Introduction

In considering three countries and four languages from the early to the late Middle Ages this book has perforce to be highly selective, omitting what others might have included. It has been written by a Germanist, and the picture would look different (but supplementary?) from another discipline. The main purpose behind this wide span is to suggest comparisons between what may otherwise be seen in isolation, in the conviction that medieval studies cannot be monoglot and that questions raised and work done in one literature may illuminate the position in others. This span and the selectivity it imposes mean that a consecutive historical development cannot be traced here or any differentiation between periods and regions attempted. My argument rests largely on textual evidence, although I also make use of recent palaeographical and codicological work on texts written by or for women.

In 1935 Grundmann published an essay on the role of women in medieval literature. Since then much work has been done on this theme, including a post-war article by him on medieval literacy. Combining these two themes, the title of this book refers to women and to readers. Accordingly, it falls into two parts, the first dealing with how reading was understood and practised in the Middle Ages and how it differed from modern reading, and the second with the various categories of women who read and were engaged in literature. The first part aims to give as wide a coverage as possible to the nature of reading (whether women are specifically mentioned or not), because only on this basis can any assessment of their reading be made. To discuss their activity without previously considering what was then meant by reading risks unthinkingly importing modern ideas into a quite different situation. Women may therefore not always be apparent in the first part of this book, but they come into their own in the second only because of this preparatory evaluation.

What this book attempts is a factual survey of the many different classes of women in three countries (Germany, France, England) who were active

as readers or otherwise engaged in literature, but also of what kinds of text they read and to some extent how they read. In a companion volume under active preparation, *Gendered reading around 1200*, I focus on three of the earliest romances in Germany, together with their French antecedents, asking how their male authors made a special appeal to women and their interests.

PART I

Reading in the Middle Ages

A book like this one which treats of women readers in the Middle Ages cannot avoid considering the nature of literacy and reading in that period, what differences there are from modern views and how things may have changed even in the Middle Ages.

A thorough discussion of medieval literacy was presented by the historian Grundmann, for whom it covered three features: it was the monopoly of clerics, who were able to read and write, and did this in the medium of Latin.[1] In conducting his survey from classical to medieval practice largely in Latin, his equation of literacy with Latinity reflects and does not question the medieval cleric's view that literacy was restricted to his own Latin world. Moreover, as the ample evidence adduced makes clear, there is much to support this view. In the first place, literacy or *litteratus* was often explicitly equated with Latinity. To speak *literaliter* or *literate* meant to speak Latin. In French, Latin was seen as the prerogative of a *lettrez* (*litteratus* or cleric) as distinct from a layman, so that a work was translated from Latin into French for those who did not understand 'la lettre'. In German *buochisch* meant the language of books or Latin. In England Ælfric equated the acquisition of Latin with literacy.[2] Secondly, literacy or the ability to read was seen as the hallmark of the cleric, as when, in French, Latin literature ('lettre en Latyn') is equated with *clergie* or elsewhere letters (*lettreure*) likewise with *clergie*.[3] Thirdly, the converse is also frequently attested: the layman was one who had no Latin and therefore could not read. A drastic illustration comes from England when, for lack of instruction in *grammatica*, the canons of

[1] Grundmann, *AfK* 40 (1958), 1–65; Green, *Listening*, pp. 8–10. By stressing that 'generally' *litterati* were clerics and monks, men of the Church and monastery (p. 14), Grundmann appears to suggest that a woman could not be *litterata* and thereby to question the theme of this book. Our task will be to question what precisely is implied by Grundmann's use of 'generally' (twice).

[2] *Literaliter*: Grundmann, *AfK* 40 (1958), 4; Ohly, *ZfdA* 87 (1956/7), 16f; *Lettrez*: Legge, *Literature*, p. 95; *Lettre*: Vitz, *Orality*, p. 55; *Buochisch*: BMZ I 280; Ælfric: Hill, 'Learning', p. 7.

[3] Legge, *Literature*, p. 288; Bell, *Nuns*, p. 69.

Newnham neglected their books and were regarded virtually as laymen ('quasi . . . laici').[4]

Underlining these three features is the greatest merit of Grundmann's argument, his demonstration of how different medieval literacy was from modern: in being restricted to Latin and to the clergy, and its exclusion of laymen and women. Included in this, however, is a point where he fails to make a distinction. In referring to the clerics' ability to read and write he is importing a modern view of literacy into the Middle Ages, when the ability to read did not imply the skill of writing, and reading was regarded as an intellectual faculty, but writing as a quite separate technical skill.[5] From this criticism of a detail we may turn to more fundamental shortcomings in Grundmann's thesis.

Judging medieval literacy by the criterion of understanding Latin has been rightly termed narrow, especially since, by definition, it excludes vernacular literacy and thereby continues the polarity between literate clergy and illiterate laity which it was in the clerics' interest to maintain.[6] Such a restrictive view hampers our assessment of the most important development in this period, the rise of written literature in the vernacular for laymen. Doubts have been voiced whether the two sets of opposites with which Grundmann worked (clerical and lay, literate and illiterate) do justice to the complexity of the case.[7] We need to spread our net wider and take account of the position in at least four contexts: social status (layman and cleric), educational status (illiterate and literate), language (vernacular and Latin) and means of communication (oral and written).

If we apply a more complex grid like this some of Grundmann's opposites no longer appear watertight as theory succumbs to reality. In the first place, not every cleric was literate or Latinate. An important example, disturbing of Grundmann's thesis because it breaks down his distinction between literate cleric and illiterate layman, comes from Philip of Harvengt.[8] Speaking of some clerics, he applies to them terms conventionally used of illiterate laymen (*simplices, idiotae, illitterati*) because of their deplorable Latin. Later, Philip goes much further by bringing a literate layman, a knight, into play. He says of this knight, able to read with understanding and to speak Latin correctly, that he is a better cleric than many a priest. Even though Philip realises that he is using terminology incorrectly ('improprii sermonis usus'), the situation he describes is closer to reality than the theory that laymen were by definition illiterate. That this was no isolated usage is

[4] Bell, *Nuns*, p. 85, n. 46. [5] Schreiner, *ZHF* 11 (1984), 328, n. 254; Clanchy, *Memory*, p. 47.
[6] Clanchy, *Memory*, p. 9; Green, *Listening*, p. 8. [7] Bruckner, *Shaping*, p. 194.
[8] PL 203, 701 and 816. Cf. Vàrvaro, *SMV* 10 (1962), 305.

confirmed by the German prose *Lancelot* saying of its knightly hero that he could read ('Er kund wol lesen'), just as Heinrich von dem Türlin says of him in the *Crône* that he was both a knight and, because of his ability to read, a cleric ('der zweier ampte pflac/Daz er ritter unde pfaffe was').[9] Medievalist scholarship reflects this position by talking of a *miles clericus* or *miles litteratus*.[10]

These last two failures of medieval reality to conform to clerical theory (unlearned clerics, educated laymen) could occur as exceptions to the rule at any time in the Middle Ages (although the educated laymen begins to be more noticeable only from the twelfth century). By contrast, a third feature (the layman's literacy is confined to the vernacular, which involves an increasing vernacularisation of written literature) is characteristic of the late Middle Ages, with earliest traces in the twelfth century. An early example is the heretic Valdes who asks two clerics to translate the gospels for him to read for use in his sermons: he could therefore read, but not in Latin. By Grundmann's thesis Valdes must be judged *illitteratus* (which is how Walter Map saw him), but that is to judge him by the categories of clerics with a vested interest in denying the possibility of vernacular literacy.[11]

Although Grundmann's definition has the merit of showing where medieval literacy differed from modern, its terms have the disadvantage of concealing changes within the Middle Ages, especially with regard to the turning-point of the twelfth century and the historically decisive emergence of vernacular literacy for laymen. Riché's studies of medieval education have stressed the importance of this century, indicating the first beginnings of a vernacular culture which, however much it owed to Latin, slowly made itself independent and encouraged a literature for laymen, some of whom were literate in a new sense, vernacular rather than Latin.[12]

This change in the nature of literacy also affected reading, involving what has been called a 'prise de conscience de l'acte de lire', which encouraged reflection on the nature of reading.[13] John of Salisbury was on the brink of distinguishing three meanings for the verb *legere*, but then leaves it at two. He says that the word 'to read' is equivocal, indicating either the activity of a teacher reading out and a listening learner ('docentis et discentis') or that of studying what is written for oneself ('per se scrutantis scripturam').[14]

[9] *Crône* 2075–7. Cf. Steinhoff, *Prosalancelot* IV 830f.
[10] Vàrvaro, *SMV* 10 (1962), 313–21; Turner, *AHR* 83 (1978), 928–45; Fleckenstein, 'Miles', pp. 319f.
[11] Grundmann, *Bewegungen*, pp. 29f. and *AfK* 40 (1958), 56f.; Green, *Listening*, p. 10.
[12] Riché, 'L'instruction', pp. 212–17; *CCM* 5 (1962), 175–82; 'L'éducation', pp. 37–49.
[13] Hamesse, 'Modèle', p. 125. [14] *Metalogicon* I 24. Quoted in Green, *Listening*, p. 337, n. 155.

John therefore refers to three different persons (teacher, learner, individual reader), but lumps the first two together by seeing them under *prelectio*, the communication between teacher and pupil, as distinct from *lectio*, individual reading. By thus squeezing out the learner-listener (*discens*) from the usage of *legere*, John has confined himself to a double function of this verb. He therefore remains content with the suggested distinction between *prelegere* (to read aloud to others) and *legere* (to read for oneself).

Hugh of St Victor (paralleled by Abelard) is not content with this, but rescues the threefold distinction latent in John's words.[15] Unlike John, Hugh explicitly refers to three kinds of reading ('Trimodum est lectionis genus') and grants an independent role to the pupil alongside the teacher and the individual reader (*docentis, discentis, vel per se inspicientis*). Accordingly, Hugh establishes three functions of the verb *legere*: for the teacher who reads aloud to his pupil ('lego librum illi'), for the pupil who is read to and therefore reads through the teacher ('lego librum ab illo') and for the individual reader ('lego librum'). Hugh is concerned with the theme of teaching, but his classification is also applicable more widely: the teacher can be replaced by someone reading out a text on occasions outside the classroom, and the pupil by any listener.

Such a threefold distinction, made already in the twelfth century, should alert us to the need for a broader spectrum than Grundmann provided, allowing for a number of variables taken into account in what follows (in reading itself, but also in writing; in the level of Latin involved, but also in the position of the vernacular). Just as there were different degrees of literacy, so were there different ways of reading. Following Hugh of St Victor, we too need to interpret 'reading' in its broadest sense, including listening to a text being read aloud to others.

This broad interpretation underlies the division of Part I into two chapters on reading in the literal and figurative senses. 'Literal reading' consists in visual reading of written letters that make up words and constitute meaning. This has to be distinguished, on the other hand, from 'figurative reading', involving a process of reading with one's mind's eye, in the imagination, not of actually written letters.

[15] *Didascalicon* III 8 (PL 176, 772); Green, *Listening*, p. 347, n. 179. Abelard: Coleman, *Reading*, pp. 90f.

CHAPTER I

Literal reading

READING TO ONESELF

In this section we deal with the individual reader, termed by John of Salisbury 'per se scrutans scripturam' and by Hugh of St Victor 'per se inspiciens' (scrutinising, inspecting a text by oneself), whose activity is described by 'lectio' and 'lego librum' respectively. In what follows I give examples for women reading, but not confined to them, since our concern here is with the nature of medieval reading as such. Only after establishing on a wide basis what was meant by reading in the Middle Ages can we turn to consider explicitly women engaged in this. If *legere* (like its vernacular equivalents) is as equivocal as these two writers make it out to be, we need to look for pointers suggesting what meaning is present.

A first indicator is the use of the verb with a reflexive dative, the situation of reading to oneself, engaged in communion with a written text.[1] The Benedictine Rule prescribed individual reading by the monk for himself ('sibi legere'), a construction which is followed in vernacular versions. Similarly, Otfrid conceived reception of his work by an individual reader ('lis thir selbo'), as did Notker with another verb for 'reading' ('sih dir selbo lector' see for yourself reader). Although they are not explicitly mentioned, women can be included here as readers (as nuns for whom *lectio divina* was also prescribed or as possible recipients of Otfrid's or Notker's works).[2] This grammatical construction can also be used expressly of them, however, as in the reading programme laid down for anchoresses by Aelred of Rievaulx ('sibi secretius legat'), where the adverb stresses solitary withdrawal for the act of individual reading.[3]

A second pointer is the reinforcement of a reflexive sense such as Latin *ipse* or German *selbo* (the latter already illustrated by Otfrid and Notker in their construction).[4] As reinforcements such words make it clear that the

[1] Green, *Listening*, pp. 136f.
[2] Women recipients: *ibid.*, pp. 180, 184.
[3] *De institutione*, p. 645.
[4] Green, *Listening*, pp. 137–9, with these examples.

person addressed could independently read the text and did not rely on having it read out (a possibility also envisaged by Otfrid and Notker). This can be made explicitly clear by a double formula expressing two modes of reception, by reading oneself or by hearing someone read. In Latin William of Malmesbury addresses Robert of Gloucester in this way ('aut ipsi legere, aut legentes possitis audire'), and in German Wetzel von Bernau highlights the reader by contrast with the listener (' . . . höret lesen/oder selber liset'). So common is this twofold reception that it can be implicit even without a double formula. Chrétien's Lancelot is able to read the names on a tombstone himself ('il meïsmes . . . /comença lors les nons a lire'), independently of the monk who accompanies him, just as in the *Rolandslied* Marsilie is able to read a letter himself from Karl ('selbe er den brief las'), since he is expressly described as educated (literate) and therefore can dispense with a scribe reading for him, as was frequently done in the Middle Ages.[5] How a woman reader may be signalled in this way is shown by Ulrich von Etzenbach, even though he uses a visual verb other than *lesen*. When Candacis receives a messenger with a letter she retires into a private room ('an ir heimelîche') and reads it ('die schrift selbe si besach').[6] Secluded in this way, not in full view of the messenger, who would normally also convey his message orally, the queen is shown to be reading to herself.

This last example, where seeing stands for reading, leads us to a third pointer, where a visual verb conveys the idea of reading.[7] This is made clear where writing is also mentioned ('to see something in writing'), where no amount of merely seeing a text can convey its contents if actual reading is not meant. Veldeke therefore refers to reading his source in two ways: either 'alse ich't geschreven sach' or 'alse ich et las', with no difference of meaning, while Wolfram presupposes women readers with his equivalent of the first construction ('diu diz maere geschriben siht'). The same usage occurs in French, as when Béroul refers to what he had read in his source: '(L)a ou Berox le vit escrit'.[8]

Much more common, however, is the use of a verb of seeing by itself. Hugh of St Victor used *inspicere* of the individual reader, and the same verb refers to a nun being permitted, if sufficiently educated, to read more than the Psalter ('in aliquem alium librum inspicere').[9] In German the most common equivalent is *sehen*, sometimes with a further preposition or

[5] *Lancelot* 1863f. *Rolandslied* 2113. Cf. Köhn, 'Latein', pp. 340–56.
[6] *Alexandreis* 20271–5. [7] Green, *Listening*, pp. 139–41.
[8] Veldeke, *Servatius* 1560, 4808. Wolfram, *Parzival* 337, 1–3. Béroul, *Tristran* 1790.
[9] Beach, *Women*, p. 115.

prefix. The meaning is clear in what Veldeke says of the Sibyl holding a book in her hand: 'dar ane sah si unde las', but also when Gottfried depicts Isold reading names carved on chips of wood for an assignation ('und sach sie an,/si las'), since looking is an integral part of her reading.[10] Another German verb used in this way is *schouwen* implying, like *ansehen*, rather closer scrutiny than *sehen*. In the epilogue to Veldeke's *Eneasroman* it is said that he gave the still incomplete work to the Countess of Cleves to read ('her liez ez einer frouwen/ze lesene und ze schouwen'), where the two verbs reinforce the idea of reading and are not to be distinguished as implying reading and looking at the pictures of an illustrated manuscript. One reason for rejecting this suggestion is the fact that *schouwen* can denote reading as conventionally as *sehen*. Before Veldeke a parallel between *lesen* and *schouwen* had been drawn by Priester Wernher with regard to his work's reception, expressly including women alongside clerics, so that they cannot be regarded as second-class recipients, confined to merely looking rather than reading. Similarly, when in the fifteenth-century *Münchner Oswald* the protagonist breaks open a sealed letter and 'begund den prief schauen eben', we are not to picture him gazing at it uncomprehendingly, but reading it.[11]

Corresponding to these German examples, we find *veoir* employed in French (Lancelot's reading of the names on the tombstones is commented on by the monk: 'Vos avez les lettres veües') and equivalent verbs later still in Middle English. With Gower Socrates' wife is annoyed to find her husband reading ('Was sette and loked on a book') while she worked. Whereas it may be uncertain in *Troilus and Criseyde* whether Pandarus is actually reading or pretending ('As for to looke upon an old romaunce'), even the appearance is meant to suggest reading. Hoccleve uses *ouersy* ('oversee') in the sense 'to read'.[12]

The search for the individual reader in the Middle Ages cannot neglect the term to designate him or her, the *lector*.[13] This confronts us with the difficulty of which John of Salisbury was well aware: if contemporary usage (even his own sometimes) failed to distinguish *legere* from *prelegere*, how can we be certain when the noun *lector* denotes the individual reader rather than one reading to others? Here too we need indicators. Although Otfrid uses *legentes* to refer to those who deliver his work orally, he also employs

[10] Veldeke, *Eneasroman* 2715 (following B and FS, although Kartschoke prefers the reading *saz*). Gottfried, *Tristan* 14677–8.
[11] Veldeke, *Eneasroman* 13445–6. Priester Wernher, *Maria* A 138–41. *Münchner Oswald* 1418.
[12] Chrétien, *Lancelot* 1877. Gower, *Confessio* 3, 659. Chaucer, *Troilus* III 980. Hoccleve: Coleman, *Reading*, pp. 193f.
[13] Green, *Listening*, pp. 142–7, for these and other examples.

the same word to denote the individual reader to whom he wishes to make his meaning perfectly clear. When Notker, who also reckoned with oral delivery, recommends the individual reader of his *Psalter* to consult Augustine he calls him a *lector*, just as Williram uses 'studiosus lector' in his prologue, whom he refers to an earlier point in his work by the visual sign X. Women play a part as individual readers with a woman author who with rare explicitness not merely refers to her audience as readers and listeners, but also divides the former into male and female ('leser und leserinne')[14]. A variant of the term 'reader' is 'whoever may read this book', which occurs at the conclusion of the *Tristan* of Ulrich von Türheim: 'swelhe vrouwen an disem buoche lesen'. Ulrich von Lichtenstein is even more pointblank in likewise recommending his book to women readers ('die vrouwen suln ez gerne lesen'), whilst Der Pleier includes them with men in the same role.[15] Whether distinguished by their sex or not, individual readers can also be addressed in French (*lecteur* and *lisiere*) and in English as the *redere*, whom Chaucer addresses only once in his *Troilus and Criseyde*.[16]

Although these cases all pertain to one individual reader, there are also occasions where two persons, with close emotional ties, are shown reading together, although we have no means of telling how their reading was conducted: did one read throughout to the other, did they take it in turns to do so, or did they literally both read together? The classic example is Dante's Paolo and Francesca reading the romance of *Lancelot* together, with its close pictorial counterpart in the Manesse manuscript where, in the illustration for Alram von Gresten, two lovers are shown reading a book together, the opening words of which are those of the *Lanzelet* of Ulrich von Zatzikhoven.[17] Another example is the story of *Floire et Blancheflor* in which the two lovers, brought up together as children, read classical literature together ('Ensamle lisent et aprendent'), in particular a work which Konrad Fleck in his German version calls the 'buoch von minnen', presumably Ovid's *Ars amatoria*. Likewise, Chaucer's Deiphebus, the brother of Troilus, joins Helen in studying and reading a text between them.[18]

Another pointer to the individual reader is a phrasing on which we have already touched in passing: the double formula referring to an author's anticipation of his work's reception in two ways: by readers or by listeners.[19]

[14] *Secretum*, 4, 34.
[15] Ulrich von Türheim, *Tristan* 3658. Ulrich von Lichtenstein, *Frauenbuch* 2130. Der Pleier: Scholz, *Hören*, p. 50.
[16] French: Scholz, *Hören*, p. 46. *Troilus* V 270.
[17] Green, *Listening*, p. 306, and Walther, *Codex*, pl. 103.
[18] *Floire* 239. Fleck, *Flore* 712–7. Chaucer, *Troilus* II 1702–8.
[19] Green, *Listening*, pp. 93f., 141f., 225–30.