

## I

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## Introduction

In recent years, the shift of power to the reader has been marked. In both literary- and book-historical spheres, the role of the reader in constructing meaning out of texts is increasingly taken for granted. Whether the approach is phenomenological, deconstructive or socio-logical, it seems that the reader is, for the moment at least, a source of authority and a point of stability for many critical discourses.<sup>1</sup> All too often however, this 'reader' is a transhistorical entity, almost a hermeneutic device through which traditional literary criticism can lay claim to new ground, new readings. In this book, I try to give textual and historical substance to the terms 'reader' and 'reading'. I do not treat them as universal givens, but as strategies that can be described and analysed, which grow out of, reflect and help to shape very specific cultural practices and which are undertaken with particular aims in mind. As recent studies for the early modern period have shown, reading is always informed by context and, even more importantly, by purpose.<sup>2</sup>

My evidence for medieval reading practice is glossing, specifically glossing on Horace's *Satires* in twelfth-century manuscripts from England and Northern France.<sup>3</sup> This context is crucial. The twelfth century saw an increase in the production of classical texts, an expansion of education, and a series of crucial debates about language, signification and interpretation. All of these are part of a gradual shift in reading itself, broadly from the ruminative *lectio* of monastic meditation to the more public, structured reading processes of the classroom. In England there are particular problems, for the linguistic legacy of the Norman Conquest is still being absorbed. It is a central aim of this book to show how all these issues bear on the reading of authoritative texts and, therefore, to offer a more specific account of the role of classical texts in twelfth-century northern European culture than is normally found under the tag 'Twelfth-Century

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Renaissance'. Indeed, I argue in Chapters 2 and 12 that the glosses ask us to reframe the traditional way of thinking about the reception of classical literature in the Middle Ages – a Christian culture racked by the fear of moral corruption – by acknowledging that more local and textual issues, like literacy, are also at work.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, there are both historical and methodological problems to be faced in using glosses in this way, and I confront these at more length in the third part of chapter 3 ('Reading Glosses'). It is clear, for example, that this form of annotation poses a serious challenge to our prevailing notion of the 'reader', an individual with their own desires and motivations. The glosses I examine here are the traces of pedagogic discourse, of a reading undertaken by a *magister* (teacher) for his pupils and which is shaped by their needs and their level of literacy. This reading involves not two but three parties – text, teacher and pupils. Much of chapters 2 and 3 is devoted to locating this reading practice in its historical, institutional and intellectual contexts. From its origins in Alexandria, grammar (*grammatica*), the foundation of the liberal arts, provided the context for reading literature. Grammar is the art in which the skills and structures of reading the authors (*expositio auctorum*) are learned. In the twelfth century, where *grammatica* has become virtually synonymous with Latin, reading the classical *auctores* is instrumental in learning this, the language of religion, culture and knowledge. In other words, reading the authors is where what we would call linguistic and literary issues converge.

In the second part of this book, *Reading Practice*, I examine this grammatical *enarratio* of classical texts in some detail, using the scheme of medieval grammar – the letter, the syllable, the word and the phrase – to construct a taxonomy of glossing strategies and to test glossing against grammatical theory. The interaction and interdependence of linguistic theory and language pedagogy is a theme that runs throughout the book (but particularly in chapters 4, 7 and 8), and will, I hope, contribute to a more integrated picture of medieval *grammatica*. Moreover, as we move from the word through the phrase to the text, other issues that are crucial to both the literary and linguistic culture of the period recur. One is the role of the vernacular and its status. It is easy to assume that the vernacular simply acts as a key to the Latin language, but glossing practice shows that this is far from the case. Both at the level of the word (chapter 5) and the phrase (chapter 9), grammar's own expository traditions prove to be at the

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root of glossing strategies which seem initially to be indebted to vernacular structures. Another set of issues clusters around the notion of authority. How do grammarians convert the grammatical and stylistic complexities of authoritative, literary texts to linguistic use? How is literature used to learn a foreign language? Again, these questions will surface at the level of the word (chapter 6), the phrase (chapter 9) and the text (chapter 10). What happens to textual authority when the *auctores*, supposedly its guarantors, constantly overturn 'correct' grammar?

It is a central argument of this book that the reading practice we can uncover in the glosses has implications of a more theoretical kind for medieval literary culture and for the history of reading, and I explore these implications in chapters 10 and 11. The glosses' reading is profoundly intentionalist, that is to say, it privileges the notion of authorial intention over all other hermeneutic categories. This comes about because the *Satires* fulfilled a crucial demand made on texts in this period – that they be ethical – and, more importantly, fulfilled it at the literal level. Now, the literal sense and authorial intention are always allied in medieval exegetical theory, so that we have here a text that can be allowed to signify literally, that does not require conversion through allegory. However, because this is a text that uses figurative language, we have to extend and redefine what we mean by literal reading; it has to include figuration. In disciplinary terms, this means that the boundary in reading practice between grammar and rhetoric becomes impossible to sustain, since both address figurative language. Moreover, since the grammarian-expositor's use of the notion of intention effectively claims for him the authority of the poet, the boundary between gloss (grammar) and text (rhetoric) begins to dissolve. This reading impels us to rethink the sister arts of grammar and rhetoric, but, more importantly, it reveals the tensions in what has been termed the 'textuality of commentary' itself.<sup>5</sup> Is it master or servant? Authority or ancillary? These are vital questions, particularly for a culture that conceived of knowledge as commentary, as reading.

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Suzanne Reynolds

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PART I

Contexts for reading

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## Learning to read: the classics and the curriculum

Postquam alphabetum didicerit et ceteris puerilibus rudimentis imbutus fuerit, Donatum et illud moralitatis compendium quod Catonis esse vulgus opinatur addiscat, et ab *Ecloga* Theodoli transeat ad *eglogas* Bucolicorum, prelectis tamen quibusdam libellis informationi rudium necessariis. Deinde satiricos et ystoriographos legat, ut vitia etiam in minori etate addiscat esse fugienda et nobilia gesta eroum desideret imitari ... Placuit tamen viris autenticis carmina amatoria [Ovidii] ... subducenda esse a manibus adolescentium ... Gramatice daturus operam audiat et legat *Barbarismum* Donati et Prisciani maius volumen cum *Libro constructionum* ... Celestem paginam audire volens vir maturi pectoris, audiat tam *Vetus Instrumentum* quam *Novum Testamentum*.<sup>1</sup>

‘After he has learnt the alphabet and been imbued with certain other boyish (*puerilibus*) rudiments, let him learn Donatus and that useful moral compendium which is generally believed to be the work of Cato, and from the *Eclogues* of Theodolus let him move on to the *Bucolics* [of Virgil], having first however read some shorter works which are necessary for the instruction of the unlearned. From here, let him read the satirists and the historiographers, so that at a young age he might learn that vices too are to be avoided and he might desire to imitate the noble deeds of heroes ... However, certain men of authority hold that the love poetry [of Ovid] should be kept from the hands of adolescents ... When he is about to undertake the study of grammar, let him hear and read the *Barbarismus* of Donatus along with the *Priscianus maior*, and Priscian’s book on syntax ... The man of mature understanding who wants to read the sacred text, should listen to both the Old and the New Testament.

Alexander Nequam, *Sacerdos ad altare accessurus*, end of the twelfth century.

In this passage (in reality a conflation of passages from several folios of the manuscript), the English polymath Alexander Nequam pro-

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poses what we might term an anthropology of reading, where there is a direct correlation between stage of life, reading ability and the kind of text that it is permissible to read. It is, of course, a resolutely masculine anthropology, where boyhood (*pueritia*) demands a mastery of the alphabet, other linguistic rudiments and a wide range of Latin texts (which I shall discuss in more detail below), where adolescence (*adolescencia*) finds the learner only too susceptible to the seductions of pagan letters, and where mature manhood alone fits him to study the written texts of God's revelation. This attempt to merge moral and educational competence is, of course, a typically humanistic gesture and it will resurface regularly, in various forms, throughout this book.<sup>2</sup> But we should not let its superficial familiarity, nor the ease with which it moves from the alphabet to the Bible, blind us to its rather striking implications.

These become clearer if we look at the passage in more detail. The *puer* first learns the alphabet, that is to say, he learns to recognise letter forms visually and to voice the correct noise to go with them, for, as John of Salisbury remarks in the *Metalogicon*, 'letters, that is to say shapes, are primarily the signs of sounds' (*littere autem, idest figure, primum vocum indices sunt*).<sup>3</sup> For the later Middle Ages, particularly for the fifteenth century, we have a fair amount of iconographic and archaeological evidence for how children undertook this task. Danièle Alexandre-Bidon has amply demonstrated how the most ephemeral household object – a bowl, for example – could be brought into the service of acquiring literacy; decorated with letters, and in daily use, it becomes a way of familiarising the child with the basic currency of written language.<sup>4</sup> Of course, this penetration of the alphabet into the details of daily life is in itself an important indication of the increased literacy of the laity in the later Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup> In the sixteenth century, the horn book becomes the most common way to learn the alphabet, the syllables and the paternoster, but for our period, such material evidence is, perhaps inevitably, extremely rare. A thirteenth-century window in Chartres depicts Saint Lubin receiving from a monk a belt studded with the letters of the alphabet so that he might learn to read, but there are few other such representations.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, it is crucial to realise that the alphabet the *puer* learns is not the alphabet of the mother-tongue – French or English – but the alphabet of Latin. In other words, even at its very earliest stages, learning to read means learning to read a foreign language. This has the most profound effect on the reading practice I analyse in

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this book; indeed, it could be said to be the most important element in understanding the forms, processes and even personnel of that reading.

What then are the ‘boyish rudiments’ (*puerilia rudimenta*) that Nequam refers to next? In *From Memory to Written Record*, Michael Clanchy recounts an *exemplum* from the sermon collection of Jacques de Vitry (who died in 1240), which gives us a clue to the next stage in learning to read. A cleric in the choir of a church sees a devil weighed down by a heavy sack; the devil reveals that his burden is made up of the syllables mispronounced by the choir. These mispronunciations are a kind of vocal sin and, so the devil explains, mean that the choir have in effect stolen the prayers from God. In other words, what the *puer* learnt next was correct pronunciation so that he might be able to voice correctly the Latin words of the divine office. This is a correctness that extends from the linguistic into the spiritual sphere. At the most basic level, learning to pronounce meant combining letters into syllables and using the sound of those syllables to voice some fundamental religious material – the paternoster and the Creed, and perhaps, like Chaucer’s ‘litel clergeon’ in the Prioress’ tale, the Ave Maria.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes the Psalter itself was used to teach the syllables, and those who had achieved a minimal form of acquaintance with Latin were called *psalterati*. John of Salisbury for example, writes, *Dum enim puer ut Psalmos addiscerem/Sacerdoti traditus essem* (‘When I was a boy, I was taken to the priest so that I might learn the Psalter’).<sup>8</sup> The Psalter was recommended as a text to be learnt by heart by authors as important and influential as Jerome, Gregory the Great and Anselm, and it seems likely that it was text from which the syllables were learnt.<sup>9</sup> This claim is customarily reinforced by a note in a Psalter which belonged to Saint Louis of France: *Cist psaultiers fu monseigneur Saint Loys qui fu roys de France, auquel il apprit en s’enfance* (‘this Psalter belonged to Saint Louis of France, from which he learnt in his childhood’).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the Psalter was subject to word for word interlinear translation into Old French and Anglo-Saxon, and this betrays a strong dependence on the vernacular in the learning of the Psalter which suggests that it intervened at an early stage in the process of learning to read. The state of knowledge as it stands is summarised as follows by Nicholas Orme: ‘Boys in school began by learning the Latin alphabet . . . Next, they practised how to recognise Latin words, pronounce them, and sing them to the rules of plainsong. Liturgical books were used for

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this purpose, like the psalter and the antiphonal, in which the letters were written large and separately and therefore easy to read.<sup>11</sup>

It is significant that the young student can therefore come to the point of reciting parts of the sacred page of the Bible without fully understanding them, for the most elementary Latin grammar, the *Ars minor* of Donatus, comes after these rudiments.<sup>12</sup> That is not to say that the *rudimenta* contained no instruction in Latin vocabulary at all, but it does seem certain that the emphasis of the training was primarily phonological. Indeed, this proved a cause of concern for some scholars in the twelfth century. Peter Damian talks of those who read without understanding and who babble the text, syllable by syllable (*syllabatim ... balbutiant*).<sup>13</sup> But with the mention of Donatus, teacher of St Jerome, we move beyond this level of uncomprehending reiteration. The *Ars minor*, which has been called the most successful textbook in the history of Western culture, takes the learner into the realm of case, declension and conjugation. The treatment of the noun *sacerdos* ('priest') demonstrates the method:

Sacerdos nomen appellativum generis communis numeri singularis figurae compositae casus nominativi et vocativi, quod declinabitur sic: nominativo hic et haec sacerdos, genitivo huius sacerdos, dativo huic sacerdoti ...<sup>14</sup>

[*Sacerdos* is a common noun, of common gender, singular in number, composite in form, in the nominative and vocative case, which is declined as follows: in the nominative, *hic et haec sacerdos*, in the genitive *huius sacerdotis*, in the dative, *huic sacerdoti* ...]

The *Ars minor* provided the basis for instruction in Latin from the fourth until at least the fifteenth century (there were 340 printed editions from 1450 to 1500 alone), and, as the work of Brian Merilees has so clearly demonstrated, it also formed the model for the earliest grammars of French.<sup>15</sup> While, at the higher levels of grammatical inquiry, trends and fashions came and went, Donatus' *Ars minor* remained the foundation of the entire discipline. Its question and answer format had obvious pedagogic potential, and it provided exactly the right kind of information for the *puer* – information on the inflections of the parts of speech.

If Donatus was the basic grammar of Latin, Nequam's next text, the *Disticha* of Cato, was the basic grammar of pragmatic morality.<sup>16</sup> This 'third-century collection of moral and philosophical maxims which was gradually adapted to the ethical and doctrinal desiderata of



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Christianity', to quote Tony Hunt, was translated into the vernacular (Anglo-Norman), and enjoyed immense popularity.<sup>17</sup> The second couplet gives a representative taste of its flavour

Plus vigila semper nec somno deditus esto;  
nam diuturna quies vitiis alimenta ministrat<sup>18</sup>

[Always devote yourself more to waking than sleeping,/since long repose gives nourishment to the vices.]

Such was the utility of this text that it became the focus for the so-called *Liber catonianus*, a flexible grouping of texts found in several thirteenth-century manuscripts which were used for elementary pedagogic purposes.<sup>19</sup> One of these texts was the tenth-century *Eclogues* of Theodolus, a debate between Truth (Alithia) and Falsehood (Pseustis) on the relative merits of Christianity and paganism, which Nequam mentions next.<sup>20</sup>

At this point, the curriculum shifts to the pagan authors of ancient Rome. The student proceeds to the study of Statius, Virgil, Lucan, Juvenal and Horace, grouped together as satirists and historiographers, both terms designed to reassure the medieval reading community of their moral standing.<sup>21</sup> Soon afterwards, and with several predictable caveats, Ovid is recommended.<sup>22</sup> It is only after the completion of this wide-ranging course on Latin literature that the learner returns to texts dealing with the technicalities of Latin grammar itself. Here Nequam recommends Donatus' *Barbarismus* (on the figures and tropes), Priscian's teaching on the parts of speech and syntax in both his *Institutiones grammaticae* and his *Partitiones*, and works on meter: *Gramatice daturus operam audiat et legat Barbarismum Donati et Prisciani maius volumen cum Libro constructionum*.<sup>23</sup> This description of the grammatical curriculum leaves no room for doubt; literary authors, and principally classical authors, were an essential part of grammatical instruction, of instruction in the earlier stages of learning Latin.

This pedagogic practice – often mentioned but rarely explored – constitutes the sphere of inquiry for this book.<sup>24</sup> If classical *auctores* are an instrumental part of learning Latin, what precisely does it mean that students 'read' them? How does this affect our notion of what medieval reading was? And how far was that reading shaped by the discipline – *grammatica* – of which it appears to be an integral part? The question also needs to be asked in reverse: what does this reading

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practice mean for how we think about *grammatica* itself, the foundation of medieval textual culture?<sup>25</sup>

However, before we go on to look at these more general questions in the next chapter, I want to spend some time delineating more precisely the *fortuna* and role of Horace's *Satires*, the classical text which forms the focus of this study. Consider the following statement, taken from an *accessus* to Horace in a Vatican manuscript (MS Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. lat. 1780 (R)) whose glossing is central to my arguments about reading and the curriculum:

Quedam enim sciuntur ut sciantur sicut evangelia, quedam propter aliud, ut auctores.

[Moreover some things, like the Gospels, are known for their own sake, [whereas] others, like the authors, [are known] for the sake of something else.]<sup>26</sup>

Here we have a perfect illustration of the pragmatic, highly directed approach to the reading of authoritative texts which, I shall argue, characterises the nature of the classical *auctor's* role in medieval *grammatica*. Whereas the study of the Scriptures is an end in itself and requires no further justification, the study of the *auctores* is fundamentally ancillary; it has what might be termed instrumental status. It is done with a certain end in view – achieving literacy – and is important in so far as it helps to achieve that end. This is not to say that the reading and study of classical authors like Horace was unimportant, but it is to qualify one view of the medieval reception of ancient texts, in which Horace, Ovid and Virgil are cherished for their own sakes as the representatives of a treasured cultural heritage. In some cases, this view is valid. For example, in the early twelfth century, William of Malmesbury's extensive copying and collecting of ancient texts is a truly scholarly activity, and it is probably safe to say that in the second half of the century, John of Salisbury demonstrates a classical learning of some breadth. Both are *litteratus* ('literate') in the fullest, Roman sense.<sup>27</sup> But these are the exceptions. In most cases, contact with classical texts is 'for the sake of something else' (*propter aliud*), and it is the aim of this book to discuss the nature and purpose of that contact.

Glossing on the *Satires* of Horace provides the perfect forum in which to explore these issues. Horace's works in general enjoyed a stable transmission throughout the Middle Ages, and this stability allows for the development of an unbroken tradition of Horatian