



Universidad de Valladolid

FACULTAD de FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS
DEPARTAMENTO de FILOLOGÍA INGLESA
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TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

History, Literature, and Politics in the Early
Translations of *The Battle of Maldon* (1826-1900)

Marta Martínez García

Tutor: Anunciación Carrera de la Red

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ABSTRACT

This BA dissertation deals with the nineteenth-century translations of the Old English poem *The Battle of Maldon*, and specifically, the presence of a historical, literary and political aspect in them. Following the debate of the critics of the Old English literature from the past fifty years, it analyses the translations by Conybeare (1826), Freeman (1869), Robinson (1885), Hickey (1885), Lumsden (1887), Ker (1887) and Butterfield (1900). Moreover, it examines how each translation treats the original poem as a historical source, a literary work or shows a particular ideological function. It can be demonstrated that most of the translations treat the poem with a literary perspective as an instructive or formal text but few others maintain the historical vision, and that all this depends on the ideological stand of the translator or the editor.

Keywords: *The Battle of Maldon*, history, literature, politics, nineteenth-century translations, Old English poetry.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo de fin de grado trata sobre las diversas traducciones realizadas en el siglo XIX del poema anglosajón *La Batalla de Maldon*, y en concreto, sobre la presencia en ellas de aspectos históricos, literarios y políticos. Teniendo en cuenta el debate de los críticos de literatura en inglés antiguo de los últimos 50 años, se analizan las traducciones realizadas por Conybeare (1826), Freeman (1869), Robinson (1885), Hickey (1885), Lumsden (1887), Ker (1887) y Butterfield (1900). Así mismo, se examina si cada traducción trata el poema original como una fuente histórica, una obra literaria o si ilustra una visión ideológica particular. Se demuestra que la mayoría de las traducciones tratan al poema con una perspectiva literaria usándolo como un texto formal o instructivo, mientras que para unos pocos lo principal es la visión histórica, y que ello va a depender de la postura ideológica del traductor o del editor.

Palabras clave: *La Batalla de Maldon*, historia, literatura, política, traducciones del siglo XIX, poesía del inglés antiguo.

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Introduction

Some years ago, a short collection of poems by the Anglo-Saxon scholar J. R. R. Tolkien reached my hands. “The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth” called my attention especially. In the preface of the book, he said that it was a sequel of a real battle that happened in Maldon, Essex. This struggle is the basis of an Old English poem, known as *The Battle of Maldon* which illustrates a strong confrontation between Anglo-Saxons and Vikings in the year 991. My interest in Old English Literature and my stay in one of those Nordic countries which stole my heart were the main motivations that led me to investigate about this poem and to work on this topic in my final project.

By reading about the battle, I had the opportunity to examine many texts, not only about important information on the struggle but also about the history from England and Scandinavia from that period. However, I did not exclusively go into the historical sources. Little by little, I found academic articles from modern critics about *Maldon*, especially from the twentieth century. Many of them tried to explain the real nature of the text and I could find the existence of certain tendencies.

Firstly, E. D. Laborde said not only that the poem works as a historical source but also that it obviously contained a literary aspect that was worth analysing. In the 1960s, J. R. R. Tolkien and other authors such as George Clark and Michael J. Swanton focused on this poem since it seemed to them that there was something behind the text understood as history and that it was its own literary nature. However, the problematic aspect in interpreting the poem remained unsolved and then, a debate about whether the Maldon poem has to be understood as a mainly historical or a literary text was opened and discussed in the 80s. It was in the 90s when authors such as Richard North and Leonard Neidorf introduced another face of the poem: a political question, which better helped to solve them.

Having seen all this, I could notice that nobody has researched the early translations of the poem. I thought that they could also help examine its real nature. So, the aim that I pursue is to see whether the debate between history, literature and politics can be perceived in the early translations of *The Battle of Maldon*. These three topics are given by translators in different ways. They may choose a historical perspective which means that the poem is considered as an additional historical source, presenting real information of the time and the place, the characters or the military strategies. Other times,

this vision toward history is seen when the historical context of the poem is clarified. Other translators rather see the poem as literature, giving a certain literary form or interpreting it as an instructive or a moral message, as if it was a tale or a legend. Finally, the political question is seen in the ideological stand of the translator in accordance with the historical moment in which he/she lives or the practical function that the translator or the editor wants to give to the poem in order to serve a particular purpose.

In order to research this, I have chosen the earliest translations of the poem from the beginning of the nineteenth century until 1900. The reason why I have selected these texts is that it is the moment in which the study of the English Literature, especially from the Old English, emerges as part of the educational system, and furthermore, History is beginning to be deemed as a science. That is why the authors of some translations want to popularize the Old English language and literature or demonstrate that Anglo-Saxon texts can be read to be enjoyed as literature, while others prefer to treat this kind of texts as historical sources.

What I have done is a process of analysis in order to find out which perspective is given by each translator, and which their ideological stand is. First of all, I have examined their careers, which provide important information, since the treatment each gives to the poem is different. The existence of translators with a literary reputation, being an Anglo-Saxon scholar or people who are interested in the history of that period can be evidenced. Next, I have focused on the form and on the content of the translations. There are some authors who keep the verse form and add rhyme and others who have removed almost any literary trace, adapting the poem into prose. In addition, there are some texts that use a simple language so that the content is clear. However, others are quite literal and include archaisms, so they need several footnotes to be plainly read. These gives me an indication of how the poem is treated since some of them are focusing on the context, explanations about the translation or philological clarifications, while others highlight the presence of literary devices. Finally, I have analysed all previous or final commentaries of the translations, written by the translators or even the editors. They talk about the historical context or the political problems from that period, the way the author has translated the poem or even the reason why they include the translation in a book or in a literary magazine. This has given me a quite clear idea on the different uses and purposes that translators and editors have given to the poem.

Having said that, after studying as many sources as possible, analysing the translations and collecting the results, I will provide the information in three chapters:

1. A state of question which deals with the transmission of *Maldon* and the scholarly debate between the presence of history, literature and politics in the original poem.
2. The analysis of the translations in which they are studied in chronological order, considering any type of information that the translator or the editor provides.
3. The conclusions that I have obtained after the analysis, interpreting the data and providing the argument as a response to the question posed.

In this project, an attempt is made to demonstrate how the debate over history, literature, and politics in *The Battle of Maldon*, contemplated in the twentieth century is reflected in the earliest translations of *Maldon* and to see whether the historical burden of the poem has been removed from nineteenth-century translations. I can anticipate that each one of these translations receives a different politics, that is to say, a different view with respect to what the poem says and to what the poem needs to say to its readers, and that the political ideological stand does not depend on the treatment they give to the text itself, historical or literary, but on the editorial context in which it appears.

1. The Battle of Maldon, History, Literature, and Politics

The Battle of Maldon is a poem whose origin is not clear, as is the case with Anglo-Saxon poetry in general. The poem is set on the battle of Maldon, an encounter between the Anglo-Saxons, led by the ealdorman Byrhtnoth, and the Vikings, headed by Olaf Tryggvason, in the east of Essex. It took place during the reign of King Ethelred, in 991, according to most sources. The date of the composition of the poem is uncertain: some scholars date it a few years after the battle and others say that it was probably composed two or three decades later. The author of the poem is unknown, though it is believed that he may be connected to the abbeys of Ely or Ramsey. The history of its transmission is particularly incomplete. The text is not preserved in any form of contemporary Anglo-Saxon writing; as it is known, the manuscript was burnt in 1731 and therefore, an eighteenth-century manuscript copy from the year 1724, probably in the hand of David Casley, is the only written testimony available, except for Thomas Hearne's printed edition of 1726. In addition, the initial and final parts of the poem are lost and, therefore, the poetic narrative starts *in medias res* and we do not have a conclusion. Despite all that, the poem has received much critical attention from scholars for the past hundred years, from many different perspectives. One debate has been predominant by academics until recently: for some authors, the poem deserves to be seen as a historical source, while, for others, its literary character represents its true nature. Lately, a new question has focused their attention: the poem's politics can explain the problems that were still unsolved.

1.1. Sources

The traditional predominance of the critical debate on the poem's historicity can be seen particularly with the anniversary of the battle of Maldon in 1991. Many publications celebrated the literary poem and the historical event. Probably, the most important and comprehensive one is the compilation of texts and studies edited by E. G. Scragg, *The Battle of Maldon: AD 991* (1991). In the book, the poem is edited and translated, but the selection of studies focuses on reconstructing all the historical evidence available: the documents in which Byrhtnoth appears, essays on the historical circumstances of the battle and the Viking invasions, as well as on the tactics and military organization of each side. The significance of the poem is described in the introduction as both historical and literary: "generations of students of Old English and of Anglo-

Saxon history have heard of the battle of Maldon and have read the poem that bears its name” (xii).

The fundamental historical facts on the battle are known thanks to the surviving copies of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. In the A version, there is an entry for AD 993 that starts, in Janet A. Bately’s translation: “Here in this year Olaf came with ninety-three ships to Folkestone, and they ravaged round about it, and then from there he went to Sandwich, and so from there to Ipswich, and overran it all, and so to Maldon” (Bately 37). Then, it adds that Byrhtnoth and his men attacked them, the earldorman was killed and the Vikings took over control. Afterwards, peace was made with them confirmed by the king, with the advice of the bishops of Kent and Winchester. The other manuscripts of the *Chronicle* agree that there was a Viking attack on Ipswich and then on Maldon, where Byrhtnoth was killed. However, the rest of details are different, starting from the year in which it happened. In the C version, the date is 991 and neither Sandwich nor Folkstone are mentioned. But instead it indicates that a tribute was paid to the Danes (10,000 pounds), with the advice of Sigeric, which is the same content found in F. Manuscripts DE also date the battle in 991. Olaf and the Viking fleet reappear in other entries of CF that record their raids on the southern and eastern areas.

Written about after a decade of the battle, the *Vita Sancti Oswaldi* gives details on Byrhtnoth and his death in hagiographic style. It is the work of the monk Byrhtferth of Ramsey, from the late tenth or early eleventh century, and is probably based on the poem. Ethelred’s reign and the incursion of the Danes and their defeats in Devonshire are given as a context. Similarly to the Old English poem, this Latin account says that Byrhtnoth was an old person, loved by his men, and that he encouraged his army before falling in battle. However, it introduces new details like that the Danes were also severely wounded or that Byrhtnoth’s men fled. However, as Lapidge suggests, Byrhtferth’s principal concern was probably to present Byrhtnoth’s virtues saying that he was the best in all skills and stood above the rest: “[a]ny attempt to extract accurate historical details from this typology is doomed to disappointment” (56). Indeed, the ‘hero’ Byrhtnoth is presented as an ideal, and the enemies as deserving punishment. The text has constructed a literary character.

Back to the historical registers, the death of Byrhtnoth is present also in calendar obituaries from the eleventh century. Three obits have survived (from Winchester, Ely and Ramsey) and apart from the date of Byrhtnoth’s death on August the 10th or 11th, they

also testify to which lands are given to their respective abbeys, as in this example from the Ely Obit, in Alan Kennedy's translation:

10 August [On this day] died our brother prior Ælfric and Godric and Ælfric and the Ealdorman Byrhtnoth who gave to this church Spaldwich, Trumpington, Rettendon, Soham, Occold, Fulbourn, Thriplow, Somersham and many [others] which are recorded in his will. (Kennedy 61)

Comparing the obits, it is clear that Ely was the most benefitted by the ealdorman, and probably that is why Byrhtnoth was buried there. However, throughout the twelfth century, all the monastic houses which he benefitted created histories that used him and many other benefactors to justify their influence. These narratives introduced new material.

The first is the *Chronicon ex Chronicis* by John Worcester, probably written during the third decade after the battle. It records some of the historical facts of the *Chronicle*, like the arrival of the Danes to Ipswich, the advice of Sigeric and the 10,000-pound tribute. It adds new ones like that Byrhtnoth was ealdorman of Essex and the names of the two Vikings fighting at Maldon, called Justin and Guthmund (Kennedy 71). The *Historia Anglorum* by another Anglo-Norman historian, Henry of Huntingdon, also mentions Ipswich and Sigeric's advice of paying the tribute to the Danes, calling it *infaustus* ('disastrous'), because of the consequences of dependence on the Danes. The *Liber Eliensis*, probably written around 1170, completes the information of the Ely Obit. It describes the behaviour and the physical appearance of Byrhtnoth specifying his most relevant characteristics (intelligence, body and courage) as a devoted Christian and benefactor of Ely. In fact, it explains two battles that took place in Maldon describing the first in which the English gain a victory, and then, the second in which they are defeated. Although, according to Kennedy, "[t]he account of events leading up to the battle does . . . contain demonstrable errors" (73), the story of his journey to the fight in Maldon in which Ramsey Abbey refused to give Byrhtnoth and his army hospitality (while, in contrast, Ely let them stay) seems very possible. The fact is confirmed by the *Ramsey Chronicle*. Kennedy suggests a Biblical source for the way in which the episode is narrated. For him, this indicates that all these twelfth-century accounts are mainly literary, "witnesses to the development of legends about Byrhtnoth and the battle which probably reflect historical realities now entirely obscure" (76).

Donald Scragg considers that neither Byrhtnoth nor the battle would have received much critical attention if the poem had not been preserved (xii). That gives it a great

significance. However, it is not until the early nineteenth century that the poem becomes known to academics, when English philological studies are established. Until then, it had passed from hand to hand among English antiquaries without much relevance.

1.2. History

One may think that, in Britain, *Maldon* should be studied as a literary text. In 1897, W. P. Ker's *Epic and Romance* introduces the poem in the literary tradition, saying that the poem "has uttered the spirit and essence of the Northern heroic literature" and his view is followed by the next generations of philologists after Eric V. Gordon publishes his edition in 1936, where he names it "the most heroic of poems" (qtd. in Frank 196). Nevertheless, the first British studies of the poem treated it as a historical document as much as the literary text.

Following the German scholarly tradition that the poem was simply a realistic description of the historical event described in the *Chronicle*, E. D. Laborde is one of the precursors in dealing with both perspectives. In 1924, he devotes his study to the style of *The Battle of Maldon*, trying to use the "only one of the later [Old English] poems of any length" (401) in order to identify the stylistic development of Old English poetry. He concludes that *Maldon* has a new style, keeping variation and avoiding monotony, but presenting a developed vocabulary and syntax, different from earlier poems: "in its plain, though lofty, style is perhaps seen the high-watermark of Old English narrative verse" (417).

In spite of carrying out this detailed study of the poem, Laborde wants to look into the historical facts around the battle, and in particular, the site where it was fought. One year later, *The English Historical Review* publishes "The Site of the Battle of Maldon" (1925). This article says that neither the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle nor the medieval narrative mention the concrete place of the battlefield, "giving no further clue than the phrase 'near Maldon'" (161). The poem, which "has been universally accepted as a contemporary and authentic account of the battle" (161), may be used as a historical source. He wants to answer to the historian Edward A. Freeman who had proposed the village of Heybridge as the historical site. Laborde states that the battlefield is in the south of Maldon, situated on the banks of the Blackwater (*Panta* in the poem), near the mouth, considering the "bridge" (OE *bricg*) mentioned in the poem (l. 78) "a low, paved

causeway submerged by the tide” (169) between the shore and Northey Island, not a bridge proper.

It is interesting to see that Laborde keeps the two lines of research open, in a historical and a literary way. From the 1960s, critics begin to abandon the historical reading of the poem and treat it as a literary piece, perhaps to separate the poem from the philological tradition of the early scholars.

1.3. Literature

This reaction is exemplified by the case of scholars like Edward B. Irving, Ralph W. V. Elliott, Norman F. Blake, Geoffrey E. Britton, James E. Cross, Cecily Clark or David G. Hale, among others. From the relation of the poem to *Hildebrand*, to the characterisation of the Vikings, or the structure of the poem, as many as twelve different contributions in the decade, look into the artistic form of *Maldon* and its connections with other forms of heroic poetry.

George Clark does not want to fall behind and presents “*The Battle of Maldon: A Heroic Poem*” (1968), in which he directly dictates that “*The Battle of Maldon* is best approached as imaginative literature not history” (56) and the traditional idea about the poem being composed soon after the battle or even by one of the men fighting cannot be demonstrated with the text. Instead, he proposes that the poem could have been composed in the eleventh century, in the west of England, and as a way of criticising of the Ethelred’s reign. It was written to represent a conflict “not between Anglo-Saxons and Vikings but between heroism and cowardice,” creating instead a heroic ideal against the general failure felt in those days (5). In sum,

The poem springs from a historical fact, the death of Byrhtnoth in battle against viking invaders, and we can assume that information and supposition about the event contributed to the work’s genesis, but to view *The Battle of Maldon* as the imperfect copy of an external reality and to suppose that its “omissions” can be supplied by scrutinizing the present-day Blackwater Estuary, consulting other sources for the event, and guessing is to fall into the “historical error.” (56)

On the other hand, in the same year, Clark writes another article about the poem, “The Battle in *The Battle of Maldon*” (1968), in which he almost contradicts himself. Trying “to propose a tentative solution to a more limited problem in [the poem’s] organization and unity” (374), he describes the battle step by step in order to show that

the battle scenes in the poem are not incoherent with Anglo-Saxon warfare, arguing that the English then “were more familiar than we with [those] realities” (375). But instead, he explains that the structure of the battle responds to the ‘envelope pattern’ of the Anglo-Saxon poetic art, again using poetry to explain the text.

Likewise, Michael J. Swanton writes “*The Battle of Maldon: A Literary Caveat*” (1968) where he also proposes that the poem has to be seen mainly as a literary work:

Clearly the poem cannot be considered an historical poem in the sense that the poems from the *Chronicle* are historical poems, concerned to record significant events with veracity and relevant understanding of perspective and the larger issues involved. (442)

For him, this poem only tells irrelevant events from the battle. In addition, it has a “sense of falseness” and an unreal feeling: “Re-reading the poem, then, leaves one with a sense of falseness, and an inability to accept an unequivocally and realistic view” (450). Moreover, he criticises that Byrhtnoth is presented with heroic actions as a literary hero and the poem is also defending the loyalty to the lord “in an age that was no longer heroic” (150). Swanton, however, does not explain the reason for that.

Around 1980s, some critics are still in line with the previous authors, keeping the literary question. For instance, Fred C. Robinson analyses the literary form of the poem and presents Byrhtnoth as a heroic character in “Some Aspects of the *Maldon* Poet’s Artistry” (1976). He also clarifies some information about Æthelred’s reign and a possible political question in the poem, which I will mention later. On the other hand, treating the poem as a historical source is once again present. A clear example is illustrated in Jr. Petty and Susan Petty’s “Geology and the Battle of Maldon” (1976) which tries to find the site of the battle considering the place previously set by Laborde and carrying out a geological study in order to clarify the historical site of the struggle.

1.4. Politics

In 1991, Richard North does something about it. Trying “to distinguish what could have been the reality probably the poet’s” (1), he explains in his “Getting to Know the General in *The Battle of Maldon*” (1991) that the poem is the product of “the mood of the time in which *The Battle of Maldon* was probably written, following the battle,” more specifically of the “climate of recrimination” of the political consequences after the defeat

(1, 10-11). Comparing the poem and its phrasing with other sources of the battle, North concludes that one thing is to believe in the authenticity of the poem because it is realistic in its descriptions and the other is that it consists of a historical account of the truth. To North, it is clear that *The Battle of Maldon* as a literary piece tried to build a reputation for the East Saxons who fought and were defeated there. He also states that the poem was composed when that area had been overcome by the Danes.

Paul Dean opens again the debate in his “History vs. Poetry: *The Battle of Maldon*” (1992). He poses that “the poem is a supplementary historical source of exceptional value” (99), because we do not really know much about the concept of history that the Anglo-Saxons had. It is not only that the poem and the historical sources like the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* present historical details, but also that there are poems in the *Chronicle* under the entries of other years, which means that poetry for the Anglo-Saxons was part of history. He insists: “it is not that the Chronicle provides fact and the poems art, but rather that they see history in quite separate ways and shape it according to literary conventions” (104), recovering the idea of history as part of *The Battle of Maldon* and concluding that perhaps the antithesis in the title of his essay is false.

In the same line, Leonard Neidorf’s “II Æthelred and the Politics of The Battle of Maldon” (2012) defends that the debate may be fictional and the question of the poem’s politics, that is, “how it engages with pressing political questions, what ideologies it supports, what policies it encourages,” needs to be discussed. Therefore, he recovers the reading of Fred C. Robinson’s “Some Aspects of the *Maldon* Poet’s Artistry” (1976), which highlights the poet’s silence to criticise the Vikings because he did not want to raise antipathies against the Danes. The study that prompted Neidorf to write about this new face of the poem was “The Diplomas of King Æthelred ‘The Unready’ 978-1016” (1980) by Simon Keynes. He is an historian from Oxford who presents this king as a figure of appeasing, trying not to be attacked by the Vikings. Through a study of the lexicon in the poem, and assuming that Æthelred put into practice a policy of appeasement, Neidorf understands that in *Maldon* there is “a politics self-consciously intended by the unknown poet” and explains it as follows:

The poet blurs the historical reality of the battle and converts it from a conflict needing to be avenged into a moving heroic occasion worthy of celebration. Ultimately, *The Battle of Maldon* is neither a “pro-war poem” nor a simple “war poem”: it is a poem written during a period of

intermittent conflict and peace, in which the enemy was not easily identifiable on racial or national grounds, and in which the enemy was not always the enemy. (471)

Given all this, it seems that the debate is interesting enough to continue with it. My attempt here is to revise the question of historicity, literary artifice and politics not in the original text, but in its modern English translations of *Maldon*. I will focus on the earliest translations of the poem, because they were produced at the same time that the university studies of Old English language and literature began and the first critical essays on the poem were published. The question is whether the translations also provide a historical point of view to the text or introduce a political aspect in the literary form that they give.

2. The Earliest Translations of *The Battle of Maldon*

It may be surprising for us to know that the Anglo-Saxon poem on the battle of Maldon has not always been considered by critics a piece of literature. As can be seen from the previous chapter, it has rather stayed midway between history and literature. This was so from the beginning, since it was first edited. Even after the poetic form of Anglo-Saxon verse became better known in the late nineteenth century, its relation to the historical events of the 990s in Essex made scholars still see it as a historical text. Only when the study of English Literature was considered on the same level as Classical literature, Anglo-Saxon poetry begin to be treated fundamentally from a literary perspective and this was especially so when the predominance of philological studies separated from English departments in general.

Therefore, it would be interesting to study the translations of Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry that have been written, and analyse how they treated the original text, as history or literature, and what the politics behind that decision may have been. Choosing *The Battle of Maldon* for this analysis is very appropriate, since it is a poem based on a historical event.

Over the past two centuries, there have been more than thirty modern English translations of the Maldon poem, the first one, by William D. Conybeare (1826) and the last one, by Samuel Salerno (1996). Among all of them, I will select the seven earliest, starting with Conybeare's "The Death of Byrhtnoth" (1826) and continuing with Edward A. Freeman's "The Song of the Fight of Maldon" (1883), William C. Robinson's "Battle of Maldon; or The Death of Byrhtnoth" (1885), Emily H. Hickey's "The Battle of Maldon" (1885), H. W. Lumsden's "The Song of Maldon, or The Death of Byrhtnoth" (1887), W. P. Ker's "Maldon—991" (1887), and finally F. W. L. Butterfield's "The Battle of Maldon" (1900). I will only study those translations printed in Britain, leaving aside, for the moment, the versions published in America, so as not to over-extend the length of this study.

2.1. William D. Conybeare, "The Death of Byhtnoth" (1826)

The first translation that I have analysed is "The Death of Byrhtnoth." It was included in John Josias Conybeare's *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (1826). The book was edited

by his brother William Daniel Conybeare (1787-1857) after J. J. Conybeare's death. It was William Daniel (the geologist and Rector of Sully) who wrote and added the translation of the poem to the original collection, and not John Josias Conybeare, professor of Anglo-Saxon at the University of Oxford, as scholars have believed until this day.

William D. Conybeare's aim in editing his brother's book, "an introductory manual of Anglo-Saxon Poetry" (lxxvi), was also his brother's: "to supply a desideratum of no inconsiderable importance in the history of the poetical antiquities of our language" (v). He does that by including the records of the Bodleian and Cotton libraries that had not yet been published (iv). In order to do that, William Daniel decides to expand his brother's work, adding what he deems appropriate.

In the introductory part of the section dedicated to the poem, William D. Conybeare explains that the source he has used for his translation is a transcript by "Mr. Price" (lxxxvii). This "Mr. [Richard] Price," an English bookseller and antiquary, took the text from Thomas Hearne's first edition of the poem, as later editors of his Warton's *History of English Poetry* state. The fact that the subtitle of Conybeare's translation is "A Fragment" seems to confirm it, because the heading of Hearne's edition is "Fragmentum quoddam historicum de Eadrico" (qtd. in Kathryn Sutherland 190). Conybeare adds that he has used Edward Lye's dictionary (1637) (lxxxvi). Lye's was the first Old English dictionary and the only one that existed in those days. It was probably too old and perhaps that is why Conybeare apologises if his translation is not exact (lxxxvii).

The other sources that Conybeare uses are the Ely Chronicle and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. In this introduction to the poem, he inserts a translation of the fragment of Ely Chronicle that deals with Byrhtnoth, in order to give historical substance to the poem, although he warns that "it does not entirely agree in its circumstances with those on the poem" (lxxxviii). He also knows the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and uses it in three footnotes, to confirm that Maldon is the place where the battle was fought (this is not said in the poem), the variant spelling of the Byrhtnoth as "Brythnoth" and the tribute that appears in Byrthnoth's speech began to be paid to the Danes from then on.

The translation that follows is in prose. The order of the events is presented as in the original text, except for the starting lines, which are omitted, as he explains: "The original poem contains 690 lines. I have omitted in my translation the first 30 of these,

which from the mutilation of the beginning of the fragment, are rendered in some places obscure” (lxxxix-cx). So, his translation starts in line 17 of contemporary editions:

Then Byrhtnoth began to train his bands: he instructed the warriors in their array and discipline, how they should stand, how guide their steeds: he bade that they should hold their shields right forward with firm grasp, and should not fear ought. (xc)

The narrative is quite clear and the language, free from archaisms, except for the pronouns *thou* or *thy*. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, footnotes are quite numerous. Most of them are explanatory notes of a few lines that he has omitted, others speak about placenames, unknown common names like *franca* (l.[42]), and conjectural interpretations: “Wulfstan appears to have been commissioned to cover the construction of a bridge for the passage of the Danish army across the estuary, as soon as the ebb of the tide rendered such a work practicable” (xci, n.1), or allusions to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

In most of them, Conybeare is very honest about his achievements, as when he mentions the existence of lines in the poem that he could not understand: “‘He ȝeleopðone eoh. ðe ahte his hlaford. On ðam ȝerædum.’ I have omitted the last line, and doubt my construction of the two former” (xciii, n. 1). Besides, there are some conjectures, as for example when he explains the word *hostage*:

“Him se ȝysel onȝan. ȝromlice fylstan.” Hostage is the only sense in which the word “ȝysel” occurs; yet it is difficult to reconcile this sense to the context. I have endeavoured to do so by incorporating in my new version the conjecture that might have escaped during the battle from the hands of the Danes. (xcv, n.1)

Given all this, one could say that the translator is more focused on clarifying the content rather than giving the poem a literary form and therefore, Conybeare is using the text more as history than as literature. However, I strongly feel that Conybeare wants to treat the poem from a literary perspective. The title he gives, “The Death of Byrhtnoth,” implies that the author is focusing on the character of Byrhtnoth more than on the historical battle itself, making the translation reinforce this character. Although it is a text in prose, his use of language is literary, with the presence of those archaic pronouns, kennings like “wolves of slaughter” and Byrhtnoth being called hero. In fact, in his introduction to the poem, he compares it with the classical Greco-Roman epics like the

Iliad or the *Odyssey*: “If names like Byrhtnoth and Godric could be substituted for Patroclus and Menelaus, it might almost be translated into a cento of lines by the great father and fountain of poetry” (lxxxviii). Then, when Conybeare presents the poem as a war poem, he is treating it not as a historical poem, but as an epic: “the pomp and the circumstance of war” (lxxxvii). Therefore, he translates it as annotated prose, as scholars were used to doing with the literary classics. Having said all this, the stand that the translator present is clear. William D. Conybeare wants to give English literature its place among the classical canon and legitimise its study, considering *Maldon* one of the few poems that can be compared with this epic classical literature.

2.2. Edward A. Freeman, “The Song of the Fight of Maldon” (1869)

The second translation that I have examined dates from 1869. It was written by Edward A. Freeman (1823-1892), an English historian specialised in the Anglo-Saxon and the Norman periods. He translated the poem in order to include it in his volume *Old English History for Children*. This book is a work of history, originally written for Freeman’s own children but later published by Macmillan. He calls it “an experiment,” a book “to show that clear, accurate, and scientific views of history, or indeed of any subject, may be easily given to children from the very first” (vii). It covers from the time of Caesar’s incursions in Britain until the year 1066 and is divided in different chapters dedicated to each reign. However, he occasionally adds “a tale,” because the book is intended to be read by children. He explains that those “tales,” although they “have so often usurped the place of true history” (vi) must be known, “sometimes on account of their real beauty, sometimes as excellent studies for the comparative mythologist” (vii).

Some of the tales that Freeman includes are, for example, the famous story of a woman scolding King Alfred for having burnt the cakes that he had to take care of: “Alfred though more of his bow and arrows than he did of the cakes, and let them burn” (122), but also the story of King Alfred and St. Cuthberht, the beggar whom he helped and later, as bishop, gave him God’s protection against the Danes (127–29). Freeman explains that every time he includes one of those stories, he tells them “in a shape that clearly distinguishes them from authentic history” (vi). They are read like children’s

stories. In fact, he gives them a separate section with a separate title in a different neo-gothic Victorian type.

This is what happens with his “The Song of the Fight of Maldon.” It is inserted in the section on King Ethelred II (978-1016), in chapter X: “How Danes Conquered and Reigned England,” but as an independent unit. The title “The Song of the Fight of Maldon” is printed in neo-gothic typography, the one that was commonly used for the titles of children’s books of tales in the Victorian age. As we will see, he is offering the children his translation of the poem, with a moralising introduction and conclusion, as if it were a story for children.

Before giving the translation, Freeman gives a historical context from 978 on, alluding to the previous invasions of the Danes. He subsequently warns that the poem is exalting the hero and the loyalty of his comrades when they try to avenge their leader. He uses these words for the children: “I want you specially to take notice how nearly the song is about Byrhtnoth’s own personal following, his own Thanes and companions . . .” (191), trying to instil in them the value of loyalty. After the end of the poem, he writes a commentary presenting the followers of the hero as role models: “So he good and brave Alderman Byrhtnoth died. It was a great pity that there were so few men like him . . .” (205). Again, the moralising tone is present.

However, his translation is not easy to read. The edition that he uses is the text from Thorpe’s *Analecta Anglo-Saxonica* (191n1). Freeman translates the poem, half-verse by half-verse, just like Thorpe had edited the poem:

. . . That Offa’s kinsman
First out found
That the Earl would not
Wretchedness thole;
He let there of his hands
Liefer fly
Hawk for the wood,
And to the fight stepped. (ll. 6-13)

He keeps kennings like *wælwulfas* (the Vikings) translated as “slaughter-wolves” (l.188) or “life-house” for *feorhhus* (body) (l.586) and frequently uses compounds such

as “brown-edged,” (l.322) for a sword, that is *bruneccg* (in fact, ‘bright-edged’). As he states, he gives the modern English text “altering it from the Old English as little as I can” (191). The problem is that such intention of fidelity makes him include so many archaisms, as well as names in their old form (x), so many syntactic twists, that the text sounds rigid and archaic, as in this example:

Too shameful me thinketh
That ye with our scot
To ships gang,
Unbefoughten. (194, ll.105-110)

It is remarkable how complex his translation is, being intended for children. Perhaps because of that, Freeman adds a large amount of footnotes. In them, he makes an effort to explain in a simple way his obsolete words. Here are some examples: “*leof*, *dear*. We still sometimes say, ‘I would as *lief* do a thing.’ In line 43 we have the word *liefest* again in the sense of *dearest*” (192n2), when he uses an obsolete word like *rathly*: “Swiftly; we now use only the comparative *rather*” (193n3), or when he writes commentaries on their history, as in: “*Georne*, in High-Dutch *gern*. We have lost the noun and the adverb, but we keep the verb to *yearn*” (195n2). Other times, his notes make conjectures on the meaning of a line: “This sounds as if Brihtnoth was hawking when he heard of the enemy’s landing, and let his hawk fly, and at once made ready for the battle” (192n3) or question the use of one term: “This is the literal meaning, but we cannot think that our forefathers, we can hardly think that the Danes, really used poisoned weapons. I suppose it means only ‘sharp and deadly’” (193n16).

Again, based on the foregoing observations, Freeman seems to be more focused on giving the text its historical essence, not only in the presentation of the events in the text and notes, but also in the history of the language. In fact, the great amount of footnotes and the Germanising style may also indicate a historical point of view on his part. After all, his translation is included in a text of history. In spite of all this, it needs to be remembered that Freeman treats the Maldon poem independently, like the story of King Alfred and the cakes. For Freeman that means that “The Song of Byrhtnoth” is a “tale,” and as I mentioned before, for him, the text is not as a piece of “true history” (vi). Thus, Freeman believe that, although literature cannot be true history, history can be learnt

through it. So, the politics behind his translation of *Maldon* is that poem can be used as an instruction for children. This “Song of the Fight of Maldon” is the first contact with history for them, and then, it will be the vehicle in order to access “true history”.

2.3. W. Clarke Robinson, “The Battle of Maldon, or The Death of Byrhtnoth” (1885)

In 1885, W. Clarke Robinson, lecturer of Modern Literature and Languages in the University of Durham, published the translation of the poem in *Introduction to Our Early English Literature*. He calls his book a “textbook” (Preface) and includes a selection of Old English poetry in the original with their corresponding translations, following some introduction on the Germanic tribes, a grammar of the Anglo-Saxon language and a guide to Old English verse. The translations are added to the editions of poems “for the benefit of those who cannot enter on a thorough study of the originals” (Preface). Robinson has taken the original Old English from the edition of Anglo-Saxon literary texts *Bibliothek der Angelsächsischen Poesie* (1861-64), by Christian W. M. Grein, the earliest modern collection of Anglo-Saxon poetry. He declares that in some cases, he has used the expanded edition of Grein that Richard P. Wülker was preparing for publication (Preface). We do not know what dictionary is he using, probably Bosworth’s, published in 1838. As in the previous cases, Robinson apologises because he “may possibly have sometimes missed the point in the original, but I have not been careful to attempt a slavish, school-boy version, nor a version which a slavish school-boy could employ like an inter-linear translation,” trying to make a “proper grammatical study of the original” (Preface).

The poem of *The Battle of Maldon* in one of the more than forty poems in the volume. Robinson describes it as “one of our most direct and characteristic war songs” (191). There is a little introduction describing the hero Byrhtnoth, of whom he says wrongly that he is “a Northumbrian ealderman” (191). This indicates he is following Conybeare and the fragment of the Ely chronicle inserted there, which strangely says that Byrhtnoth is a Northumbrian. Robinson also quotes Conybeare to compare the poem with the classic tradition of Homer, although no reference to Conybeare is given (191).

Robinson does not edit the original completely, but fragments: lines 25-61 (the Viking chief turns to the Saxons in order to claim the tribute, and Byrhtnoth replies: “Spears as a tribute to you they will give”), lines 89-116 (the start of the battle, the

moment in which Byrhtnoth let them to cross over the river, with the preparations from both sides), and lines 162-69 (Byrhtnoth's death and final prayer).

Robinson translates these parts, and some other. In his translation, he maintains the verse form, which sometimes shows rhyme. Here are the opening lines:

The herald of Vikings then boldly called out.
He stood on the strand and with words shouted loud,
With threads he announced the sea-pirates message,
To Brithnoth, the noble, who stood by the bank. (196, ll. 25-28)

As can be seen, his version is not as rigid as Freeman's and it is readable. However, instead of imitating the Old English metre, Robinson uses a type of verse which is contemporary to his own period: tetrameters. The rhythm is not so fluid when the battle is starting:

. . . The fight was now nigh,
The glory in war. The time was now come
When fated men were there destined to fall.
A cry was then raised. Eagles and ravens
Circled round in the air, for carcasses eager. (197, ll. 104-08)

The speeches from Alfwine (lines 211-24), Loveson (lines 244-54) and Brihtwold (lines 309-19), are added in translation, although they do not appear in the corresponding Old English text edited by Robinson:

Then Loveson sake likewise, his linden shield raised:
"This I have promised, that I would not hence
One footbreadth fly, but would press onwards,
And avenge in the conflict my captain and friend." (198)

Robinson has omitted the part when some of the Saxon combatants flee, as in the case of Godric, and instead adds these of the supporters. It may be said that his intention is moralising.

It seems very clear that he wants to popularize the study of the Anglo-Saxon language throughout the dissemination of its literature. Maybe that is why the translator decided that footnotes were not necessary. In this way, "The Battle of Maldon" is made easy to follow and presented to people who wants to enjoy literature, regardless of any philological aspect. Then, Robinson selects only the events that he considers relevant for

that purpose, and also for the purpose of instruction. He is fulfilling his two aims: that “the study of our early literature and language might be made still more widely popular and instructive by pointing out the literary interest and value of these ancient poems” (Preface). He probably chose the subtitle “The Death of Byrhtnoth” to give the poem a greater epic value. All this offers an excellent clue to indicate that this “characteristic war song” leans towards a literary question. These are the reasons to believe that, for Robinson, the practical function of the poem consists in presenting a moral lesson and, perhaps make readers familiar with the Old English language and promote the reading of these kind of texts.

2.4. Emily H. Hickey, “The Battle of Maldon” (1885)

In the same year 1885, Emily H. Hickey (1845-1924), an Irish poet, translator and essayist, also translated the poem of the battle of Maldon. It first appeared in *The Academy*, a weekly review of literature, sciences and arts, in two different parts: “The Battle of Maldon (ll. 2-184),” in issue no. 681 (23 May 1885), and “The Battle of Maldon (L. 185 to end of what remains to us),” in issue no. 697 (12 Sept. 1885). Then, it reappeared in *Verse-Tales, Lyrics and Translations*, a collection of nearly fifty of Hickey’s poems published in 1889 in Liverpool, where she reedited “The Battle of Maldon” in the section “Translations from the First English” together with other Anglo-Saxon texts such as “Judith” and “The Dream of the Holy Rood.”

It needs to be said that she made those translations before converting to Catholicism in 1901 and, although she later disavowed them, since they did not fit with her new faith (Woodwall 156), in 1910, she paraphrased the poem in chapter X of *Our Catholic Heritage and English Literature*. It is a history of English literature until sixteenth century, in “an attempt to increase the interest which Catholics may well feel in this part of the great inheritance of their fathers” (Our Catholic Heritage 5).

However, this is not the original context in which the translation was produced. She wrote it as a critic and as a writer. The fact that the text was first published in *The Academy* and later in *Verse-Tales, Lyrics and Translations* speaks for itself. One is a review of literature and the other is a collection of poems so, the translation was made and intended for readers of literature.

Not a single philological or explanatory footnote or reference is included in the translation. The poem stands by itself. It is readable, in verse and reasonably accurate to the story of the original, keeping the order of the events in the battle. This extract comes from the first part and describes the ebb of the tide and the two sides face to face before the fight:

After the ebb came flowing flood, the lake streams linkt their might:
Too long it seem'd to wait until the spears might clash in fight.
Then Pantë's stream they did beset with all their strong array,
The forefront of the East Saxons, and the sea-folk's host that day. (*The Academy*, no. 681, ll. 47-50)

Hickey's translation is the work of a poet, writing for the readers of her time. She does not imitate Old English verse. The verse form is fourteen syllables in each line and she uses rhyming couplets with assonant rhyme. This can be seen, for instance, in these lines, when Byrhtnoth is killing an enemy, just before his own fall:

Then swift he thrust another one, through shatter'd corslet prest
The spear that bare the mortal wound; the death-stroke through the breast.
The blither was the earl for that, out laught the warrior grim,
Thankt God because of that day's work, which God had given to him. (*The Academy*, no. 681, ll. 100-03)

Hickey clearly gives preference to literature. This is present in measure and rhyme throughout the poem, and in epithets such as "wolves of slaughter" (l.64) or compounds as "world-joys" (l.117), "heart-comrades" (l.139), "linden-shield" (l.165).

By combining the publications in which the translations and the commentaries are included, the presence of a modern verse form, as well as the absence of notes and of archaic language, there are enough pieces of evidence that make Hickey's translation a literary piece on its own. It is the first translation titled "The Battle of Maldon" that presents the complete poem in a readable poetical form. However, what is important in the case of Hickey is her politics: she demonstrates that the same translation can serve different politics. So, as she did, it can be added in the Protestant or the Catholic inheritance including it in one collection or in a journal in particular.

2.5. H. W. Lumsden, “The Song of Maldon, or The Death of Byrhtnoth” (1887)

The next translation is by Col. H. W. Lumsden, published in 1887. The identity of this author is obscure. He belonged to the royal artillery and, in 1881, he translated *Beowulf*.

His version of the Old English poem, “The Song of Maldon, or The Death of Byrhtnoth,” appeared in *Macmillan’s Magazine*, a literary periodical that was published monthly since 1859. In the essay that precedes the translation, Lumsden states that he considers “there is nothing in Old English literature finer than this fragment” (371).

This essay was the first complete article of historical criticism on the poem: “The Song of Maldon.” It includes the information known on the transmission of the text, the historical sources on the battle, like the different *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* versions and the eleventh and twelfth-century narratives, as well as examples of several historical aspects that can be learned from the poem. Lumsden suggests that the site of the battle was near Heybridge and also explains that Byrthnorth was not earl of Northumbria, as the *Liber Eliensis* said and as he has found out in the charters of Aethelred (373, 375). The fact that he was a Colonel can be reflected in the great amount of information about questions of strategy, military tactics, and weapons that he provides: “There can be no doubt that the *gar*, *spere*, *franca*, or *darod*, as it is variously called in the poem, was a weapon for throwing, not for thrusting” (375). Never before had anyone told this kind of information, since they were political historians, philologists or literary writers. Finally, he gives possible information about the Saxon combatants, for example: “Eadric perhaps may be the infamous Eadric Streona who in 1007 became Ealdorman of Mercia, and married King’s Aethelred’s daughter Eadgyth” (376).

It is clear that he believes that the poem can be used as a historical source: “Rarely is the evidence for any historical fact so direct and so trust-worthy” as in the poem; it can be considered a “true and faithful” register of the facts although there were “poetical exaggerations and amplifications;” and it may be thought that “[i]f the author was not actually an eye-witness of the battle, he at any rate knew the ground thoroughly, and got his information at hand” (371).

Given this, it may be surprising to find that the title of the translation leans on the literary: “The Song of Maldon.” Indeed, Lumsden’s translation is in verse, composed of iambic heptameters. The lines are accentual-syllabic, and rhyming couplets with assonant rhyme. The poetic form is the same as Hickey’s:

Then for the heathen host the Earl made way and overbold
Men heard the son of Brihthelm shout across the water cold.
“Lo! Here is room for you! Come on, come warriors to the fray!
God only knows which of us twain shall hold the field to-day.” (377, ll. [55-58])

The consequence of using these rhyming couplets and the heptameter metre is that Lumsden’s translation is not literal. He has to paraphrase the content of the poem so that each translated line has fourteen syllables. As a result, a single line in the translation includes the content of two lines in the original or one and a half. So, the total number of lines is half the number in the original.

Despite that, all the content from the original is illustrated in the translation. The translator maintains the order of the events: the encounter of the combatants, the flight of the cowards, the fall of Byrhtnoth and the revenge of every brother-in-arm with their corresponding speech. In addition, Lumsden language is very simple and quite easy to follow. There are almost no archaisms:

From hand was hurled the sharp-filed spear, the whetted arrow flew,
The bow was busy, shield met spear, and fierce the combat grew.
On either side brave soldiers fell. There Brihtnoth’s kinsman died,
Wulfmaer, his sister’s son, all hewn with sword-wounds deep and wide. (377, ll. [67-70])

Like other translations analysed, a relevant lack of footnotes, the title of the poem, and verse form, even rhyme, are the key pieces of evidence that can make this translation a purely literary one. That is why it seems that Lumsden’s conception of Maldon is mixed. There is a contrast between the literary form that the translator gives to the poem and the fact that he considers the text in its historical context and as a historical source of information.

This happens again in 1894, when E. A. Fitch reprinted “Col. H. W. Lumsden’s spirited paraphrase” in his *Maldon and the River Blackwater* (8). Fitch was the Lord Mayor of Maldon six times and was interested in local history as an antiquary of the Essex Archeological Society. He republished Lumsden’s translation because he believes “[t]his fine and intensely interesting poem deserves to be better known locally” (8). The new editor describes the work as “an almost contemporaneous historical fragment describing this fight, with even the speeches of the warriors handed down to us, and the faithful description of the ground on which it was fought” (8).

Fitch agreed with Lumsden that the battle of Maldon, just another skirmish of the Norsemen, gains historical importance because of the poem (371). This means, in spite of the literary essence of the text, the importance that *Maldon* has is due to the historical evidence it offers. So, the practical use that Lumsden wanted to give to the poem is that literature helps discover history and the same idea is transmitted by Fitch and his antiquarian interests.

2.6. W. P. Ker, “Maldon—991” (1887)

In the same year in which Lumsden published his translation of *Maldon*, William P. Ker was polishing his own version. However, it would remain unpublished until R. W. Chambers’ *England before the Norman Conquest* appeared in 1926. As Chambers informs, “the *Battle of Maldon* was made many years ago by W. P. Ker, and is now printed for the first time” (xxv). Chambers (1874-1942), a friend of J. R. R. Tolkien and author of many relevant works about Anglo-Saxon and Medieval literature and history, was a disciple of Ker (1855-1923), the essayist and Scottish professor of Literature in University College of London, to whom he succeeded.

Thirty years before the publication of Ker’s translation of *Maldon*, Ker had published *Epic and Romance* (1896), in which he treated “the two great kinds of narrative literature in the Middle Ages” (5) in their different forms: “the English metrical romances, the Middle High German poems, the ballads, Northern and Southern—which would require to be considered in any systematic treatment of this part of history” (v). What is interesting is how Ker shows a special interest in the poem of Maldon in that book. He becomes the first professor to write about it.

To illustrate the different schools of epic poetry, he compares the *Song of Maldon* to *Hildebrand*, the Icelandic sagas, or the *Song of Roland*. All narrate “the defence of a narrative place against odds” (5). But *Maldon* and *Roland* are more accurate:

The *Song of Maldon* and the *Song of Roncesvalles* both narrate the history of a lost battle, of a realm defended against its enemies by a captain whose pride and self-reliance lead to disaster, by refusing to take fair advantage of the enemy and put forth all his available strength. (54)

The similarities of the epic from French, Icelandic, English and Homeric texts, are given throughout the text: “it is inevitable it should be described as it is in the Iliad, the

Song of Maldon and *Song of Roland*, and the Icelandic Sagas, as a series of personal encounters, in which every stroke is remembered” (13), “[e]ven in Maldon there is a tragic error” (69), or “[i]t is not as in the *Iliad*, where different heroes have their day, or as at Maldon, here the fall of the captain leads to the more desperate defence and the more exalted heroisms of his companions” (294), among many others. In addition, Ker connects the poem with the classical tradition: “The creed of Maldon is that of Achilles” (12). On the other hand, the differences with all the other types are also clear, mainly, the simplicity of the style (37).

Maybe this is why Ker’s version breaks with the previous translations, since prose reappears. Ker translates the text with the original missing lines, keeps all the speeches of the comrades of Byrhtnoth and the order of the events that occur in the conflict. His prose version is very readable and so, makes the plot clear. However, the fact that it is written in prose does not mean the text loses literary force, as for example in the case of the physical encountering:

Then speedily he shot another so that the mail coat gave; in his breast he was wounded through the rings, at his heart stood the deadly spear. The earl was the blither for that: he laughed, the bold-hearted man, and spoke thanks to the Creator, for the day’s work that the Lord had granted to him. (263)

There are only a few footnotes. They suggest improvements in the text. It is the case of *felharde* (l. 108), that Ker translates “as hard as files,” and may be “sharpened by the file” (262n1), or the word *ceorl*, which Ker translates as “earle,” but may be improved: “Or, perhaps, ‘a simple farmer,’ not one of Byrhtnoth’s retinue” (265n1). These notes are written by Chambers, who has also written an introductory paragraph about the poem and about the main character of Byrhtnoth. He also states that the poem is mutilated and the fact that Byrhtnoth and his comrades are individualized by name while the Viking names are not recorded.

The title, “Maldon—991,” is more suitable for a history book, so it is less literary than in the previous translations. Then, it is not surprising that the translation of the Old English poem is followed by the translation of the treaty signed between Aethelred and Olaf, the leader of the Vikings, after the battle: many historical facts that were known from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and complete the information given by the poem can be read there, like the presence of Olaf, Justin and Gudmund, the advice from archbishop Sigeric to the king in order to give a tribute to the Danes, and so on.

That said, there is an apparent contradiction here. While Chambers includes the translation in a book of history, Ker gives a literary form to the text, which is comparable to the translations of other Germanic poems or the classics from Homer. But the contradiction disappears when it is understood that Chamber's book belongs to the series "University of London Intermediate Source-books of History": "primarily designed to meet the needs of students taking History for their Intermediate Examination, but also to provide an introductory collection of sources covering the whole of English history" (iv). Ker's translation is included here to be used by students and "writers of text-books on English history" (iv). Consequently, the politics behind this literary translation is given by Chambers who defends that the poem can be used as a historical source that helps students of history and promotes its study as a university discipline.

2.7. F. L. W. Butterfield, "The Battle of Maldon" (1900)

And last but not least, Sir Frederick L. W. Butterfield (1858-1943) concludes my analysis. His translation is included in *The Battle of Maldon and Other Renderings from the Anglo-Saxon*, a poetry book published by a small Oxford publishing house, James Parker, in 1900. What we know about the author is that he belonged to a noble family dedicated to textile manufacturing. He went to Oxford University and then, the translation of the poem may have emerged from the classes of Anglo-Saxon he took under the supervision of Arthur S. Napier, as he mentions in the introduction of his book (x).

Butterfield presents the purpose of his translation very clearly: "rendering the Old English pieces, which it is my aim to help to popularise" (ix). In order to achieve that, he wants to get "a clear presentation of the subjects," and so, he tries to translate as literally as possible and occasionally uses paraphrase. He maintains the discourses of Byrhtnoth's comrades. The only change that he has made is: "I have ventured to exercise my judgement in commencing the translation at line 17, from which point of the narrative flows easily and naturally" (x).

He also imitates the original stress and the alliterations as well: "Of course the adopted stresses have as a rule been carefully adhered to, and some attention given to alliterative imitation" (x). There is no rhyme, but he keeps the four stresses from the original verse, as in this extract:

The slaughter-wolves came; they recked not of the sea,
The Viking horde; west over Panta,
Over the clear water, they lifted their shields,
Brought them alas! To the longed-for land. (9, ll. 96-99)

Or in Byrhtnoth's speech:

"Dost thou hear, O pirate, what this people saith?
They will give you for tribute their battle-dulled spears,
Poisoned darts and ancestral swords,
Arms that shall not avail you for war. . . ." (5, ll. 45-49)

The use of alliterations is very limited, but in contrast to the previous translators, his translation is written "on the principle of Stress" (x). Butterfield justifies that choice quoting Robert Bridges saying it is "most natural to our language" (x-xi). This is his greatest innovation. Butterfield is the first of all translators of *The Battle of Maldon* that uses imitative metre, and not one of the other metres that were then more popular.

So, although he entitles his translation "The Battle of Maldon," and clarifies that it is an "Old English Fragment dedicated to 991 A.D.," these are the only two historical references he uses. His interest in the fragment is poetic, and not historical. It is not philological, either: Butterfield does not claim to have a "special linguistic scholarship" (x). In fact, his translation explains very well how things have changed since William D. Conybeare published his translation from Old English .

It is clear that Butterfield's main purpose is to disseminate Anglo-Saxon literature, and specially, this poem. By 1900, History and Old English literature are being taught at universities for several decades and Old English poetry has begun to be better known and become more popular. By that same year, *The Battle of Maldon* in particular has become one of the most popular Old English poems among students like Butterfield and that is why the poem gives name to his full collection of translations from the Anglo-Saxon. Moreover, the interest of literary critics in the twentieth century and the debate over the nature of the poem grew rapidly. That nature, as I believe I have shown here, was given by the function and context that translators and editors give to the translated texts, rather than by the texts and form of the translations themselves.

3. Conclusion

Unquestionably, *The Battle of Maldon* has caused a great amount of controversy. To begin with, the real aim of the composition is still a challenge and a good many of conjectures have been created through history. In all likelihood, the poem was conceived one decade after the historical battle in 991. What is more, its authorship is also a mystery. Even though its origin is quite obscure, the text has been transmitted in a fragmented form and it was only preserved in an eighteenth-century manuscript copy of the lost Anglo-Saxon original which has been edited several times.

The main debate among critics has evolved around the historical, literary or political nature of the poem. It all began in 1924 with Edward D. Laborde, who introduced *Maldon* as a literary poem but also an additional historical source. In the 1960s, critics like George Clark and Michael J. Swanton stated that its historical burden should be removed, presenting a heroic ideal within an invented story in an exact model of the Anglo-Saxon poetry. But it is in the 80s when many opinions between literature and history seemed to be evident. For example, scholars such as Fred C. Robinson kept the literary perspective, while Jr. Petty and Susan Petty tried to give a historical view.

Nevertheless, in the 1990s and 2000s, some academics presented a different reading of the poem beyond the debate between history and literature. Traditionally, the poem had been interpreted to contain a piece of criticism against Byrhtnoth for having let the Vikings advance and not resist them. Instead, it was now seen that the view was different if *Maldon* is considered in the political, social circumstances under which it was composed. In that way, the literary devices in the poem may have a political purpose of recrimination, because of the king's weakness, as Richard North indicates, or a purpose of appeasement, that will keep away the attacks of the Vikings, as Leonard Neidorf states. So, it is evident that a process of "divorce from pure history" and a new interpretation of the literary text is presented, on the basis of contextualising the politics and purpose of the text.

Once I observed the several perspectives from the critics, I realised that the debate is still open. Thus, I wanted to contribute to it with my own analysis of the early translations of *Maldon* and see how that debate between history, literature and politics can be also seen in them. First, I analysed the historical question by looking at whether the translator considers the poem is a source explaining real events or facts or clarifies

the historical context of the poem. Next, I looked into the literary aspect by examining how the translators deal with the literary form or see the text as a source of instruction or morals. Finally, I considered politics by focusing on the aim that the author of the translation gives to the poem and on the ideology that he/she wants to transmit, and also on the role that the editorial context plays in that transmission.

The poem is of such importance that more than thirty-five translations have been created since Anglo-Saxon poetry was popularized. The first dates from 1826 and the last which appears is from 1996. But, I want to come back to the period in which the Old English literature and History took shape as academic disciplines, and for this reason, I have chosen the translations from 1826 until the start of the twentieth century, when Edward D. Laborde showed two sides of the later debate indicating how the poem should be treated.

In the analysis of the translations that I made, I could realize that there is a clear tendency. From William Daniel Conybeare dated in 1826 until Frederick L. W. Butterfield in 1900, the literary perspective is the most relevant aspect, and only two of the translators present a historical view. In addition, the fact that the story of the hero Byrhtnoth is mostly translated by men of letters or poets (with the exception of Henry W. Lumsden who is a military) and intended for a non-academic audience could have influenced as well.

The first translations such as William D. Conybeare's and Edward A. Freeman's seem to treat the poem with a historical point of view. The amount of footnotes explaining the story or the real meaning of the poem and the fact that it is considered a "poem of war" or included in a book of history may imply that a historical aspect is present. But, Conybeare finally links *Maldon* with the classical Greek poetry, calling it "epic poem", and therefore, he wants the poem to be set among the classical literature. Apart from that, Freeman's book distinguishes texts which contains "true history" from "tales" as his "Song of the Fight of Maldon," which he uses as an instruction for children and in order to show them the way to appreciate "authentic history."

From then on and from 1885, a clear literary tendency is followed. The story of the hero Byrhtnoth is presented in verse with literary devices such as compounds or kennings and some of the translators try to add rhyme and rhythm in order to make it more suitable for the literary taste of that time. Besides, the philological notes and

explanatory references tend to disappear stepwise and it seems that it is more interesting to maintain its original form and to avoid those explanatory notes which could distract the reader. For this reason, the translations of the poem become clearer and more readable. Moreover, they are intended for people who want to enjoy literature and published in a compilation of Anglo-Saxon texts or in a literary magazine. Additionally, they give this literary form to give a moral message, as in the case of W. Clarke Robinson, to demonstrate that a single text can serve different types of religious stands as Emily H. Hickey does, or even to disseminate the reading of Anglo-Saxon literature, as in the case of F. L. W. Butterfield who was the first to present the text with the imitative metre.

However, there are some translations in which a basically literary or historical view on the part of the translator is not clear. In the case of Henry W. Lumsden, his translation chooses a verse form that emphasises literary aspects like rhyme or measure. Correspondingly, it was first published in a literary magazine. But, the essay that Lumsden writes to introduce the translation of the poem only details all the historical evidence that the poem offers. Having this into account, it is as if Lumsden uses literature so that people would know real history. Something similar happens with Ker's translation. When Ker translates *Maldon* in poetical prose, one can see that he is following his own views on the poem, comparing it with the epic classics or the heroic poetry of the Germanic and Scandinavian traditions. However, we find that two decades later, his translation is included in a history source-book published by Chambers, who treats Ker's literary translation exclusively as a historical source so that university students of History can learn about the history of the period.

What I observe from this and the rest of translations of poem in this early period is that neither the literary form nor the historical orientation that translators give to the text itself would define the nature of *The Battle of Maldon* for the readers the time. What nineteenth-century readers received as the true essence of the Old English poem, when they read it in translation, was related to the use, the ideology or the social vision that its translators or editors would give through titles, introductions, commentaries and notes, or through the place where they were published, as part of history-source books or poetry books or literary magazines, or the way they were edited, with or without footnotes, for example. Therefore, the long debate between history and literature that occupied the 1980s and beyond seems to be purely academic. However, in the twenty-first century, the debate still continues unchanged. Therefore, the investigation should not be abandoned,

and the same kind of analysis could be applied to other Old English poems or to the Modern English translations in the twentieth century. As J. R. R. Tolkien once said: “deep roots are not reached by the frost.”

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