

OLD ENGLISH LEXICOLOGY
AND LEXICOGRAPHY

Essays in Honor of Antonette DiPaolo Healey



Edited by
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To Toni: magistra and friend

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‘Revising Hell’: The Voices of Teachers in Anglo-Saxon Studies and Anglo-Saxon England

Damian Fleming

Among Toni Healey’s many contributions to the world of scholarship, we cannot overlook her role as an exceptional classroom teacher at the University of Toronto. Her combination of philological and literary knowledge with sharp, sometimes incisive commentary – always imbued with deep, genuine concern for her students – has inspired me to look closely at the writings of some of the most prominent writers from Anglo-Saxon England whom we know to have been teachers, to try to find their distinct teaching voices. Bede, Ælfric, and Byrhtferth of Ramsey all wrote texts which are explicitly pedagogical in nature, and each of these authors includes meta-commentary which elucidates not only their methods of teaching, but often their attitude toward teaching and possibly toward their students. Recreating the experience of education in Anglo-Saxon England from diverse texts written in diverse modes for diverse audiences and purposes is a fraught endeavor. Close-reading these passages offers us an opportunity to understand more deeply the experience of being a teacher – and possibly of being a student – in early medieval England. As Irina Dumitrescu has recently shown, ‘the study of ... “scenes of instruction” is vital, not only because of its relevance to the growing body of research into Anglo-Saxon and early medieval education ... but because the processes of teaching and learning underpin the very creation of the texts that comprise much of the past’s legacy to us’.¹ Dumitrescu – herself an undergraduate student of Toni’s – carefully and enlighteningly reads a range of texts but does not examine the particular texts considered here, which all come from teachers themselves. I think a volume in honor of a great teacher is an ideal venue to build on Dumitrescu’s work. Interrogating the work of early medieval English teachers alongside a great teacher of their period might deepen our appreciation of all.

At the outset, I must acknowledge that this task is particularly challenging. As many of us teachers know, we do not really expect students to

¹ *The Experience of Education in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2018), p. 2.

remember everything we say, and we certainly don't expect our off-hand comments to be analyzed. Nevertheless, doing exactly this at a session in Toni's honor at The International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo was not only a joy for me to recall and I believe for her to hear, but also for the scholars and well-wishers gathered in her honor to gain insight into the experience of her classroom. Similar analysis of select educational writers – focused especially on their texts dealing with a difficult subject, namely *computus* – might yield similar insight. Not to stand on shoulders too high, as Dumitrescu has shown, the late Anglo-Saxon author Ælfric Bata uses raucous exaggerated scenes of violence, abuse, and also humor for instructional ends. 'Joking,' he explains, 'is often mingled and joined with language and words of wisdom'.² Thus I have tried; the reader will decide if I have been successful. Toni has surely earned a place in the field as exalted as Bede or Ælfric – and more so than Byrhtferth – so I do not hesitate to compare them on more or less equal terms in this volume in her honor.

Professor Healey the Teacher

It is cliché and not unproblematic to talk about an accomplished female academic as maternal, but I'm sure everyone who knows Toni would acknowledge she is one of the most kind, warm, and supportive scholars in ours or any other field. Her concern as a teacher and dissertation committee member continues well beyond her students' graduation. She sends handwritten notes on the *Dictionary of Old English* newsletter each year; she once called at my house on Thanksgiving morning to ensure she had all the correct information for a letter of recommendation I had requested. She is academic kindness personified. Like Ælfric and Bede, her presence evokes thoughtful learning and careful instruction. Nevertheless, I also associate Toni with accidental double entendres. She is such an earnest and devoted scholar, that I think she does not notice when her words can be interpreted more than one way – perhaps ironically, for someone who has written so eloquently on polysemy. I know this happens to me, perhaps increasingly the longer I teach. I once asked my History of the English Language students if they knew the difference between 'being hanged' and 'being hung'. One student enthusiastically indicated that they did indeed. This type of unintentional double entendre is where the title of this chapter came from: imagine the extra room of the *Dictionary of Old English* on the fourteenth floor of Robarts Library circa 2003. This is where all the old magnetic tapes for the original Corpus of Old English

² Dumitrescu, *Experience of Education*, p. 65.

were stored. It was a cramped, not beautiful space, where a handful of PhD candidates were studying Old English Philology – slowly working through Alistair Campbell's *Old English Grammar*.³ Toni was a little late one class, and came bustling in, as always like a brilliant hummingbird: 'Oh! I'm so sorry! I spent the whole morning revising Hell'. Meaning, of course, that she was checking *DOE* headwords that began with 'Hell'.⁴

I don't think we ever laughed at lines like this from Toni; we were still very much in awe of her learning. But I would jot some of these down in notebooks I still own. Later in the semester, she asked a British student to pronounce the word P-O-T, to demonstrate the distinctive vowel sound which is not present in North American dialects. 'See?' she said, 'We all want Jonny's *pot*'. I was honored to take a course devoted to *Beowulf* from Toni; she warned of Grendel's mere, 'don't go there', and pointed out at line 1397 ('Ahleop ða se gomela gode þancode') that 'you don't need to leap for the alliteration'. I'm not certain these are funny taken completely out of context; this is the challenge of trying to reconstruct connotation and even personality from students' or teachers' notes after the fact. The difficulty becomes exacerbated by increase in time; attempting to do so for 1000-year-old texts may be a futile endeavor. Some comments, however, perhaps transcend time. At a panel about the *Old English Newsletter* at Kalamazoo, Toni started her presentation by declaring, 'I'm just going to shoot my wad'. Another participant, then editor of the *Old English Newsletter*, almost got whiplash from his double take. I had never considered up to that point that that expression had more than one meaning. Toni's usage was perhaps more in line with the *Oxford English Dictionary's* '4.b. In fig. phr. to shoot one's wad, to do all that one can do'.⁵ It is surely a coincidence that the usage example of this expression cites none other than Angus Cameron, Toni's predecessor at the *Dictionary of Old English*.⁶

My first thought for an article in honor of Toni – longest serving editor of the greatest resource in our field – was to document some of the similar unintentionally funny definitions found in the *Dictionary of Old English*. As a graduate assistant there who did a lot of copyediting, I would occasionally discover unusual or surprising turns of phrase in entries. For

³ Alistair Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959).

⁴ In addition to the simplex *hell*, *helle* ('hell'), *DOE: A to I* records sixty-three compounds that contain either *hell* or *helle* as their first elements.

⁵ 'wad, *n.1*', *OED Online* (Oxford UP, June 2017) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/224935>> [accessed 19 October 2017].

⁶ Peter Roosen-Runge, 'Well, I'm really not an expert on it. I've practically shot my wad'. The citation comes from the 'Discussion' section of 'Friday Afternoon: What Computers Can Do in the Humanities', in *Computers and Old English Concordances*, ed. Angus Cameron, Roberta Frank, and John Leyerle (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), pp. 21–33 at 31. Roosen-Runge was one of the participants of the conference 'Computers and Old English Concordances', which took place at the University of Toronto on 21 and 22 March 1969.

example, the rare word *frecmase*, which literally means something like ‘greedy titmouse’, is surprisingly used as a gloss for *lardariulus*: apparently a diminutive of *lardarius*, ‘one who deals in lard’. The semantic jump from a small bird to a seller of animal fat is explained by a short parenthetical note in the DOE:

CorpGl 2 10.91: *laudariulus* [for *lardariulus*] *frecmase* (lemma is prob. a diminutive of *lardarius* ‘one who deals in lard’; tits like lard).⁷

The final phrase of the parenthetical note, which caught the particular attention of myself and a fellow immature graduate student, who were fascinated by the range of possible interpretations (what part of speech is ‘like’ in this context anyway?), goes all the way back to W. M. Lindsay.⁸ Nevertheless, one has to stretch to find the humor in instances like these, and spending time seeking such references in such a venerable resource is certainly beneath the dignity of both our honoree and the audience for the volume. If one is interested in the definitions of the Old English *fisting* and *feorting*, one should look them up on one’s own time.⁹

Byrhtferth the Tired

A more productive tribute to our great Anglo-Saxonist teacher might be to think about her teacherly voice in comparison to our known Anglo-Saxon teachers. We all know teachers have distinctive classroom attitudes and voices which often remain with their students for the rest of their lives. Some distinctive teachers’ voices are even present in their writing. When we read the articles and books by our mentors, do we not hear them in that voice? Can we not detect the tenor of the asides? Some are more obvious than others. If we want to think about being able to hear a teacher’s attitude in his writings, the place to start is with Byrhtferth of Ramsey, since his bilingual commentary on the computus – the *Enchiridion* – gives us some of the clearest insight into the mind of an Anglo-Saxon teacher, and it is not always pretty.¹⁰ As Rebecca Stephenson has shown, we must

⁷ DOE, s.v. *frec-māse*.

⁸ *The Corpus Glossary*, ed. W. M. Lindsay (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1921), p. 104, no. 91.

⁹ Cf. Roberta Frank, ‘Sex in the *Dictionary of Old English*’, in *Unlocking the Wordhord: Anglo-Saxon Studies in Memory of Edward B. Irving, Jr*, ed. Mark C. Amodio and Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 302–12; ‘F-Words in *Beowulf*’, in *Making Sense: Constructing Meaning in Early English*, ed. Antonette diPaolo Healey and Kevin Kiernan, Publications of the Dictionary of Old English, 7 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2007), pp. 1–22.

¹⁰ *Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion*, ed. Peter S. Baker and Michael Lapidge, EETS ss, 15

understand Byrhtferth's comments within the world of the Benedictine Reform and Byrhtferth's anxiety about maintaining a clear distinction between his fellow monks and the secular clerics.¹¹ Nevertheless, the voice of Byrhtferth is distinctive; we can hear his frustration at his task of teaching unwilling or unable students: 'Vs þingð to langsum þæt we ealne þisne cwide on Englisc clericum geswutelion' 'It seems to us too tedious to explain the whole passage to clerks in English'.¹² The rhetorical maneuverers at play here – especially the degradation of both the use of English and the 'clerks' themselves – suggest that we not take this directly as a transcript of Byrhtferth's actual classroom voice. The text of the *Enchiridion* after all is a unique text, and its textual history is fraught. The sole surviving complete manuscript is far from ideal. If Michael Lapidge's assessment of the quality of the copying of the manuscript is to be believed, we owe the survival of Byrhtferth's work to one of the worst scribes of all time: 'If ever there was a sleepy and careless Anglo-Saxon scribe, it is the scribe of Ashmole 328 [...]. The breadth and range of his scribal errors are a matter of wonder'.¹³ Even with these caveats, however, the extant text of the *Enchiridion* retains vestiges of its classroom origin which have never been considered before. At one point within the text Byrhtferth especially notes what material had been covered in class previously ('Hesterna die' 'Yesterday')¹⁴ before briefly reviewing the material that was covered then. Stephenson rightly asserts the *Enchiridion* is 'perhaps more representative of Anglo-Saxon classroom practices and attitudes' than the colloquies which Ælfric of Eynsham and Ælfric Bata wrote.¹⁵

While the comments Byrhtferth makes may be ideologically driven, the content – the types of snarky things that he writes – must in some way reflect the sorts of things he said in his classroom. Without question, these are things that Byrhtferth thought. Many of his comments are deeply relatable. He begs his students to shape up so they can perform well for formal assessment:

(New York: Oxford UP, 1995).

¹¹ Rebecca Stephenson, 'Scapegoating the Secular Clergy: The Hermeneutic Style as a Form of Monastic Self-definition', *ASE*, 38 (2009), 101–35; and *The Politics of Language: Byrhtferth, Ælfric, and the Multilingual Identity of the Benedictine Reform*, Toronto Anglo-Saxon Series (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), pp. 68–101.

¹² *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, pp. 20–21.

¹³ Michael Lapidge, 'The Edition, Emendation, and Reconstruction of Anglo-Saxon Texts', in *The Politics of Editing Medieval Texts*, ed. Roberta Frank (New York: AMS Press, 1980), pp. 131–57 (p. 144). See also *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, pp. cxv–cxxiv. Cf. Stephenson, *The Politics of Language*, pp. 43–46, on the pitfalls of Lapidge and Baker's strong editorial position and decisions.

¹⁴ *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, pp. 16–17.

¹⁵ Stephenson, *The Politics of Language*, p. 41.

Nu wolde ic þæt þa æðela clericas asceocon fram heora andgites orðance ælce sleacnyse, þæt hig þe borlicor mihton beforan arwurðum biscopum gecyðan þæra epactana gescead.

Now I want the noble clerks to shake all laziness from their mind's understanding so that they can better recite the calculation of epacts before the reverend bishops.¹⁶

We can perhaps understand Byrhtferth's frustration was furthered by his isolated position. On more than one occasion he conjures the image of his scholarly predecessors almost looking down upon him. He positions himself pseudo-humbly among the fathers of the church as a means of enduring the exasperating task of teaching his lazy students:

Nouimus pro certo quod plurimi suburbani ignoranti clerici quot sunt genera annorum, sed eorum ignauis consulere placet suffultus patrum patrocinio, cum quorum canibus indignus sum recumbere.

We know for certain that many city clerics are ignorant of the types of years; but, sustained by the assistance of the fathers – with whose dogs I am unfit to lie down – it is a pleasure to deal with the clerics' idleness.¹⁷

In a somewhat more touching invocation of authority, Byrhtferth invites his students to envision the Venerable Bede himself, sitting in their presence, couched with pillows and discoursing eloquently:

Hyt wæs wundorlic Moyses geteldgehlung þæt Beda se æglæca lareow mæge to gebugan and gesyttan fægere gebolstrod and us glædum mode geswutelian þa þing þe him cuðe synt. We lætað þæt se getiddusta wer her sitte, nu we his gewritu smeagað.

It was Moses's wonderful tabernacle that Bede, the marvelous teacher, may enter and sit in, fairly couched with pillow, and joyfully reveal to us the things that are known to him. We shall pretend that that most learned man is sitting here, now that we are examining his writings.¹⁸

I am hesitant to draw too many parallels to my own teaching experience, but if one teaches at a more remote institution and perhaps does not have many colleagues, I can imagine inventing such colleagues; why not aim for the greatest of all time? Whether or not we can determine that Byrhtferth ever spoke these words to his students, we know that in his text he created an ideal teaching and learning environment. Byrhtferth

¹⁶ *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, pp. 42–43.

¹⁷ *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, pp. 18–19.

¹⁸ *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, pp. 66–67; see M. Breann Leake, 'Rewriting the Historian of the English People: The Afterlife of Bede in Early English Texts' (PhD dissertation, University of Connecticut, 2018), 96.

suggests that he would like less time with his students and more time sitting in the presence of the scholars who came before him, upon whose learning his own teaching rests.

Following this brief fantasy, however, Byrhtferth returns to his students with renewed vigor, insulting his students in a way that those most deserving will not likely understand. Byrhtferth seems to revel in passive aggression:

Pas þing synt earfoðe on Englisc to secganne, ac we wyllað þurh Cristes fultum hig onwreon swa wel swa we betst magon and þas meregrota þam beforan lecgan þe þisra þinga gyman wyllað.

These things are difficult to say in English, but with Christ's help we shall reveal them as well as we can, and lay pearls before those who wish to pay heed to these things.¹⁹

The scriptural quotation of course refers to Jesus' 'casting pearls before swine', of Matthew 7:6. The unnamed swine are now his students, though only those who know their scripture well and are paying full attention would even know that they have been insulted. This passage also reveals yet another source of Byrhtferth's frustration: 'The things are difficult to explain in English'. In addition to trying to teach an extremely difficult subject, Byrhtferth is simultaneously forced to craft a new vocabulary in his native language for the subject.²⁰ The subject of computus is inherently difficult; as we shall see below, even the greatest master of computus – Bede – struggles to communicate its nuances succinctly. Bede at least had the advantage of working in Latin, the language in which his own source texts operated. Byrhtferth was in some ways in uncharted territory. The *Enchiridion* is a difficult and complex – and often bewildering – text; imagine however how difficult it was to compose; imagine the day to day activity of trying to grapple with this material in at least two languages with students who were likely not particularly keen to learn. Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion* gives us unique insight – unparalleled in any other Anglo-Saxon text – to the experience of these frustrations for a teacher.

Byrhtferth's particular pedagogical frustrations may have been furthered by his own experiences as a student. Byrhtferth was famously a student of Abbo of Fleury, the brilliant continental intellectual who made Fleury his home for two years.²¹ Abbo and Byrhtferth most likely would have communicated in Latin, the language in which all early medieval

¹⁹ *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, pp. 66–67.

²⁰ René Derolez, 'Those Things are Difficult to Express in English...', *English Studies*, 70 (1989), 469–76.

²¹ *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, p. xx–xxi; *Byrhtferth of Ramsey: The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgwine*, ed. and trans. Michael Lapidge, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon, 2009), pp. xxii–xxv.

computus-related texts were written. Although Byrhtferth speaks with only kindness of Abbo, we might imagine the difficulty of learning from a teacher with a different first language. Byrhtferth's record of his own struggle as a teacher to communicate this information in English – in a vernacular – was in many ways unique. Language difficulty was certainly something that was on Byrhtferth's mind; his text preserves the earliest attestation – and the only in Old English – of the word *French* referring to the language. One wonders what sort of teacher Abbo may have been. Although Byrhtferth does not ever complain about his teacher, it is striking that one of the earliest attestations of the Old French loanword 'sot' ('fool') occurs in Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion*, in the immediate context of speaking French poorly:

Se ðe his agene spræce awyrt, he wyrcoð barbarismus swylce he cweðe 'þu sot' þær he sceolde cweðan 'þu sott'. Se ðe sprycð on Frencisc and þæt ne can ariht gecweðan, se wyrcoð barbarolexin.

He who corrupts his own language commits a barbarism, as if he said 'þu sot' ['you soot'] where he should say 'þu sott' ['you fool']. He who speaks in French but cannot speak it correctly commits *barbarolexis*.²²

Might we imagine Abbo calling Byrhtferth or other Ramsey monks 'sots'? Like the 'pearls before you-know-what' comment, perhaps not all of those Abbo insulted even understood what he was calling them. It is difficult to make any of these assertions unambiguously; at the same time we must acknowledge the 'pearls' that Byrhtferth has left us. All our knowledge of Anglo-Saxon daily life is reconstructed from precious scraps of information which have often survived entirely by chance. Of all places from this period, the monastery was by far the most literate and productive of text; if anywhere, this is where we would be most likely to have some recorded insight into the daily thoughts of these people. Nevertheless, these hints from Byrhtferth are among the only ones we have. Not all of these hints are pleasant.

Regardless of his own experience as a student, Byrhtferth is condescending to his students, giving us, in both Latin and English, some of the most biting sarcasm in the corpus of extant Anglo-Latin and Old English literature:

²² *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, pp. 88–91. See Derolez, 'Byrhtferðus Bene Docet', *English Studies*, 78 (2006), 253–65 and 'Language Problems in Anglo-Saxon England: *barbara loquella* and *barbarismus*', in *Words, Texts and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture: Presented to Helmut Gneuss on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Michael Korhammer (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992), pp. 285–92 (esp. pp. 290–91).

Quoniam sermo iste ad desides congruit clericos, ammonemus, pacis reuerentia, eos ut discant que ignorant et postmodum doceant ceteris que didicerint.

Because this discussion is pertinent to lazy clerics, let us urge them, begging their pardons, to learn those things they are ignorant of, and thereafter teach others what they have learned.²³

swa ic heronem wylle gesettan, þæt þam sleacan preoste ne þince to mycel geswinc þæt he undo his eagan herto.

as I will write down here so that the lazy priest will not think it too much trouble to open his eyes to it.²⁴

Perhaps deep down, however, Byrhtferth pictures himself as deeply caring. All of these cynical remarks, we should at least hope, stem from the fact that Byrhtferth yearns for his students' success. Many could attest to Toni Healey's genuine care for her students and friends; Byrhtferth makes such a claim for himself:

Oft seo brodige henn, þeah heo sarlice cloccige, heo tospræt hyre fyðera and þa briddas gewyrmð. Swa we þenceað iunglingas to frefrianne mid þissere lare.

Often the brooding hen, though she clucks sorrowfully, spreads her wings and warms her chicks. So we intend to comfort young ones with this teaching.²⁵

I do not know of such a physical 'mothering' image in all of Old English literature, which contrasts so strongly with the severe pedagogue found throughout the rest of the text. Even this image, however, is more complicated than it seems, and may hide further hidden scorn for his students. Like the 'pearls before swine' image above, Byrhtferth again draws on Jesus' words in the Gospel of Matthew, though how we are to read the allusion here is far from clear. The central image, that of a broody hen, warming her chicks, comes at the culmination of Matthew 23, all of which is a harsh rebuke of the Pharisees and scribes, who are criticized for their ostentatious displays of piety which disguise their moral failing. This passage seems to have made an impression on Byrhtferth, because he alludes to it later in the *Enchiridion*, criticizing his students for not 'keep[ing] their phylacteries with them, mak[ing] a mess of calculations of this sort'. Here however, Byrhtferth has flipped Jesus' rebuke – in Matthew, phylacteries are a symbol of hypocrisy – into chastisement for

²³ *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, pp. 52–53.

²⁴ *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, pp. 104–05.

²⁵ *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, pp. 68–69.

not doing the work they ought to.²⁶ Likewise, the broody hen passage in Matthew is Jesus' image of himself, sheltering his beloved, in contrast to Jerusalem – here representative of the Pharisees and scribes – which he decries for murdering its own prophets. Seeing inside Byrhtferth's head is always a challenge; these allusions are especially vexing. Does he think his students should be more like Pharisees? That he himself is utterly unlike the Pharisees? Is this another subtle dig at his students, who may or may not understand the Gospel allusions? This is the danger of trying to make much of teachers' offhand comments in a pedagogical context. We cannot even fully grasp what Byrhtferth intended or what his students took away from their instruction. We are left, nevertheless, with a surprisingly maternal image of a teacher. Perhaps Byrhtferth is so harsh and so condescending because he cares so much.

Ælfric the Kind

Byrhtferth's predecessor, the single most prolific named Old English author, Ælfric of Eynsham, was also a teacher. Ælfric has left us at least one set of texts explicitly crafted for classroom instruction: his *Grammar*, *Glossary*, and *Colloquy*.²⁷ Unlike the *Enchiridion*, which has 'prerequisites' – that is, it was clearly written with advanced students in mind – Ælfric's pedagogical 'triad' on the other hand is aimed at introductory Latin language students.²⁸ His *Colloquy* in particular is a series of Latin conversations designed to introduce spoken Latin and a wide range of vocabulary. Of course, like Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion*, we cannot take this text as a transcript of an Anglo-Saxon classroom – the *Colloquy* after all introduces a cast of characters, from a farmer to a councilor to a baker – but it does nevertheless show us how Ælfric may have envisioned his own classroom.

He begins in the person of a teacher. Ælfric clearly envisions a 'student-centered' classroom: the *pueri* initiate the *Colloquy*, asking to be taught and deferring to the *magister* as to what the appropriate subject

²⁶ For a careful reading of this complicated passage, see Leake, 'Rewriting the Historian of the English People', pp. 89–96.

²⁷ *Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar*, ed. Julius Zupitza, Sammlung englischer Denkmäler in kritischen Ausgaben, 1 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1880); *Ælfric's Colloquy*, ed. G. N. Garmonsway (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966).

²⁸ Joyce Hill, 'Ælfric's Grammatical Triad', in *Form and Content of Instruction in Anglo-Saxon England in the Light of Contemporary Manuscript Evidence*, ed. Maria Amalia D'Arconco, Loredana Lazzari, and Patrizia Lendinara (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 285–307; Thomas N. Hall, 'Ælfric as Pedagogue', in *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. Hugh Magennis and Mary Swan (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 193–216.

will be. The very next question has to do with the method of instruction. The teacher asks, 'Uultis flagellari in discendo?' 'Do you want to be beaten in learning?' and the students humbly reply 'Carius est nobis flagellari pro doctrina quam nescire' 'It's better for us to be beaten in learning than to not know'.²⁹ Ælfric raises the specter of pedagogical violence only to dispel it quickly, again driven by the agency of the students themselves:³⁰

Sed scimus te mansuetum esse et nolle inferre plagas nobis, nisi cogaris a nobis.

But we know that you are kind and do not want to inflict punishments on us, unless you are compelled by us.³¹

Ælfric presents his teacher as a 'good cop' in contrast to Byrhtferth's condescending snarky 'bad cop'. The figure of the *magister* in this text nevertheless quickly fades out of view, as a parade of occupational characters become the focus of the piece.

Even if Ælfric had written more material for this teacher role, a comparison with Byrhtferth's apparent teaching style would not be an equal assessment. To try to unearth comments comparable to those in the *Enchiridion*, it makes more sense to see how Ælfric wrote about the difficult subject of computus himself in his Old English work *De temporibus anni*.³² Here we can imagine Ælfric like Byrhtferth – like Professor Healey – trying in earnest to teach a difficult subject to a variety of learners. Here even Ælfric occasionally seems to express concerns about the capabilities of his audience. These comments do not match Byrhtferth's voice in terms of tone, nor do they directly address students, but they give us some insight into the mind of Ælfric as he embarks into the uncharted territory of vernacular explanations of astronomical phenomena:³³

Pa seofon sind gehatene Septem planete, & ic wat þæt hit wile þincan swiðe ungeleaffullic ungelæredum mannum, gif we secgað gewislice be ðam sterorum & be heora gange.

The seven are called *septem planete*, and I know that it may seem very incredible to unlearned people if we speak truthfully about the stars and their paths.³⁴

²⁹ Ælfric's *Colloquy*, pp. 18–19. See Dumitrescu, *The Experience of Education*, p. 67.

³⁰ See Irina Dumitrescu, 'The Grammar of Pain in Ælfric Bata's *Colloquies*', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 45 (2009), 239–53.

³¹ Ælfric's *Colloquy*, p. 19.

³² Ælfric's *De Temporibus Anni*, ed. and trans. Martin Blake (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009).

³³ Blake considers the following asides as possible evidence of lay readership for this text; Ælfric's *De Temporibus Anni*, p. 45.

³⁴ Ælfric's *De Temporibus Anni*, pp. 92–93.

Rather than directly addressing the inabilities of his students, Ælfric envisions the reactions of the ‘unlearned’: presumably those outside of his classroom and monastery. In doing so, Ælfric creates a certain sense of community among his students or readers. It’s not teacher versus students, but both of them together in contrast to the unlearned. This topos resurfaces throughout this work:

Wucan & monðas sind mannum cuðe æfter heora andgite, & ðeah ðe we hi æfter boclicum andgite awriton, hit wile ðincan ungelæredum mannum to deoplic & ungewunelic.

Weeks and months are known to men according to their understanding, and although we might write about them as understood in books, it would seem too profound and strange to the unlearned.³⁵

One wonders – and the danger is great of reading too much into such short asides – if such comments reflect in any way Ælfric’s own discomfort with the material. Teachers can have their own doubts, especially when delving into materials outside of their own expertise. Perhaps Ælfric wants to assure students that these claims may seem strange because he himself finds them strange. Ælfric’s personal motivation for imagining the non-audience for this work is also suggested when he uses it to foreclose further discussion:

Ðeah ðe we swiðor sprecon be heofenlicum tunglum, ne mæg swa ðeah se ungelæreda leornian heora leohtbæran ryne.

Though we might say more about heavenly bodies, the unlearned person, however, is unable to learn about their luminous course.³⁶

He could say more, but he apparently is not going to because the unlearned – who are presumably not among his audience – would not get it. Perhaps this is a slightly Byrhtferthian dig at his own students: I could tell you more, but it would be a waste of time, because it’s over your head. Ælfric is not being mean; he’s just being honest.

The Venerable Teacher

The Venerable Bede is in many ways the *magister magistrorum*: not only the literal source for so many later Anglo-Saxon works, but also the personification of the learned and humble dispenser of wisdom as envisioned by Byrhtferth. Like all great teachers, he tells us that he is a student first, and also a writer:

³⁵ Ælfric’s *De Temporibus Anni*, pp. 80–83.

³⁶ Ælfric’s *De Temporibus Anni*, pp. 92–93.

semper aut discere aut docere aut scribere dulce habui [...] haec in Scripturam sanctam meae meorumque necessitati ex opusculis uenerabilium patrum breuiter adnotare, siue etiam ad formam sensus et interpretationis eorum superadicere curauit.

It has always been my delight to learn or teach or to write [...] to make brief extracts from the works of the venerable fathers on the holy Scriptures or to add notes of my own to clarify their sense and interpretation for my own benefit and that of my brothers.³⁷

Even though Bede composed more biblical commentary than any writer since late antiquity, he claims to have merely ‘added some notes’. While the structure of many of his works is built significantly on tying together quotations from the fathers, he does much more than this. I would not be the first to point out that Bede created a wealth of original exegesis, and at times he in fact contradicts his sources – even the fathers.³⁸ At moments like this, when Bede is his most original, we can see shades of attitude creeping to the surface of his writing. I have elsewhere shown Bede’s rage at being accused of heresy for his Hebrew-based chronology; he also gets rather angry when writers misuse Hebrew etymologies.³⁹ But in this volume devoted to the career of a great teacher like Toni Healey, I’d point to the number of times Bede’s teacherly persona – his classroom self – comes out while trying to explain something rather difficult like computus. Bede’s *De temporum ratione* served as the textbook on the reckoning of time and the calculation of Easter until the sixteenth century. Surely such longevity can be attributed to the masterful teacher who created the text. Nevertheless, as with the works of Byrhtferth and Ælfric, careful close reading can uncover cracks in the teacherly persona or perhaps offer insight into the very real frustrations of teachers even over 1000 years ago. On more than one occasion in his *De temporum ratione*, Bede expresses frustration at trying to communicate in writing something that can be said – in a classroom – much more easily:

Quae uerbo melius colloquentis quam scribentis stilo disci pariter et doceri queunt.⁴⁰

³⁷ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), pp. 566–67.

³⁸ See Roger Ray, ‘Who Did Bede Think He Was?’, in *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Morgantown: West Virginia UP, 2006), pp. 11–35.

³⁹ Fleming, ‘*Hebraeam scire linguam: Bede’s Rhetoric of the Hebrew Truth*’, in *Imagining the Jew in Anglo-Saxon Literature and Culture*, ed. Samantha Zacher (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), pp. 63–78.

⁴⁰ *Bedaue uenerabilis De temporum ratione liber*, ed. C. W. Jones, CCSL, 123B (Brepols: Turnhout, 1977), p. 281.

These things can be both learned and taught more easily through speech than by the pen of a writer.⁴¹

Multa hinc dici poterant, sed haec melius a colloquente quam a scribente fiunt.⁴²

Much can be said about this, but it can be done to better effect by someone speaking than through the written word.⁴³

Quae profecto omnia melius colloquendo quam scribendo docentur.⁴⁴

In truth, all this is easier to teach by oral explanation than in writing.⁴⁵

Sed innumera huiusce disciplinae, sicut et caeterarum atrium, melius uiuae uocis alloquio quam stili signantis traduntur officio.⁴⁶

But many aspects of this discipline, just as of the other arts, are better conveyed by the utterance of a living voice than by the labour of an inscribing pen.⁴⁷

Unlike Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion* and Ælfric's *Colloquy* – both of which give the impression of reproducing lived classroom experience – Bede's text calls explicit attention to the absence of a classroom and the attendant difficulties necessitated by the disconnect. Bede seems to yearn for the classroom: if only he could sit down with us, he could explain all of this difficult material far more easily. Bede realizes that knowing him only through his works does not do justice to the scholar-teacher that he was. Not everything he knows can be transferred to text. Bede's own awareness of this situation makes Byrhtferth's fantasy – imagining Bede on his pillows, in his classroom, for his and his students' benefit – all the more poignant. As Bede wishes himself to be able to explain in person, so does one of his most enthusiastic students – centuries later – wish for Bede to be present.

Bede gives us some of the clearest images of a teacher at work, struggling and getting occasionally frustrated at the difficulty of his task. Since the ultimate goal is instruction, rather than, say, showing off his own erudition, he urges those who are able to take up the task that he is here only able to do in written form:

De quorum positione strictim nescientes instruere obsecro scientibus oneri non sit.⁴⁸

⁴¹ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. Faith Wallis (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1999), p. 18.

⁴² *De temporum ratione*, p. 336.

⁴³ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, pp. 57–58.

⁴⁴ *De temporum ratione*, p. 349.

⁴⁵ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, p. 68.

⁴⁶ *De temporum ratione*, p. 444.

⁴⁷ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, p. 139.

⁴⁸ *De temporum ratione*, p. 333.

I beseech those who are knowledgeable not to consider it an imposition to instruct those who do not know concerning the precise position [of the signs].⁴⁹

In one of the most teacherly things one can say, Bede preemptively silences his potential colleague-critics – assuming we can imagine anyone as an equal to Bede – ‘if you do not like the way I have done it, do it yourself’:

Quod si quis obiecerit uel huius uel praecedentis argumenti alicubi ordinem uacillare, doceat ipse in huiusmodi quaestionibus indagandis ueracius et compendiosius argumentum, et nos libenter gratanterque accipiemus.⁵⁰

Should anyone object that the order of either this or the preceding formula is unsound at any point, then let him teach a more accurate and handy formula for investigating questions of this kind, and we will gladly and gratefully accept it.⁵¹

The passive aggression runs deep from the Venerable pen. In this case, however, his target is not his students, but other teachers. But this is a rare bit of near snark from a writer who for the most part wants nothing more than his students’ success, even the slower among them: ‘ut manifestiora cuilibet etiam tardioris ingenii reddantur’⁵² ‘so that these matters might be more evident to everyone, even those of slower understanding’.⁵³ Knowing that his classroom and readership will be comprised of students of all levels, he appeals equally to both sides of the classroom (‘siue eruditus siue simplex es, lector’ ‘and reader, whether you are learned or unschooled’)⁵⁴ and provides the ‘dumbed-down’ version of the work he has already explained more fully:

Si qui uero etiam calculandi minus idoneus, lunaris tamen circuitus existit curiosus, et huic ad capacitatem ingenioli sui commodamus argumentum quo id quod quaerit inueniat.⁵⁵

Should someone rather less skilled in calculation nonetheless be curious about the course of the Moon, we have also for his sake devised a formula adapted to the capacity of his intelligence, so that he might find what he seeks.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, p. 55.

⁵⁰ *De temporum ratione*, p. 346.

⁵¹ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, p. 66.

⁵² *De temporum ratione*, p. 342.

⁵³ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, p. 62.

⁵⁴ *De temporum ratione*, p. 345; *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, p. 64.

⁵⁵ *De temporum ratione*, p. 343.

⁵⁶ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, p. 63.

Again, however, there are moments when a bit of attitude creeps into Bede's writing, as if he cannot believe that he has to strip his teaching down to the barest rudiments for those who can't even do basic maths:

Quod si adeo quisque deses uel hebes est ut absque omni labore computandi lunae cursum scire uoluerit, innitatur [...].⁵⁷

Should anyone be so lazy or slow-witted as to wish to know the course of the Moon without any of the trouble of calculating, he must rely on [the following chart].⁵⁸

Like Toni, Bede even occasionally lets slip the unintentionally funny image; he urges, 'Denique ut rei ipsius euisceremus intera'⁵⁹ 'Now to gut the bowels of this question!'⁶⁰ Looks like he's ready to shoot his wad.

Like Bede and Ælfric and even Byrhtferth, there are many sides to Professor Healey, as I imagine those who have benefited from either her teaching, her scholarship, or her friendship know. Yes, she is kind and supportive, but she is a scholar – a philologist! – and does not mess around with facts. I don't think she ever got too frustrated, like Bede and certainly not like Byrhtferth, but she did tell me and my classmates on the first day of Old English Philology that 'this course will be nothing but problems'. She was always an honest teacher. I recall she liked my final essay for her *Beowulf* class – it became my first conference paper and then my first publication⁶¹ – but she told a classmate that his paper would have been better 'if more of it had been right'. On the other hand, I had the hardest time in Old English Philology; sound changes did not come easy for me. Toni almost never put us on the spot in class, but one day, out of the blue, she asked me to identify the sound change at work in a particular Old English word. I didn't know the answer though I bet everyone else in class did. It was i-mutation, the easiest of all sound changes. It was rather embarrassing – I didn't have many moments like that in graduate school – but it was formative. Not until I was putting this essay together for presentation at Kalamazoo at the session in honor of Toni did I realize how obsessed I have become with i-mutation. I now can proudly claim to have taught scores of students – in my Old English and History of the English classes, in Cleveland and Fort Wayne – about i-mutation and its

⁵⁷ *De temporum ratione*, p. 353.

⁵⁸ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, p. 71.

⁵⁹ *De temporum ratione*, p. 425.

⁶⁰ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, p. 125.

⁶¹ 'Eþel-weard: The First Scribe of the Beowulf MS', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* (2004), 177–86. See now, Damian Fleming, 'ethel sweet ethel-weard: the first scribe of the Beowulf-manuscript' <<https://medievalfleming.wordpress.com/2017/11/14/ethel-sweet-ethel-weard-the-first-scribe-of-the-beowulf-manuscript/>> [accessed 6 April 2018].

significance in English. My enthusiasm for this sound change prompted one student to make us i-mutation t-shirts. I am living witness to the power of a carefully chosen word to a struggling student. We can only hope to reconstruct what it must have been like to learn from our great early English scholar-teachers, Bede, Ælfric, and Byrhtferth; we will never know exactly what effect their attitudes – positive or negative – had on their students. But I know for certain the impact of Antonette diPaolo Healey’s teaching and mentorship on me.