Miszellen und Forschungsberichte

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SCRIBE ET IMPERA: LITERACY IN MEDIEVAL GERMANY[1]

Research on literacy and orality in the past thirty years has drawn attention to social process-es that had rarely been touched on before – least of all by literary historians. I shall speak of some of these social processes, but do not intend to solve any problems in this essay. I shall merely raise a few significant issues, not the least of which are matters of definition.

The ›impera‹ in the title is easy to deal with: it is, in Max Weber's definition of power, »every opportunity of imposing one's own will in a social relationship, even against resistance«[2]. Defining ›literacy‹ is much more problematical: first of all, it is a matter of degree, – is one lite-rate if one can read, but not write? To be sure, the ability to write implies an ability to read, but not *vice versa*. And how well does one have to be able to read in order to be ›literate‹? We speak of ›functional literacy‹ for instance. Second, preliteracy is a different condition altogether from illiteracy within a literate culture. Third, the literacy of the past – medieval literacy, for instance – was altogether different from modern literacy. Fourth, the literacy of, say, ancient Greece, Rome, or Egypt was quite a different matter from medieval literacy. Fifth, alphabetical literacy differs from non-alphabetical literacy, and even within alphabetical literacy there are funda-mental differences between script-literacy, print-literacy and computer-literacy. And sixth, the notion of ›literacy‹ itself is differently defined in different languages, and in some – for example in English – the term is ideologically loaded[3]. And then, is one speaking of individual literacy or of that of a culture which is dependent on the written word for its cohesion? A culture may be ›literate‹ in this sense, while the majority of its people may be illiterate, as in the European Mid-dle Ages. For all these reasons I prefer to use the less elegant term ›writtenness‹ whenever pos-sible. It has all the advantages of German *Schriftlichkeit* over English *literacy*.

It is also necessary to distinguish between orality and the oral narrative tradition. Orality encompasses all oral utterance; the oral narrative tradition is the oral transmission of narra-tives, whether spoken, chanted or sung, which are recomposed at every telling by means of traditional structural and lexical stereotypes. It is essential, particularly in reference to me-dieval practice, to recognize the special conditions created by ›vocality‹, the practice of vocal-izing while reading or writing, and of reading aloud to a listening public[4].

1 This essay is a revised version of a lecture delivered at the University of Amsterdam in February 1992, prepared during a fellowship year at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study, and published un-der the title Scribe et impera: geletterdheid in middeleeuws Duitsland, in: Communicatie in de mid-deleeuwen, ed. Marco Mostert, Hilversum 1995, p. 75–87.
2 Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft, Tübingen 1922 (Grundriß der Sozialökonomik 3), Para. 16, 28.
3 For some definitions of literacy, see David Barton, Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Writ-ten Language, Oxford 1994, p. 19–22.
4 See especially Ursula Schaefer, Vokalität. Altenglische Dichtung zwischen Mündlichkeit und Schrift-lichkeit (ScriptOralia 39), Tübingen 1992; and Joyce Coleman, Public Reading and the Reading Pub-lic in Late Medieval England and France, Cambridge, England 1996.

In the beginning of humanistic concern with the oral narrative tradition, the conditions governing the composition of traditional narratives and those associated with the production of written texts were considered to be mutually exclusive: the oral poet was thought to compose impromptu on the basis of the traditional stereotypes, the writing author as using few if any such ›formulae‹. Albert Lord, in his description of South-Slavic oral performances was quite adamant about this[5]. This opposition between the two conditions is also reflected quite clearly in the title of Herbert Grundmann's influential article, ›Litteratus – Illitteratus‹[6]. Of course this neatly dichotomous arrangement could not last: it soon became evident that written compositions – as well as oral utterances generally – are also marked by stereotypical, ›formulaic‹ style and structure, and that writtenness in general combines with various aspects of orality and vice versa[7]. As far as the Middle Ages are concerned, an ›illitteratus‹ could be a knight who could read, and a ›litteratus‹ could be a monk who had to have the Rule of his order read out to him in translation[8]. A way out of this untidiness was then sought by using the concept of transitionality in describing a ›text‹. The trouble with this is that any aspect of a text, its production, the text itself, its style, its performance, its reception, or its public, could be ›transitional‹ in various ways. Merely calling a text ›transitional‹ is therefore less than helpful. A transition, moreover, is a process, not a state, and it implies continuous, unidirectional movement. But it is easy to see that the development of ›literacy‹, however defined, was neither continuous, nor unidirectional. Reading a text aloud is an oralization of a written text; if this written text is composed in a stereotypical style, it is a case of reoralization[9]. The concept of ›transitionality‹ is therefore meaningless as a description of a text. Moreover, in rescuing the dichotomy ›literate / illiterate‹ by inserting a purely schematic compromise between the two poles, it obscures a number of very significant historical processes.

An initial impact of writtenness on preliterate orality is perhaps best suited to illustrate the complexity as well as the significance of the issues involved. In European history we can observe such a collision of writing with preliteracy in the East Frankish Empire of the ninth century. In the Western Frankish Kingdom, Gallo-Roman culture had preserved some remnants of the Roman heritage: in the Eastern Kingdom both writing and Christianity landed on a tabula rasa. In this context writing and Christianity must be thought of together: writing as first in Latin and then both in Latin and in German, Christianity as appearing in the form of a book, Holy Scripture, written in Latin, the Vulgate. But obviously the missionaries had to preach in the vernacular if they hoped to make converts[10]. They also had to be consistent in

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5 Albert B. Lord, The Singer of Tales, Cambridge, Mass. 1964, p. 124–38.

6 Herbert Grundmann, Litteratus – illitteratus, in: Archiv für Kulturgeschichte 40 (1958) p. 1–60. See in this regard also Gabriella Severino Polica, Cultura ecclesiastica e culture subalterne: rileggendo alcuni saggi di H. Grundmann, in: Studi storici 23 (1982) p. 137–66.

7 The combination of orality with writtenness in its various forms characterizes the production and transmission of medieval narratives under the cultural conditions of vocality; see above all Schaefer, as in n. 4, p. 5–58 et passim. The fact that formulaic diction occurs also in texts composed in writing was already pointed out by Larry Benson, The Literary Character of Anglo-Saxon Formulaic Poetry, in: Publications of the Modern language association of America [PMLA] 81 (1966) p. 334–41. It must be observed, however, that the presence of formulaic diction in the Meters of Boethius or the Phoenix has little bearing on its function in the composition of oral narrative poetry.

8 M. T. Clanchy, From Memory to Written Record. England, 1066–1307, Cambridge, Mass. 1979, p. 177–81; Michael Richter, Kommunikationsprobleme im lateinischen Mittelalter, in: Hist. Zs. 222 (1976) p. 43–80, particularly p. 71–73.

9 See, for instance, Franz H. Bäuml, Verschriftlichte Mündlichkeit und vermündlichte Schriftlichkeit: Begriffsprüfungen an den Fällen »Heliand« und »Liber Evangeliorum«, in: Schriftlichkeit im frühen Mittelalter, ed. U. Schaefer, Tübingen 1993 (ScriptOralia 53), p. 254–66.

10 Richard E. Sullivan, The Carolingian Missionary and the Pagan, in: Speculum 28 (1953) p. 705–40; Wilhelm Konen, Die Heidenpredigt in der Germanenbekehrung, Düsseldorf 1909, p. 20–23; Hermann Lau, Die angelsächsische Missionsweise im Zeitalter des Bonifaz, Kiel 1909, p. 39–54; Albert Hauck,

their preaching if Christianity was to be presented as monolithic, as one faith in one God. However, many Christian concepts which they knew perfectly well in Latin were unfamiliar to them in German – either because the missionaries were Anglo-Saxons or Gauls, or because these concepts simply did not exist in German[11]. Some of the earliest Latin-German glossaries were not intended to teach their users Latin – they provided German vocabulary for readers of Latin[12]. If one could read, one could read Latin, though how well remains an open question. Whatever the intention behind the glossaries, their compilation and use tended to provide a German terminology for consistent use. Consistency is also the ultimate reason for the use of books by the missionaries in the face of their pagan or recently converted public. St. Boniface repeatedly wrote to England, asking for books, richly illuminated, »so that a reverence and love of the Holy Scriptures may be impressed on the minds of the heathens to whom I preach ...«[13]. And St. Lebuin is described in his *Vita* as suddenly appearing in the midst of a gathering of Saxons, in priestly garments, bearing a cross in his hands and a copy of the Gospels in the crook of his arm[14]. This of course raises a series of questions: why would a crowd of preliterate pagans be impressed by a book, why did Boniface take chests of them along on his last, fatal mission to the Frisians, and why did the missionaries put so much weight on the use of books in the presence of the pagans[15]? One answer is that the evangelists had made Christianity a religion of the book: it came to be testified to by the written Word of God; secondly, the use of the book in preaching is a very practical device for associating the substance of the utterance not with the priest, but with the object he holds in his hands. It is therefore a sacred object. And third, the words are consistent – the book represents a monolithic faith[16]. These, then, are some of the first uses of writing in the face of preliterate paganism. It also illustrates the fact – still worth mentioning in the presence of literary historians – that the problems posed by writtenness and orality are not ›purely literary‹ problems – as if there were such things: they are socio-historical problems.

But to return to our subject: the first collision of writing with preliteracy in the East Frankish Empire. We shall concentrate on two concrete instances: the Old Saxon ›Heliand‹, written in the first half of the ninth century, and the ›Liber Evangeliorum‹ which Otfrid, monk of Weissenburg, wrote in the 860's[17].

Otfrid aims his selective translation of the Gospels into Old High German endrhyme at three different situations: at the private reader, as when he asks his public to *thana snidan*, cut

Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands, I, Leipzig 1900, p. 477–81; M. SCHIAN, Geschichte der christlichen Predigt, in: Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche 15, 1904, p. 639–59.

11 See Liudger, Vita Gregorii, c. 2 (ed. O. HOLDER-EGGER, MGH SS XV, p. 67–68), and the Interrogationes et responsiones baptismales, ed. A. BORETIUS, MGH Capitularia regum Francorum, I, 107, p. 222; also HAUCK, as in n. 10, II, p. 468, who refers to similar evidence for the absorption of Christian terminology in Slavic vernaculars.

12 Wolfgang HAUBRICHS, Die Anfänge: Versuche volkssprachiger Schriftlichkeit im frühen Mittelalter (ca. 700–1050/60), in: Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn der Neuzeit, ed. J. HEINZLE, Frankfurt 1988, Teil 1, Band 1, p. 228–40.

13 Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius, ed. A. TANGL, Berlin 1916 (MGH, ep. sel.), no. 35.

14 Vita Lebuini antiqua, ed. A. HOFMEISTER, Leipzig 1926 (MGH SS 30,2), p. 789–95.

15 In connection with the function of the book as a »magical« object and a symbol of power, see particularly Michael HARBSMEIER, Buch, Magie und koloniale Situation. Zur Anthropologie von Buch und Schrift, in: Das Buch als magisches und als Repräsentationsobjekt, ed. by P. GANZ, Wiesbaden 1992, p. 3–24. An interesting example of the book as an object of power is adduced, in quite another connection, by Hanna VOLLRATH, Herrschaft und Genossenschaft im Kontext frühmittelalterlicher Rechtsbeziehungen, in: Hist. Jahrbuch 102 (1982) p. 33–71, specifically p. 40–41 and n. 34.

16 For the role of the book in establishing a common denominator, i.e. ›correctness‹ in Carolingian liturgical reform, see Arnold ANGENENDT, Libelli bene correcti. Der »richtige Kult« als ein Motiv der karolingischen Reform, in: Das Buch als magisches, as in n. 15, p. 117–35.

17 See BÄUML, as in n. 9.

out objectionable passages with a knife (V,25,37; 25,42; 25,49), or when he uses spatial text references such as ›above‹ (I,1,57; II,4,103; II,9,1; V,12,4) or refers the reader to another text[18]; a listening audience is implied by the presence, at least in the Freising manuscript, of two Old High German versions of the Latin prayer »Tu autem, Domine, miserere nobis«, which traditionally closed monastic refectory readings[19]. And there is a reference to ›hearing‹ the text and having it read aloud, and one referring to a previous passage, *thie wir hiar lasun forna* = »which we just read here«. But by far the most interesting aspect of the ›Liber Evangeliorum‹ is Otfrid's letter to Archbishop Liutbert of Mainz, which accompanies both manuscripts emanating from the Weissenburg scriptorium[20]. Here Otfrid asks for the archbishop's approval of his work, explains why he undertook the translation, and comments on some of the difficulties he encountered. When Otfrid addresses a reader with his exegetically based and symbolically structured text complete with acrostics and telestics, – all of which would completely escape a listener, let alone an uneducated one – one wonders why he bothered to translate it at all. The letter to Liutbert gives three answers: (1) so that it might annihilate (*deleret*) the *laicorum cantus obscenus*, i.e. the oral tradition; (2) in order to emulate pagan and Christian Latin poets who have praised their heritage in their language by glorifying the Christian heritage of the Franks in the Frankish language; and (3) to make the *sanctissima verba* accessible to him »who shudders at the difficulty of a foreign language (*alienae linguae difficultatem horrescit*), so that he may beware of straying even slightly from the Law of God, now understood in his own language, in his thoughts«. These, then, are the reasons why Otfrid wrestled with the Frankish language, which, rough and undisciplined (*inculta et indisciplinabilis*), is unused to the bridle of grammar. As far as annihilating the *cantus obscenus* is concerned, monks – latinate or not – did not necessarily reject pagan songs[21]. Here Otfrid has certainly aimed well. As far as the *sanctissima verba* are concerned, however, they are in principle accessible to a reader of Latin in any case. It may seem, therefore, that at least in this respect Otfrid's labor has been unnecessary. But this is just as much an oversimplification of circumstances as the opposition ›literacy – orality‹: an educated reader need not be erudite, nor need a reader who knows Latin know it well enough to approach the Vulgate without shuddering. A hundred years before Otfrid, for example, St. Boniface caused a baptism to be repeated because the officiating priest pronounced the formula *baptizo te in nomine patria et filia et spiritus sancti*; certainly this priest would have had a hard time wrestling with the Vulgate[22]. A hundred-and-fifty years after Otfrid, Notker III of St. Gall explained to his bishop his purpose in translating certain texts for the monastery school[23]; these included works of Boethius and Aristotle. Surely students ready for these had had their instruction in basic Latin behind them; yet these translations functioned in part as instruction in Latin by rendering the text readily understandable[24]. And from the time of Charlemagne we have a reference

18 See Dennis H. GREEN, Zur primären Rezeption von Otfrids »Evangelienbuch«, in: Althochdeutsch, ed. R. BERGMANN, H. TIEFENBACH, L. VOETZ, Heidelberg 1987, p. 737–71, esp. 744–46.

19 See Friedrich OHLY, Zum Dichtungsschluß »Tu autem, domine, miserere nobis«, in: Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift 47 (1943) p. 26–68. For the intended receptions of the »Liber Evangeliorum«, see GREEN, as in n. 18, p. 738–71; as regards audial reception, see particularly p. 755–68.

20 For an English translation and commentary, see Francis P. MAGOUN, Jr., Otfrid's »Ad Liutbertum«, in: PMLA 58 (1943) p. 869–90; for a German translation, see Fidel RÄDLE, Otfrids Brief an Liutbert, in: Kritische Bewahrung. Beiträge zur deutschen Philologie. Festschrift für Werner Schröder, ed. Ernst-Joachim SCHMIDT, Berlin 1974, p. 213–40.

21 Alcuin's letter to the bishop of Lindisfarne, in which he criticizes the monks' concern with pagan heroic poetry rather than Christian literature is merely the best-known indication; see MGH EE 4,1 no. 124, p. 183.

22 See TANGL, as in n. 13, no. 68.

23 HAUBRICHS, as in n. 12, p. 272–76.

24 Gerhard MEISSBURGER, Grundlagen zum Verständnis der deutschen Mönchsdichtung im 11. und 12. Jahrhundert, München 1970, p. 247.

to the necessity of translating the Benedictine Rule for monks and abbots[25]. Certainly there will have been a reading, basically latinate clergy to whom Otfrid's translation will nevertheless have been welcome.

But this reason for Otfrid's undertaking is related to the two others – the annihilation of the *cantus obscenus*, and the competition with the glorifications of the pagan or Christian heritage of others in Latin. Both are now to be achieved for Frankish Christianity in Frankish. It is not merely a question of translating the Gospels into German or of casting their content into end-rhyming verse. It is first and foremost a question of establishing a Christian vernacular canon. This canon – Otfrid is quite specific about this – is to be the equal of the canon represented by the works of Virgil, Lucan, Ovid, Juvencus, Arator, Prudentius, etc. It is therefore not merely a question of a literary manifestation of the Carolingian policy of Christianization. It is a full-blown attempt to establish a literary canon, an evaluative authority, at a time when the German language was barely writable. And in this connection Otfrid does not address a public ignorant of Latin; just the opposite: he challenges the *magnos viros*, the ›great men‹, who, though pious and wise in all other respects, have not sung the praise of God in their own language, and he challenges them to do their bit to see that this is done[26]. Otfrid acts quite in the spirit of the Council of Tours of 813 and the Council of Mainz of 847[27], both of which require the preaching of the essential homilies *in rusticam Romanam linguam aut Thiotiscam*, as well as the requirement of the Admonitio generalis of 789 that priests should not be allowed to »make up and preach ... anything new or uncanonical from their own initiative, not in accord with Holy Scripture«[28]. The combination of the requirements of the councils and the Admonitio calls for a canon. Otfrid intends to supply it.

All this assumes two of the previously mentioned three types of reception of the ›Liber Evangeliorum‹: the private reader and the listener to a reading of the text. We shall now turn to the third possible situation. At the beginning of his letter to Liutbert, Otfrid speaks of his work as *huius cantus lectionis*, – and indeed there is no lack of indications that his text was received as choral or recitative chant as well as a lectio in the refectory or the monastery school at Weissenburg: all manuscripts have various kinds of accent markings that indicate a use of the text as recitative, and the Heidelberg manuscript has neumes[29].

Of course, there is a tactical reason for this: if Otfrid intended his work to drive out the secular songs of oral tradition, as he says in his letter to Liutbert, his production would have to compete with them on the same basis – as song[30]. But this early attempt at establishing a vernacular literary canon, combined with the contemporaneous development of musical writtenness[31] is nothing less than an attempt to establish, not only a canon for the text, but also a canon for the performance. And in doing this, Otfrid's work reaps the advantage of three kinds of institutional canonization: (1) it meets the stated requirements of the Frankish Church, and can therefore count upon its institutional support – which is, of course, what the letter to Archbishop Liutbert is all about; (2) in making possible its performance as a chant, it takes advantage of the institution of the liturgy; and (3) by thus entering liturgical practice, it gains the benefit of the canonical reception of the liturgy itself. In short, if a canon is an exercise of power, Otfrid's translation is a very large step toward gaining the power of the Church for the vernacular, and the vernacular for the extension of the power of the Church.

25 For these and similar problems, see RICHTER, as in n. 8, p. 69–72.
26 Otfrids Evangelienbuch, ed. O. ERDMANN, Tübingen 1957, p. 4–7, here lines 105–21.
27 Tours: MGH Concilia II/1, p. 286, canon 17; Mainz: MGH Concilia III, p. 164, canon 2.
28 MGH Capitularia I, as in n.11, p. 61–62, canon 82.
29 See GREEN, as in n. 18, p. 762–71.
30 See GREEN, as in n. 18, p. 758.
31 See Leo TREITLER, Oral, Written and Literate Process in the Transmission of Medieval Music, in: Speculum 56 (1981) p. 471–91; and Joseph KERMAN, A few Canonic Variations, in: Canons, ed. R. v. HALLBERG, Chicago 1983, p. 177–95.

The example of the ›Liber Evangeliorum‹ illustrates, among other things, that medieval writtenness and orality cannot be seen as opposing poles. They are continually and variously intersecting processes. A somewhat different example of the possible combinations of writtenness with orality, and with the oral tradition, is the Old Saxon ›Heliand'. Its style is densely formulaic, its diction heavily laden with traditional formulations – in short, at first sight clearly an oral poem in origin, which somehow has landed on parchment[32]. If one accepts the hypothesis that the structure of the ›Heliand‹ is determined by numerical symbolism, then of course the work cannot be identified as a product of the oral tradition at all[33]. And the state of the text as well as the familiarity of its author with Carolingian theology make it quite clear that it is not a record of an oral performance. We are apparently faced by a problem similar to that once posed by the poems of the Anglo-Saxon Cynewulf: all the symptoms of oral composition, and at the same time the undeniable evidence of its written composition. Francis Magoun, still laboring under the influence of the notion that the processes of oral and written composition were mutually exclusive, sought to solve this problem by means of the notion of a writing poet composing in the traditional way – dictating to himself, as it were[34]. This was received with some amusement at the time – quite unjustly, as it turns out. For we can observe something like this process – not an oral poet writing, but a writing poet using oral style – being used quite frequently several centuries later: in the ›Nibelungenlied‹ for instance, as well as in ›Kudrun‹ and several other Middle High German verse narratives. If Michael Curschmann is right in seeing this formulaic style as a literary stylization of oral composition, that the writing poet was writing ›nibelungisch‹, what is that but a process of dictating to himself in a certain style[35]?

But the question remains: why would the writing ›Heliand‹-poet use the stylistic stereotypes of the oral tradition in the first place? The answer is obvious if one sees the function of the poem to lie in the Christianization of the Saxons. A preliterate public yet to be Christianized will be easier to influence with a culturally strange narrative if this narrative is cast in the familiar form of the oral tradition. Thus the written use of oral-traditional style has the advantage that it can be received by the public in its accustomed form, although it is read aloud. In a sense, therefore, the ›Heliand‹ illustrates both an effect of the oral tradition on writtenness, and also the reverse: the use of writtenness as a means of feigning an oral tradition under the cultural conditions of orality. It also contradicts the view prevalent in the early days of the theory of oral-formulaic composition, that oral stylistic stereotypes are superfluous in written texts. It depends on their purpose.

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32 Thus, for instance, Robert L. KELLOGG, The South Germanic Oral Tradition, in: Franciplegius. Medieval and Linguistic Studies in Honor of Francis P. Magoun, Jr., ed. J. B. BESSINGER, Jr. and R. P. CREED, New York 1965, p. 66–74.

33 For a criticism of this view, see Burkhard TAEGER, Zahlensymbolik bei Hraban, bei Hincmar – und im Heliand?, Munich 1970 (Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters 30), p. 195–228.

34 Francis P. MAGOUN, The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry, in: Speculum 28 (1953) p. 446–67. In this connection, see also the important essays of Ursula SCHAEFER, The Instance of the Formula: A Poetic Device Revisited, in: Papers on Language and Medieval Studies presented to Alfred Schopf, ed. by R. MATTHEWS and J. SCHMOLE-ROSTOSKY, Frankfurt 1988, p. 39–57; and ID., Hearing from Books: The Rise of Fictionality in Old English Poetry, in: Vox Intexta. Orality and Textuality in the Middle Ages, eds. A. N. DOANE and C. BRAUN PASTERNACK, Madison, Wisc. 1991, p. 117–36. In a larger context, the problem is treated in SCHAEFER, as in n. 4, p. 116–18, 124–26, 141–43 et passim.

35 Michael CURSCHMANN, »Nibelungenlied« und »Nibelungenklage«. Über Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit im Prozeß der Episierung, in: Deutsche Literatur im Mittelalter. Kontakte und Perspektiven. Hugo Kuhn zum Gedenken, ed. by C. CORMEAU, Stuttgart 1979, p. 85–119.

Ulrich Bach has shown that the mnemonic device ›loci-et-imagines‹ was used in printed leaflets as late as the seventeenth century, i.e. that the things to be remembered were structured architectonically as an aid to the memory in printed material addressed to a predominantly illiterate public[36]. This is the same principle as the use of oral-formulaic style in the ›Heliand‹ to facilitate its reception by a preliterate public: a familiar structural principle used in an unfamiliar medium. Moreover, »conventional expressions ... express conventional ideas«[37], and are therefore a useful means for making unconventional ideas appear conventional and thus acceptable[38]. The examples cited by Bach are not isolated: the thirteenth century yields more than a few examples of pseudo-oral style – the ›Nibelungenlied‹ and ›Kudrun‹ are perhaps the best-known instances. But the combination of the characteristics of the oral tradition with writing also implants characteristics of literacy onto a text designed to be received in the conditions of orality. A written hagiographical text like the ›Heliand‹ by definition adheres to a canon of sacred literature, or in a more general sense Christian literature, and derives from this a degree of authority enabling it to challenge the oral tradition of a culture in process of being christianized. Here the formulation of a sacred text in writing, even though in oral-formulaic style and quite without the literarifications characterizing Otfrid's work, renders the text potentially canonical. And just as in the case of Otfrid's ›Liber Evangeliorum', its canonicity is substantiated by its provision, in the Munich manuscript, with neumes, and in the Straubing manuscripts with accent marks. Here also, therefore, it is not only a question of establishing a textual canon in the vernacular, but also of a canon for the performance and reception of the text[39].

The relationships between literacy and orality, writtenness and the oral tradition, which these examples illustrate, make it quite clear that one cannot regard the two conditions as opposites. Similarly, it is clear that one must view the development of writing in the vernaculars as far more complex than suggested by the usual model of a one-dimensional development from orality to literacy.

Not the least important function of these forms of literarification is that of canon-formation, a special kind of authority according to which things or actions are to be judged[40]. Since nothing – no object, no action, no belief – has an innate value, all value is dependent on other things. What gives the impression that objects or actions have innate values are canons – more or less widely accepted standards or norms, culturally institutionalized in religions, schools, the media, the law. Some of these canons have a venerable history: Homer, Freedom, Sincerity. But of course the values of such canons vary synchronically from culture to culture and from subculture to subculture, as well as diachronically within cultures. What, then, are some of the causes of their variance and their stability? And what roles do literacy and orality play in all this?

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36 Ulrich BACH, Oral Rhetoric in Writings for a Mixed Literate and Illiterate Audience, in: Poetics 18 (1989) 257–70.

37 Raymond W. GIBBS, Jr., Psycholinguistic Studies on the Conceptual Basis of Idiomaticity, in: Cognitive Linguistics 1 (1990) p. 417–51, specifically p. 446.

38 See particularly SCHAEFER, as in n. 4, p. 131: »Der Zweck des Erzählens in der primären Oralität ist die Weitergabe von bereits kollektiv Bekanntem, was in der Vokalität dazu führen kann, daß die kollektive Bekanntheit nur vorgegeben wird«.

39 The combination of oral-formulaic style with writtenness in the case of hagiographical texts is to prove itself just as useful – though under quite different circumstances – some three centuries after the »Heliand«: in the cases of the Middle High German »St. Oswald« and »Orendel«.

40 On canon formation and the functions of canons, see the fundamental essay by Barbara HERRNSTEIN SMITH, Contingencies of Value, in: HALLBERG, as in n. 31, p. 5–39, as well as Aleida and Jan ASSMANN, eds., Kanon und Zensur. Beiträge zur Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation II, München 1987.

Canons represent the interests of social groups and the individuals forming those groups, and they serve the purpose of maintaining these interests. They are also a social necessity, for they make human social behavior to some degree predictable. They are, therefore, a means to preserve as well as to challenge a social order, a means of maintaining as well as subverting a given status quo. The canons of the oral tradition of preliterate societies, that is, the rules governing the oral transmission of narratives, consist in the tradition itself. The tradition provides the standards for composition, performance, and reception of oral narratives. There may occur conflicts of canons within an oral tradition, but if this tradition is preliterate, i.e. if it is the cultural encyclopaedia, the repository of useful knowledge of a preliterate culture, then such conflicts can be neither extensive nor long-lasting without endangering the survival of the culture. Hence the encouragement of strict adherence to the tradition, and the discouragement of ›originality‹ within such cultures. On the other hand, conflict among canons of writtenness will generally not affect the survival of literate cultures, though they may well lead to internal changes.

Among the canons of medieval literacy, that of its exclusivity perhaps best illustrates the degree to which a canon can resist changing social conditions. The gradual spread of vernacular writtenness, gathering speed in the twelfth century and becoming a flood with the invention of printing with movable type in the fifteenth, led to a sharpening of the issues. The translations of Christian texts from Latin into the vernacular during the Carolingian era served to establish the power of the Church on German territory. The layman was involved in these vernacular literarifications merely as listener to readings and observer of liturgical performances. There was no question of his having any direct access to writtenness – he had no need for it, unless it be as a member of the governing religious or secular establishment. During the Ottonian period, when the Christianization of what had become the Holy Roman Empire had been largely achieved, very little was produced in vernacular writing, if its transmission is any guide[41]. With the twelfth century, however, and in concert with the increasing rationalization of territorial governance, there began an increase in vernacular writtenness. Access of the laity to the written word, and particularly to religious texts, therefore also increased. This threatened the clerical monopoly of written knowledge, including its monopoly of the written Word of God, at the same time as it strengthened the laity's self-confidence in the face of that monopoly[42]. Students and professors, attracted to the growing universities founded by lay powers to provide them with secular and religious knowledge, found that it was in their interest to support the clerical monopoly of knowledge. In the later Middle Ages, in the fifteenth century, municipal schools teaching writing (in German) and bookkeeping were founded as the necessity for literacy in business law, in business management and in business generally increased. Monastic and religious reformers of every stripe demanded more books and better access to books, and mystics of every stripe produced a steady stream of written material in the vernacular. And the Church soon saw heretics lurking in every corner.

As the carrier of the Christian tradition, the written (Latin) word enjoyed high respect throughout the Middle Ages. Now, however, an anti-literary scepticism made itself felt in the name of a *sancta simplicitas*, a *docta ignorantia*, as well as from the standpoint of ›experience‹, for which Paracelsus in the early sixteenth century is perhaps the best, though late example. All these types of opposition were oppositions to a canon: the canon of the practice of the

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41   As regards the so-called »große Lücke« in the history of German literature, see Dennis H. GREEN, Die Schriftlichkeit und die Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im Mittelalter, in: Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch 30 (1989) p. 9–26.

42   See the thorough discussion of this process and related problems by Klaus SCHREINER, Laienbildung als Herausforderung für Kirche und Gesellschaft, in: Zs. für historische Forschung 11 (1984) p. 257–354.

artes liberales only by those who have a right to practice them: the *liberi*, for whose support the *ignobilium filiis* are to labor. Already early in the twelfth century Hugh of St. Victor makes this point very clearly[43]. Similarly, Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century assigned the *artes mechanicae* to the *servi* because they are *serviles*, and have a purpose other than themselves, whereas the *artes liberales* are *nobilior*[44]. Both Hugh and Thomas thus brought the pedagogical canon into direct agreement with social stratification. We know nothing of Hugh's origin, but Thomas came from a noble family. Not, however, Konrad Bitschin, city clerk in Danzig and Kulm in the mid-fifteenth century, who, along with many others, simply repeated the dicta of Hugh and Thomas: they served his purpose as city clerk. The same social interests pitted conservative jurists, medical doctors and theologians against those – liberal clergy as well as laymen – who favored translations of technical and professional books, above all the Bible, into German. And not only into German – the same conflict took place in England. In short, the use of written translation, which had served to establish the power of the Church and support the secular power during the Carolingian era, had become a liability, a threat to that power. Translation and access to writtenness now created the possibility for the destruction of a monopoly.

This raises a further question: if the nonparticipants in the monopoly of Latin literacy only now gained direct access to its treasures through written translations, was there some other means for them to gain such access to Latin literacy before?

Here one must return to about the year 600, when Pope Gregory the Great wrote two separate responses to the iconoclasm of the Bishop of Marseille: (1) »Pictures are used in churches so that those who are ignorant of letters may at least read by seeing on the walls what they cannot read in books;« and (2) »What writing does for the literate, a picture does for the illiterate looking at it, because the ignorant see in it what they ought to do; those who do not know letters read in it. Thus, especially for the people, a picture takes the place of reading... Therefore you ought not to have broken that which was placed in the church in

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43 Didascalion II, 21 in: Migne PL 176, col. 760.

44 Peter Sternagel, Die artes mechanicae im Mittelalter. Begriffs- und Bedeutungsgeschichte bis zum Ende des 13. Jahrhunderts (Münchener Historische Studien, Abt. Mittelalterliche Geschichte 2), Kallmünz 1966, p. 110–111.

45 (1) *Idcirco enim pictura in ecclesiis adhibetur, ut hi qui litteras nesciunt saltem in parietibus uidendo legant, quae legere in codicibus non ualent;* (2) *Nam quod legentibus scriptura, hoc idiotis praestat pictura cernentibus, quia in ipsa ignorantes uident quod sequi debeant, in ipsa legunt qui litteras nesciunt; unde praecipue gentibus pro lectione pictura est.... Frangi ergo non debuit quod non adorandum in ecclesiis sed ad instruendas solummodo mentes fuit nescientium collacatum.* S. Gregorii Magni registrum epistularum libri VIII-XIV, ed. D. Norberg, 1982 (Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 140 A), IX, 209, and XI, 10, p. 768, 874. – Dr. Martin Heinzelmann has kindly brought to my attention the evidence of Gregory of Tours in his Liber Vitae Patrum XII: De Aemeliano heremita et Brachione abbate, in MGH Script.rer.merov. I–2, 1885, p. 263, l. 20ff., according to which, as layman, he recited his Canonical Hours without knowing what he was singing. When he then saw letters on pictures in church, he traced them and inquired after their meaning and thus learned to read and write. This raises at least two interesting points: (1) Learning a text such as the Canonical Hours by heart without being able to read requires that one repeatedly imitate someone's »oral performance« of such a text; and (2) learning what is in pictures requires »letters on pictures« and a knowledge of what those letters »mean« – in short, learning from pictures requires either the ability to read, or the interpretative »oral performance« of someone who can read, or a previous experience with such an »oral performance« which can be appropriated for an interpretation of a given picture. See Franz H. Bäuml, Autorität und Performanz: Gesehene Leser, Gehörte Bilder, Geschriebener Text, in: Verschriftung – Verschriftlichung. Aspekte des Medienwechsels in verschiedenen Kulturen und Epochen, ed. C. Ehler and U. Schaefer, Tübingen, to appear 1997.

132   Franz H. Bäuml

order not to be adored, but solely in order to instruct the minds of the ignorant«[45]. The question arises therefore, can one »read by seeing on the walls« what one cannot read in a book; and does a picture really do for the illiterate what writing does for the literate[46]?

This dictum of Gregory's was cited, paraphrased, and elaborated on throughout the Middle Ages, but it was never questioned. It had itself become canonical: it was the canonical answer to the question posed above: did the *illitterati* have direct access to the information that the *litterati* could read. The canonical answer was »yes, by means of pictures«, and that was that. Gregorius dixit.

But a little reflection should make clear that this cannot be so. Gregory was speaking of pictures representing scenes from the Bible or saints' lives. But any number of pictures of Adam, Eve and the Serpent cannot teach one anything about the Garden of Eden and Original Sin, unless one has first been told whom and what one is looking at and what it all means[47]. One is told whom and what one is looking at by written identifications on banderols, or written labels above or below the figures, to be read by those who could read. And what it all means one learns by being told – it is part of common knowledge, received quite separately from, and even prior to, learning to read or looking at pictures. In short, pictures cannot teach one discursively what one does not know, but they can reinforce the memory of what one already knows, through having been told[48]. They do this by providing the narrative with a structure in space – which is exactly how the medieval student practised the ars memorativa. The learning – if it is Christian learning, and this, of course, is not the only learning – issues ultimately from the written word, and from those who could read. But here, in the case of the ›reading‹ of pictures in support of what one already knows, one also runs up against a canon, an evaluative authority. Any given ›reading‹ of a series of pictures will differ from any other ›reading‹ of the same series of pictures within the confines of their canonical interpretation and that of one's own experience. Its dynamics will be similar to those governing the performance, i.e. the singing of a chant according to Carolingian musical notation: the pictures, just as the musical notation, cannot be prescriptive for every detail of their ›performance‹, but their canonical interpretation will act as control over their reception. It is therefore not only the text, the notation, or the pictures which are subject to canons, but also the performance and thus the reception – i.e. the understanding. But there is another advantage to pictures as an element of control: like the performance of the liturgy, viewing pictures was a public activity. Bishop Paulinus of Nola, in the fifth century, describes how the peasants entering his newly decorated church are affected by the »colored sketches which are explained by inscriptions over them, so that the script may make clear what the hand has exhibited. Maybe that when they all in turn show and relate to each other what has been painted, their thoughts will turn more slowly to eating«[49]. Viewing pictures, whether in a church or in a book, is a public act for an illiterate: someone else must be there to explain. And a public act is a controlled act. This, of course, creates order – but whatever order it creates, it creates it to sustain the power behind the canon.

46 For a stimulating analysis of this problem, see Lawrence G. DUGGAN, Was art really the »book of the illiterate«?, in: Word and Image 5 (1989) p. 227–51.
47 Avril HENRY, Biblia Pauperum: A Facsimile and Edition, Aldershot 1987, p. 17–18.
48 I am also grateful to Dr. Heinzelmann for pointing out that Gregory of Tours (Glor. mart. 21) said exactly this: that pictures are *ad commemorationem virtutis*.
49 Cited by Michael CAMILLE, Seeing and Reading: Some Visual Implications of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy, in: Art History 5 (1985) p. 26–49, specifically p. 32.