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Introduction

Modern readers of Alfred's translation of the *De consolatione Philosophiae* are often struck by his assimilating into the Old English version his own late ninth-century preoccupations and intellectual pursuits. The Alfredian *Consolation* is a thoroughly English work, shaped by the virtues and limitations of the native language of its translator. Alfred's temporal concerns and his desire for a coherent programme of English education based upon the translation of those Latin works 'most necessary for all men to know' define the character of the text, especially in the king's editorial comments and his simplification of Boethius's philosophy.[1] But the process of translation also took place at a level even more elemental than that of idea or syntax or word through the reduction or omission of the visual information contained in the written Latin text. The Old English text of the second redaction (that including the metres) incorporates none of the standard graphic cues, for example, capitalization, lineation, punctuation, which ensure the readability of the *metra* in the contemporary Latin manuscripts. The omission – certainly not conscious, but just as certainly habitual – of these cues is the first clue which the otherwise silent Old English manuscripts provide us for examining reading and literacy in Anglo-Saxon England.

London, BL, Cotton Otho A. vi is the unique copy of the second

[1] For an overview of scholarship on Alfred's *Consolation*, see M. Godden, 'King Alfred's Boethius', in *Boethius: his Life, Thought and Influence*, ed. M. Gibson (Oxford, 1981), pp. 419–24, and A. J. Frantzen, *King Alfred* (Boston, 1986), pp. 43–66 and 125–8. For the Latin sources available to Alfred, see J. S. Wittig, 'King Alfred's *Boethius* and its Latin Sources. a Reconsideration', *ASE* 11 (1983), 157–98. J. M. Bately discusses Alfred's expectations for his programme of education in *The Literary Prose of King Alfred's Reign: Translation or Transformation?* (inaugural lecture, University of London, 1980), p. 7.

redaction of Alfred's translation of the *De consolatione* (see pl. I). Ker assigns the manuscript to the mid-tenth century and considers it the work of one scribe.[2] The manuscript only barely survived the Cotton fire, and most of its leaves are so crumbled, charred and shrivelled that punctuation is difficult to detect and spacing and proportion impossible to determine. Yet despite the manuscript's unfortunate condition, it is possible to identify the textual format in the burned sections, and to distinguish other graphic cues in the later leaves.

The scribe of Otho A. vi habitually separates prose from the metres by leaving a space at the end of each discrete section of text. The section (whether prose or metre) is marked terminally by heavy punctuation (. , .), and the rest of the line is left blank. Each new section was intended to begin with a large capital, three or four lines high, but the capitals were never filled in.[3] This arrangement is the manuscript's only concession to the distinction between prose and verse, and exists, perhaps, as a consequence of the later substitution of metres for most of the original Old English prose paraphrases. As modern readers turn the leaves of this sadly damaged manuscript, they see line upon line of unrelieved text, little blank space, few capitals, and extremely light pointing. The significance of the formatting, a consequence of the text's paucity of visual information, only emerges distinctly by contrast. Were one to place alongside the Old English *Consolation* in Otho A. vi any tenth-century English copy of the Latin *De consolatione*, the difference in formatting, especially the care devoted to the spatial arrangement of the Latin text, would be immediately striking.

Perhaps the most obvious place to begin exploring the implications of the formatting of the Latin *De consolatione* is Oxford, Bodleian Library, Auct. F. 1. 15, pt 1 (see pl. II). This deluxe text of the *De consolatione* was copied at St Augustine's, Canterbury in the second half of the tenth century.[4] It is a beautiful specimen of Latin scholarly literacy. The book was designed to present both text and commentary, with space ruled for the text approximately 14 cm wide and that for the commentary 6.5 cm wide. Signes-de-renvoi in the text direct the reader to the margins for

[2] *Catalogue*, no. 167.

[3] See, for example, 35r, 40r and 46r. *The Paris Psalter and the Meters of Boethius*, ed. G. P. Krapp, ASPR 5 (New York and London, 1932), l–li, provides a table of small capitals in the manuscript.

[4] T. A. M. Bishop, *English Caroline Minuscule* (Oxford, 1971), p. 7 and pl. VII.

commentary. The *metra* are carefully set off from the prose text. Each *metrum* begins with a large ornamental green capital, and each verse within it begins with a capital in orange. Prose sections begin with a violet capital initial. The first line of each *metrum* and each prose is in capitals. *Metra* are written one verse to a line, with the exception of *metra* in dimeter, whose verses are set out in two columns.

While Auct. F. 1. 15 is unusual in the fine quality of its design and execution, it is hardly unique among English tenth-century manuscripts of the *De consolatione* in its highly visual layout. All of the surviving tenth-century copies (CUL, Kk. 3. 21, Cambridge, Trinity College O. 3. 7, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, lat. 6401A, 14380 and 17814) distinguish verse from prose by writing the *metra* one verse to a line and beginning each verse with a coloured capital initial.

One might dismiss the difference between the formatting of Otho A. vi and that of the Anglo-Latin manuscripts by remarking that Otho A. vi is unique in transmitting the Old English metres of the *Consolation*. However, while it may be the only surviving copy of the Old English metres, it is otherwise an unremarkable manuscript, certainly not unique in its formatting of a text with both prose and verse. The manuscripts of the West Saxon translation of the *Historia ecclesiastica* (for Caedmon's *Hymn*),[5] those of Alfred's translation of the *Regula pastoralis* (for the *Metrical Preface*),[6] those of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (for the six *Chronicle* poems),[7] to mention but a few, all transmit Old English works in both prose and poetry, but make no distinction in the formatting of verse and prose.

In contrast, throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, Latin manuscripts written in England regularly distinguished verse from prose through the use of a set of conventional visual cues.[8] That this should be so for Latin and not for Old English raises some important questions about the writing (and reading) of each language. Why, in the same centres and at the same time, did conventions for writing verse in the two languages differ so funda-

[5] These are: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Tanner 10; Oxford, Corpus Christi College 279; CCCC 41; CUL Kk. 3. 18.

[6] These are: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 20; CCCC 12; Cambridge, Trinity College R. 5. 22; CUL, Ii. 2. 4.

[7] That is, those poems composed in so-called 'classical' verse. The manuscripts are: CCCC 173; BL, Cotton Tiberius A. vi; Cotton Tiberius B. i; Cotton Tiberius B. iv.

[8] See O'Keeffe, 'Graphic Cues', p. 144.

mentally? What information do visual cues provide for a written text? What can the absence of these cues in Old English poetic manuscripts reveal about the nature of the literacy underlying the written verse they transmit?

In my view, the answers to these questions must begin with the understanding that a 'text' has a material reality intimately dependent on the transmitting manuscript.[9] Speaking is in essence a temporal act, and spoken communication depends on the presence of the audience before a speaker. In speech, certain aspects of meaning are time-dependent, for emphasis, clarity, surprise and suspense all depend on the speaker's modulation of his or her speech in time. When a work is written, however, its tempo no longer depends on the speaker or writer. In fact, tempo virtually disappears, because writing is language made spatial. Surprise and emphasis, and especially clarity, now depend on the transformations of temporal modulations into space. Writing thus introduces a new element of meaning into previously aural language: significant space. Irregular pauses in the stream of speech become conventionalized in writing by more or less regular spaces between 'words'.[10] Dots and marks indicate special status for portions of text; scripts and capitals indicate a hierarchy of material and meaning.[11] Literacy thus becomes a process of spatializing the once-exclusively temporal, and the thought-shaping technology of writing is an index of the development of this process.

In the hypothetical case of an originally oral poem, for example, committing the work to writing involves loss and gain – loss of interpretative performance but gain in the conservation of the poem. That loss is gradually, though never completely, compensated for by the addition of graphic cues that add information which guides interpretation. The fewer

[9] This approach is essentially in opposition to the distinction which Roland Barthes makes between 'work' and 'text' in his widely published 1971 essay, 'From Work to Text', in R. Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. R. Howard (New York, 1986), pp. 56–64.

[10] On the functional difference between spoken and written word, see Bäuml, 'Varieties', pp. 247–8. See also Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp. 30–73, esp. 39.

[11] Until M. B. Parkes's book on punctuation appears, see E. M. Thompson, *An Introduction to Greek and Latin Palaeography* (Oxford, 1912), pp. 55–64, for an overview of arrangement of text, punctuation and accents. For a convenient summary of early conventions of punctuation to mark the colon, comma and periodus, see Isidore, *Etymologiae* I.xx.1–6. P. McGurk, 'Citation Marks in Early Latin Manuscripts', *Scriptorium* 15 (1961), 3–13, discusses scribal practices for distinguishing quoted material.

the number of graphic cues in the written message, the greater the information a reader must bring to the text in order simply to read it. Non-lexical graphic cues – hierarchy of script, capitals, lineation, significant space (for division of morphemes or larger units of meaning) and punctuation – all develop as graphic analogues to oral interpretative cues. Both oral and graphic cues function to regulate the reception of the work by an audience. For early vernacular works (whether oral or written in origin), the transmitting manuscript does not merely ensure the survival of the work as a text through the operation of a technology of preservation; it actually determines conditions for the reception and transmission of the work.

The physical arrangement of a text on a page thus becomes a crucial constituent of its meaning. The less predictable a work to its reader (for verse, the less formulaic its language or the less conventional its narrative) the more necessary become graphic cues to assist its reading and decoding. In addition, the material reality of 'text' reveals the dependence of the manuscript's realization of the work upon a unique act of reception. However they may have been composed, Old English poetic works survive in manuscripts much removed from the circumstances of their composition. And as the discussion of reading and textual variance in the ensuing chapters will demonstrate, the circumstances of copying ensured that each record of a poem would be different from any other.[12] Given these features of early manuscript transmission, the usual distinction between the reality of the 'poem' (as an abstract conception to be approximated by careful editing) and its realizations in the manuscripts is illusory.[13]

An undertaking which sets out to examine the early development of literacy within a language and a culture must necessarily have as the object of its study the manuscript records. As its title suggests, this present book studies the manuscript records of Old English verse in order to explore a particular cultural moment in the history of writing – a transitional state between orality and literacy. I contend in the following chapters that the condition of literacy in Anglo-Saxon England was very different from what we understand as 'literacy' in our own society. By this statement I refer not to the numbers of individuals who might be judged to have been able to read in Anglo-Saxon England, but, more significantly, to the very practice

[12] See Sisam, *Studies*, pp. 29–44. For a defence of conservative editing in the light of scribal knowledge see Stanley, 'Unideal Principles'.

[13] See below, p. 78, n. 5.

of reading, the decoding strategies of readers, their presuppositions, visual conventions and understanding of space. My argument will be that the manuscript records of Old English poetry witness a particular mode of literacy, and examination of significant variants and of developing graphic cues for the presentation of verse (such as mise-en-page, spacing, capitalization and punctuation) provide strong evidence of persisting residual orality in the reading and copying of poetry in Old English. The first task, however, must be the definition of terms.

LITERACY: MODERN DEFINITIONS AND MEDIEVAL PRACTICE

The nature and extent of literacy in Anglo-Saxon England are issues fundamental to an understanding of early English thought. Examination of the orality underlying the Homeric poems gave rise to an explosion in our understanding of the early Greek world-view. Following the studies of Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord, Eric Havelock, for example, used the tension between entrenched orality and growing literacy to examine the nature of Greek oral consciousness.[14] Studies of the impact of literacy on a culture have extended well beyond literary criticism to include anthropology, psychology and history.[15] Incorporating the results of such studies, Walter Ong has suggested that literacy does indeed restructure consciousness but that the process is quite slow.[16] Understanding the nature of that oral consciousness and the process of modification which encroaching literacy engendered is the most important task facing current Old English scholarship. Without an accurate understanding of the consciousness which determined the contemporary reception of Old

[14] See M. Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse: the Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. A. Parry (Oxford, 1971) and Lord, *Singer of Tales*. See also E. A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, MA, 1963), and his *Origins of Western Literacy*, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Monograph Series 14 (Toronto, 1976).

[15] See most recently Goody, *Interface*. Following Goody's lead (in *Domestication*), Scribner and Cole (*The Psychology of Literacy*, p. 236) 'approach literacy as a set of socially organized practices'. For studies of the effect of developing twelfth-century literacy, see Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, and B. Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, 1983).

[16] See Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p. 115. See also W. J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven and London, 1967), pp. 53–87 and Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology*, pp. 23–48.

English poetry, modern criticism may all too easily misread the verse which is left.

The last few years have seen much interest in the possible oral roots of Old English poetry. In the history of Old English scholarship, the subject is a relatively recent one, having taken its impetus from the work of Parry and Lord. Those arguing the orality of Old English verse have had to confront the traditional view of the canon, namely that whatever the origins and process of transmission, the versions which have been preserved are written, and therefore literate, texts. Over the years, the proponents of orality in Old English verse have attempted a variety of strategies to demonstrate their case. The simplest of these is Francis Magoun's analysis of the oral formula, in which he argued from distinguishing features of the classical Greek formula to demonstrate the orality of Old English poetry.[17] Donald K. Fry moved away from this stance by focusing on the importance of memory as a process which preserved dictated works. For him, the only demonstrably oral Old English poem is Caedmon's *Hymn*.[18] Robert P. Creed, applying Berkley Peabody's systemic approach to the classical oral tradition, judged *Beowulf* 'a copy of a recording of a performance'.[19] More recently, John Miles Foley, on the basis of comparison with Christian oral epics in South Slavic tradition, has suggested that Old English poetry shows both 'oral' character and 'literary' art.[20]

To a greater or lesser degree, these arguments depend on a crucial assumption: that the presence of formula is our assurance of the oral origin of Old English verse. That this assumption is dubious was elegantly argued in 1966 by Larry D. Benson in his much-cited study of the 'literary character' of Old English verse.[21] By using the argument that several 'literary' works had a high percentage of formulas, Benson countered the

[17] F. P. Magoun, Jr., 'The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry', *Speculum* 28 (1953), 446–67; rpt. in *Essential Articles for the Study of Old English Poetry*, ed. J. B. Bessinger and S. J. Kahrl (Hamden, CT, 1968), pp. 319–51.

[18] On Caedmon and oral composition, see Fry, 'Caedmon as a Formulaic Poet', p. 41. On memory see Fry, 'The Memory of Cædmon', pp. 288–90.

[19] R. P. Creed, 'The *Beowulf*-Poet: Master of Sound-Patterning', in *Oral Traditional Literature*, ed. J. M. Foley (Columbus, OH, 1981), pp. 194–216. On the tests for orality, see Peabody, *Winged Word*, p. 3.

[20] J. M. Foley, 'Literary Art and Oral Tradition in Old English and Serbian Poetry', *ASE* 12 (1983), 183–214.

[21] Benson, 'Literary Character', p. 334, n. 4, argues that Old English poetry was composed within a 'lettered tradition'.

oral formulaic assertion with another: that any work which is written down is *ipso facto* literate. However, the meaning of 'literacy' behind such an assertion must be carefully scrutinized since, in the context of the debate, its use suggests that anything written down implies a fully literate consciousness in at least the composer and possibly the audience.[22] In fact, both sorts of assertions are called into question by the writings of Aldhelm, perhaps the most literate Englishman of his day. Michael Lapidge has demonstrated that Aldhelm's quintessentially 'literate' verse was composed formulaically.[23] The apparent coexistence of two modes of composition in Aldhelm's verse – formulaic and literary – makes imperative a reconsideration of the implications of the term 'literate' and its applicability in early medieval cultures.

The argument from documents is no more helpful than the argument from formulas. On the assumption that written documents imply a literate populace, J. E. Cross, examining sources and dissemination of information, has argued for the literacy of the Anglo-Saxons.[24] And with comparable persuasiveness, C. P. Wormald, also on the basis of documentary evidence, has called it into question.[25] While the debate appears to be at a standstill, examination of some of the terms and assumptions in the debate demonstrates that the issues are far from clear.

ORALITY AND LITERACY – SOME DEFINITIONS

There is little ambiguity about the meaning of the term 'orality'. In its pure sense, the word describes a state of consciousness untouched by the technology of writing. An extensive literature describes the implications of such a consciousness, and this information is the product of inferences both from written texts (i.e. Homeric poems) and contemporary oral com-

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] M. Lapidge, 'Aldhelm's Latin Poetry and Old English Verse', *CL* 31 (1979), 209–31.

[24] Cross, 'The Literate Anglo-Saxon', at 67–8.

[25] C. P. Wormald, 'The Uses of Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England and its Neighbours', *TRHS* 5th ser. 27 (1977), 95–114, at 113, argues that 'the traditional view of restricted literacy is substantially valid for the whole early English period'. Latin learning dominated the cultural world despite the vernacular and was the main source of literate tradition. He sees no conclusive evidence of a substantial development of literacy after Alfred. C. E. Hohler, 'Some Service-Books of the Later Saxon Church', in *Tenth-Century Studies*, ed. D. Parsons (London and Chichester, 1975), pp. 60–83 and 217–27, argues the poor Latinity of tenth-century English writers (at pp. 72 and 74).

positions (i.e. South Slavic or Xhosa poetry).[26] In his study of the psychodynamics of orality, Walter Ong describes and summarizes the primary features of oral thought and expression as additive, aggregative, redundant, conservative, agonistic, empathetic, homeostatic, situational.[27]

While it would be possible to construct a complementary list to characterize literate thought,[28] it is doubtful that any definition of 'literacy' which such a list might imply would command agreement in the Old English scholarly community. The general concord on the meaning of 'orality' is pointedly lacking for 'literacy'. The reasons for this situation are partly historical, owing to the incomplete documentary evidence left to us, and partly perceptual, owing to the peculiar nature of human perception, which obscures the very categories of intellection through which we understand the world. Insofar as we are thoroughly literate, we normally do not question our powerful visual processing of information, spatial understanding of language, dependence on sources of information external to our memories, reliance on lists as tools for analysis and categorization. Insofar as literacy is for us a defining technology,[29] we naturally assume that these fundamental conditions of our own literate thought-processes also underpin the works we value and study. In the twentieth century, man is *homo legens*.

In such assumptions lie the workings of what might be called a 'literate ideology', whose most powerful characteristic is to blind us to the visual dominance of our own thought processes. 'Ideology' in the sense I am using it is not the false consciousness of the general Marxist critique (although this kind of meaning could be usefully, if analogically, pursued), but is closer to that sense of the word which Lee Patterson defines as 'the means by and through which man gives meaning to his social world and thereby makes it available to his practical activity'.[30] Natural (and misleading)

[26] For an account of oral formulaic theory with particular focus on Old English, see J. M. Foley, 'The Oral Theory in Context', in *Oral Traditional Literature: a Festschrift for Albert Bates Lord*, ed. J. M. Foley (Columbus, OH, 1981), pp. 27–122.

[27] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, pp. 31–57.

[28] Such a list of descriptors might include 'subordinative', 'analytic', 'economic', 'objectively distanced' and 'abstract'; see Ong, *ibid.*

[29] Goody, *Domestication*, p. 145, calls writing a 'technology of the intellect'. For the concept of 'defining technology', see, J. D. Bolter, *Turing's Man* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1984), p. 11.

[30] Patterson, *Negotiating the Past*, p. 54.

ideological assumptions haunt the use of the word 'literacy'. Behind its simple dictionary definition as the quality of being literate, or the ability to read a passage and answer questions on it, lies a morass of cultural assumptions and value judgements. The word itself is relatively new and came into vogue as a term in the late nineteenth century, initially in the writing of social reformers.[31] In this context, 'literacy' was a societal issue, useful or dangerous depending on one's political outlook. In fact, 'literacy' as it is used today indexes an individual's integration into society; it is the measure of the successful child, the standard for an employable adult. That 'literacy' for us connotes more than simply the ability to read is demonstrated by its frequent combination with the word 'computer'. In the phrase 'computer literacy', 'literacy' transcends reading and refers instead to an individual's knowledge of computers, competence in using them and, therefore, ability to be employed.

Whatever our assumptions may be about the conduct and meaning of literacy in our world, we must be cautious about applying them to the circumstances of earlier cultures. As Walter Ong and others have amply demonstrated, an oral world is markedly different from our own and is characterized by vastly different presuppositions and thought patterns. And in those cultures which possess some literacy but experience a heavy oral residue, the dominant power of the mind is memory.[32]

Several analyses touch on the difficulties in approaching medieval literacy with twentieth-century definitional biases. In a fundamental study, Herbert Grundmann pointed out that *litteratus* referred to an individual who could read and write in Latin (not the vernacular).[33] Using Grundmann's work as a base, Franz Bäuml extended the examination of the phenomena of medieval literacy to the vernacular, focusing in particular on the question of literate perception.[34] For Bäuml, literate perception depends 'not on the individual's ability to read and write, but on his perceptual orientation within his literate culture: the recognition of the fact that the fundaments of his culture – codified laws, the doctrine of the

[31] R. Ohmann, 'Literacy, Technology, and Monopoly Capital', *College English* 47 (1985), 675–89, at 676.

[32] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p. 36.

[33] H. Grundmann, 'Litteratus–Illitteratus', *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 40 (1958), 1–65. See also J. W. Thompson, *The Literacy of the Laity in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley, CA, 1939), p. 5: 'Literacy during the Middle Ages may be measured almost wholly by the extent of the knowledge and use of the Latin language.'

[34] Bäuml, 'Varieties', p. 239.