the history of English and of the sort of solutions historical linguistics in general offers in dealing with problems of language change. As an example of the former, we may adduce Bambas's unqualified statement that the chronology of the GVS cannot now be determined (p. 149)<sup>8</sup>; the latter may be illustrated by the paradox already hinted at, namely that, despite frequently admitting how difficult it is to assign a rationale for any change (e. g., on p. 149), Bambas keeps trying to overcome this difficulty, and, consequently, far too often ends up with "explanations" such as the above-mentioned one on semantic changes or the following one:

[the simplification of inflection in ME] "can be accounted for by the willingness of the English to accommodate foreigners who were speaking English with an imperfect grasp of its grammatical niceties." (p. 93).

Although all our objections pertain only to the most striking shortcomings of the book, there still seem to be enough of these to simply reject it. This, however, is not so simple. After all, the book is for the most part concerned with the external history of English and one has to admit that this aspect of it has been dealt with much more satisfactorily than anything else. Some sections, e.g., those on borrowings, are definitely better than the corresponding ones in similar handbooks<sup>9</sup>. Also, the considerable selectiveness and sketchiness of presentation, so characteristic of the whole book, are really well motivated here. The choice of information to be included is much more to the point than in the purely linguistic sections, which, coupled with the lively style (in its proper place here), makes the respective parts both instructive and pleasant to read. Indeed, had Bambas concentrated exclusively on the socio-historical background of the development of the language (an area he seems much more competent in than diachronic lin-

<sup>7</sup> What we want to stress here is the infantile form of the statement, presumably due to the intended "clear and concise" style. Should we want to argue with the assertion itself, however, counterexamples would not be hard to find; history abounds in instances of the exactly opposite effects that the political power of a given nation may exert on the popularity of its language with speakers of other languages.

<sup>8</sup> Bambas must be unaware of the amount of investigation which the problem has received recently, as well as of some of the results of this research, which seem quite unequivocal (cf. Lass 1976).

<sup>9</sup> Cf., for example, the respective sections in Nist 1966, which are nothing more than bare lists of lexical items, most likely to be skipped altogether by less patient students.

guistics proper), his book might have turned out to be quite a useful teaching aid. In fact, the present reviewer believes it could still, to a limited extent, be used for this purpose, provided that the students were made aware of its shortcomings or, at a beginner level, explicitly told which sections to omit. If nothing more, this is at least a reasonable alternative to ignoring the book altogether.

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*Byron's political and cultural influence in nineteenth-century Europe: a symposium*. By P. G. Trueblood (ed.). Pp. xix+212. London: Macmillan, 1981.

Reviewed by Marius Byron Raizis, The University of Athens and Southern Illinois University - Carbondale.

The 1974 Lord Byron Seminar at Cambridge, observing the 150th anniversary of his death in 1824, gave impetus for the creation of this handsome volume of studies that its veteran editor collected and presented with patience and enthusiasm.

A known scholar, author of *The Flowering of Byron's Genius: Studies in Byron's 'Don Juan'* (1945) and of *Lord Byron* (1969, 1977), a genuine philhellene, Dr. Trueblood is now Emeritus Professor of English, Willamette University, Oregon. His *Symposium* consists of twelve studies by celebrated scholars and critics, for the most part, which had been delivered as lectures at various international symposia like the already mentioned one at Cambridge and the Second International Byron Seminar at Missolonghi, Greece, in 1976. Some had been published before.

The circulation of this volume revived and enhanced scholarly interest in Byron which had somewhat lost momentum since the period of New Criticism and the generally anti-romantic attitudes of the troubled decades, 1930-50. There is no doubt that this book belongs in the company of serious studies by scholars like L. A. Marchand, A. Rutherford, J. Jump, J. McGann, G. Ridenour, D. L. Moore, E. Lanford, P. Quennell, W. W. Pratt, E. E. Bostetter and other biographers and critics of our times.

The first of these essays, "The Historical Background: Revolution and Counter-Revolution 1789-1948", is written by Douglas Dakin (Emeritus Professor of History, University of London), who is an authority on Philhellenism and the Greek Revolution of 1821. It offers a quite objective and extensive panorama of the historical, diplomatic, and ideological trends and events which created the intellectual climate within which Byron's poetic talent flourished as an honest reaction to established practices and beliefs. In it Professor Dakin dismisses some romantic and revolutionary myths *vis-à-vis* that period and its dominant personalities.

In the second entry, "Byron and England: The Persistence of Byron's Political Ideas," lecturer W. Ruddick (University of Manchester) quite persuasively argues that the reasons for Byron's rebelliousness did not begin to be understood in his country before 1860, and that his influence on "radical" authors and thinkers — such as Ruskin, Morris, Orwell, and Auden — manifested itself long after the end of the Romantic Period.

Things were different on the Continent, though. The British Germanist C. Hentschell (The British Council) in his detailed comparative study of Byron and Byronism in Germany and Austria offers us numerous observations on their enormous artistic impact on local poets from Goethe and Heine to Pückler-Muskau, and on the substantial ideological attraction they exercised on leading personalities like Bismarck and Nietzsche. Quite soundly Dr. Hentschell relates his topic to the more general one of Philhellenism, and even mentions the Bavarian monarch Ludwig, father of the first king of Greece, Otto.

In his short but cogent article, "Byron and France: Byron as a Political Figure", the famous comparatist R. Escarpit (University of Bordeaux III) clarifies with precision and ease that Byronism in France appeared mainly as an ideological, not a literary, phenomenon, and that poetic imitators of Byron's style and pose had depended on rather hasty and irresponsible translations of his verse which, in their turn, had misrepresented many salient features.

The entries by professors G. Melchiori (Rome), F. de Mello Moser (Lisbon), E. Pujals (Madrid), E. Giddey (Lausanne), N. Diakonova and V. Vacuro (Leningrad), and the account by novelist-translator J. Żuławski (Warsaw) examine the handling of local cultural elements by Byron in his poetry, and the impact of his life and work on the national literatures of Italy, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, Russia, and Poland, respectively. Undoubtedly, from a purely literary viewpoint, Byron's impact was greater in Poland, Russia, and naturally, Greece, where many direct and indirect influences converged, as it were, since many a European model to local poets had been influenced by Byron directly.

"Byron and Greece: Byron's Love of Classical Greece and His Role in the Greek Revolution", by Emeritus Professor E. G. Protopsaltis (Athens), deals with the political significance of Byron's presence in embattled Greece, 1823–24, discusses various official documents related to his activities and eventual death at Missolonghi, and even mentions some new details of interest to Greek historians of the Revolution. Byron's impact on the literature, art, and culture of modern Greece is almost ignored, unfortunately, thus this article is not in harmony with most of the contributions by the literary scholars of Europe. It seems to me that the editor should have solicited an essay comparable in nature and contents to those of Melchiori, Diakonova, or Moser — to name just three — where the reader is given a chance to realize the degree of Byron's multifaceted influence on, for instance, the Risorgimento in Italy, the poems and stories of Pushkin and Lermontov, or to read an honest reevaluation of his lordship's rather derogatory comments on the character of the Portuguese, as all these figure in his poems and other writings.

A general comprehensive survey by Professor Trueblood rounds off this presentation of studies about Byron's political and cultural influence in nineteenth-century Europe. This fine *Symposium* is completed by a necessary Index of names, Notes on the Contributors, and by a Preface where the energetic American Byronist explains its purpose and genesis. All entries are properly documented; and the volume constitutes a precious source of most reliable information and commentary for Byronists, comparatists, and scholars of English Romanticism.

Through Dr. Trueblood's labours, the Pole, the Russian, and the Greek student

of the composite cultural phenomenon Byronism-liberalism-philhellenism is assisted in forming a complete and sound idea as to motives and consequences. Older studies of Byronic liberalism and philhellenism tended to almost canonize the eccentric English nobleman and his disciples as angels or saints of Liberty tormented in a world of cynicism, intrigue, and reactionary activities on the part of the socio-political and religious establishment. Newer treatises, such as William St. Clair's eloquent though slightly prejudiced *That Greece Might Still Be Free: The Philhellenes in the War of Independence* (1972), with their application of marxist principles and other fashionable criteria, not only had demythologized Byron and the other "freedom fighters" of that time, but had even suggested that their motives were, more often than not, mercenary, opportunistic, egotistical, and the like. Paul Trueblood's collection of essays restores the balance between these two extreme attitudes.

International volunteers fought for the Independence of the American Colonies, the preservation of the Spanish Republic, the defeat of fascism, colonialism, and imperialism all over the world. No serious academic ever suggested that Lafayette, Garibaldi, or Che Guevara were restless misfits or sublime egotists rather than dedicated and honest idealists. To suggest that Lord Byron and those inspired by his example were so, is more than unfair: it is a pseudosophisticated and almost cynical pose worth no more than the pseudo-idealistic and melodramatic practices of many third-rate petty imitators of Byron's life and poetic creation.