

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

.....
MEDIEVAL LATIN
LITERATURE
.....

Edited by

RALPH J. HEXTER

AND

DAVID TOWNSEND

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PART I

.....
FRAMING THE FIELD:
PROBLEMATICS AND
PROVOCATIONS
.....

At
can
man
form
and
The
sine
tion
place
and
An
frid
edior
studies
econ
conten
mediev
database
and sept

CHAPTER 1

THE CURRENT QUESTIONS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS OF MEDIIEVAL LATIN STUDIES

DAVID TOWNSEND

PHILOLOGY AS ACHIEVEMENT AND CONSTRAINT

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the study of medieval Latin literature stands heir to generations of rich philological accomplishment. Editorial projects of massively ambitious scope—some continuing from their inception in the nineteenth century or earlier—produced editions upon which scholars continue to rely, and, even when superseded, upon which subsequent efforts have often been founded. The establishment of reliable critical texts enabled wider-ranging studies—at the same time shaping such studies by providing the sense of a firm scientific foundation upon which further work could build. (Such reciprocities are palpably exemplified by the interactive relations between the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* and the journal *Neues Archiv* and its antecedents; between the *Acta Sanctorum* and *Analecta Bollandiana*; between the *Corpus Christianorum* project and *Sacris Erudiri*.) The accumulated accomplishments of source study connected with these editorial efforts; the establishment of the provenance of individual manuscripts; studies of the transmission and availability of individual classical texts; and the reconstruction of the holdings of specific medieval libraries: all these afford the contemporary reader an unprecedentedly rich understanding of the context of medieval Latin literature. More recently, the creation of searchable digital textual databases has transformed our ability to trace lines of influence at a fine-grained and sophisticated level.

The most monumentally accomplished of these achievements have naturally claimed respect as the least easily replaceable and as least requiring duplication. The consequent bibliographic solidity has encouraged an operative assumption that editorial production at its best remains detached from the implication of editorial process in its own cultural moment; it has militated against the integration of more recent editorial theory, which has called into question the opposition of the text as a stable object of scrutiny in contradistinction to the task of interpretation. The fluidity of vernacular textual circumstances have by contrast had a more substantial impact on the theoretical deliberations of such works' editors, beginning with Bédier's early twentieth-century challenges to recensionist method, and continuing with models of textual *mouvance* introduced to medieval editorial theory by Paul Zumthor. A notable recent example of a more eclectic and self-consciously experimental Latinist editorial practice is the Ars Edendi project based at the University of Stockholm (<http://www.arsedendi.org/>), which views itself as a laboratory for discussion of the manifold problems encountered in presenting texts of anomalous and unruly transmission.

At the same time that a highly successful regimen of editorial work defined the limits of Latin literary studies, medieval Latinity's halting and incomplete disciplinary enfranchisement through most of the twentieth century within the broader field of North American medieval studies carried with it a risk of ossification. Despite intermittent attention to medieval Latin topics under the auspices of the American Philological Association, Departments of Classics, in their overriding preoccupation at the time with virtuosic command of the relatively narrow range of late Republican and early Imperial linguistic and literary norms, hardly offered medieval Latinists a ready affiliation. More focused attention was paid the field under the aegis of the Modern Language Association, beginning with a presidential address delivered in 1908 pleading for the importance of the subject's study (Coffman et al. 1924, 305). The formation of a Committee on Mediaeval Latin Studies, initially constituted under the auspices of the MLA in 1921 but soon reorganized independently in affiliation with the American Council of Learned societies, led in 1925 to the foundation of the Medieval Academy of America (Wenger 1982, 27). Such efforts were born of the best intentions to emphasize the natural and organic cross-fertilization of work on medieval vernacular texts in conjunction with the Latinate cultural matrix out of which they emerged, and on Latin texts in dynamic relation to the always interlinguistic circumstances of their production. But ironically, the hiving off of the field from more diachronically engaged conversation within traditional disciplines enabled the unchallenged subdivision of vernacular medievalism within the MLA along lines of national literatures, thus obscuring the pre-national continua of most medieval literary production. (It might, indeed, be observed that the transnational and metalinguistic character of medieval Latin literature [on which latter, see the essay by Carin Ruff in this volume] must have constituted something of an uncomfortable scandal to nationalistically inclined literary-historical narratives—narratives challenged, to be sure, by both Curtius and Auerbach, but powerful still even in the wake of World War II's demonstration of the bank-

ruptcy of political and cultural nationalism.) The overriding emphasis upon cultural synthesis in much American medievalism of the early and mid-twentieth century encouraged the conception of medieval Latin not as a site of cultural contestation but as a tool for the preservation of stasis and the erasure of local difference.

Thus many North American medieval Latinists, in notable contrast to the institutional circumstances of German and most other European universities, came to pursue their research at the margins of departments (of English, modern languages, history, religion, or art as well as classics) in which the focus of their studies remained esoteric. Few would have described this situation as desirable. Yet the ensuing isolation encouraged a self-seriousness of mission that neither found itself required to make a case for relevance to the interests of colleagues within one's institution nor was easily deflected from its self-determined agenda by a wider range of competent interlocutors. In short, along with the disadvantages of an often arcane and hieratic status came a liberation from the demands of immediately engaged response to a larger academic community.

Such institutional circumstances explain in part the lag that developed between the concerns of medieval literary studies more broadly and those of medieval Latinists during the last third of the twentieth century. The virtually inexhaustible primary sources available to medieval Latinists afforded the field copious material with which it might have confronted the methodological shifts that revolutionized literary studies beginning in the 1970s, and which by the later 1980s were beginning to reshape the *lingua franca* of literary medievalism more specifically. The work of such scholars as Kevin Brownlee, Marina Brownlee, Jane Burns, Carolyn Dinshaw, Allen J. Frantzen, Jesse Gellrich, Sarah Kay, Alexandre Leupin, Stephen Nichols, and Lee Patterson, to name only a few, led the importation of a broad range of post-structuralist and materialist approaches into vernacular medieval studies. Such scholars brought to bear the concerns of Derridean deconstruction, Lacanian psychoanalysis, the responses of the new French feminisms to psychoanalytic thought, the broad, epistemologically based challenges to social, intellectual, and literary history posed by Michel Foucault, Mikhail Bakhtin's mapping of conflicting, dialectically charged generic expectations within a single work, and the debates over concepts of ideology and agency consequent on readings of Foucault and of Louis Althusser—these latter debates being particularly central within American New Historicism and the more Marxist-inflected movement of British cultural materialism. By the mid-1990s, such approaches transformed the intellectual profile of North American medievalism, and the ongoing work of these scholars, together with the initiatives of a subsequent cohort, began to build on these new foundations under less of an apologetic burden. By the end of the century, the theoretical wave had, for all its eclecticism, become something of an interpretive orthodoxy and the foil against which further work has begun to contest the dominance of these now-established approaches and their claims to general applicability.

Medieval Latin studies remained on the whole strikingly innocent of this trajectory. These years saw a few engagements with the new methodologies, for

example Gerald Bond's study of the construction of subjectivity in the verse of Baudri of Bourgeuil, articles by the author of the present essay on questions of gender in Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis* and in the hagiography of Goscelin of Canterbury, Bruce Holsinger's work on the sequences of Hildegard of Bingen and on the construction of racialized identity in the sermons of Bernard of Clairvaux, Ralph Hexter's work on the sexual heterodoxy of Ovidian reception, a collection of essays on ideologies of gender in twelfth-century Latin literature (Townsend and Taylor 1998), and the attention of scholars including Robert Bartlett, Nancy Partner, and Robert Stein to the ideologies of twelfth-century Latin historiography. Scholars brought theory to bear on the legacy of classical literature (for example, Christopher Baswell and Marilyn Desmond), but with a principal emphasis on vernacular adaptation rather than on the Latin texts, or else addressed to Latin texts questions whose multi-disciplinary dimensions framed their Latinity as incidental to their subject matter (as for example Alexandre Leupin's, Mark Jordan's, and Noah Guynn's approaches to Alan of Lille's diatribe against homoeroticism in the *De planctu Naturae*, Jordan's reading of Hrotsvit's life of the Cordovan martyr Pelagius, or Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's essays on several hagiographical and historical texts). The impact of current methodologies, with the exception of the reception studies of Hans Robert Jauss, has lagged even further in much Continental medieval Latin scholarship.

In short, medieval Latin studies remained for the most part resolutely grounded in the "old philology" of editorial practice, source study, codicological analysis, and traditional literary history. Such an approach bore rich fruit in, for example, a sustained, tirelessly inquisitive, and deeply erudite investigation of the literary milieu of tenth-century monastic Latinities in the work of Michael Lapidge; a signal account of the historiographical aims of early medieval historiography by Walter Goffart; a superb omnibus companion to medieval Latin studies edited by Frank Mantello and A. G. Rigg; the latter's magisterial history of Anglo-Latin literature; comprehensive accounts of simile and ecphrasis as devices of Latin epic in the work of Fritz Peter Knapp and Christina Ratkowitzsch, respectively; the proceedings of congresses held in 1988 (Heidelberg), 1993 (Florence), 1998 (Cambridge), 2002 (Santiago de Compostela), and 2006 (Toronto), organized under the auspices of the International Committee for Medieval Latin Studies. It is telling that a survey of the approaches represented by these five latter collections identifies fewer than half a dozen papers that could in any meaningful sense be said to engage hermeneutic methods articulated later than the 1960s.

The aversion to theory has led to a significant loss of opportunity in the field over the last thirty years. An engagement with contemporary debates over ideology and agency might have introjected a new vitality into the prosecution of source study and *Toposforschung*, had research more often substantively engaged transformations of a citation's illocutionary force in the concrete milieu of specific receptions. (A fine and venerable example of such engagements can in fact be found in the *Bedeutungsforschung* of Friedrich Ohly and his students.) The failure of the existing literature to recognize the full depth of the achievements of Hrotsvit of

Gandersheim dramatically exemplifies the desiderata left unfulfilled by the current state of the field. An overriding emphasis on the normative monastic context and the literary models for Hrotsvit's saints' lives and dramas as unproblematic documents of hagiographical edification has done little to convey her originality and the subversive, gender-critical potential of her texts (on which see Parsons and Townsend in this volume), precisely because Hrotsvit scholarship has made so little use of theories of the socially and culturally productive instability of the repetitive performance of sanctioned roles. Critics might have come to such a discussion through multiple channels: through deeper engagement with feminist models of mimetic performance derived from the work of Luce Irigaray; through Judith Butler's post-Lacanian description of the Law of gender's self-undermining reliance on endless performative iteration by those subject to it in order to remain in force; through Bourdieu's insistence that cultural capital is generated not for its own sake but in order to contest and remake agency within a concrete cultural formation. Instead, studies of Hrotsvit's Benedictine context have tended to impute an essential conservatism to her project, simultaneously reducing her choice of the dramatic form to a provincial bluestocking's adoption of an imperfectly understood literary convention (Sticca 1970, 1973, 1984). Even feminist studies of her work have tended to emphasize her self-legitimation within an essentially patriarchal literary tradition rather than reading her works as inhabiting a patriarchal tradition in order to subvert it (Wilson 1988; Newman, Stottlemyer, and Wiethaus in Brown et al. 2004). Such a situation contrasts with feminist work on the tradition of devotional literature, where, for example, Linda Georgianna and later Anne Clark Bartlett and Barbara Newman delineated the vividly contested wresting of agency from patriarchal discourses and social structures. The pursuit of *Toposforschung* and institutional contextualization through positive description, rather than in order to identify sites of discursive contestation, has sidelined the subversive agency of the most important woman writer between the end of antiquity and the twelfth century.

Inadequate theorization of cultural agency also contributes to a pervasive disregard for translation as a scholarly discipline in its own right. The academic marginalization of translation is hardly unique to medieval Latin studies: as Lawrence Venuti has variously observed, it is endemic across most areas of literary specialization and is rooted deeply in ideologies of intellectual property. But just as an undeconstructed binary between editorial practice on the one hand and a contextualized hermeneutic engagement with the text on the other has insulated the editing of medieval Latin texts from focused discussions of cultural negotiation, so also the notion of textual integrity as radically distinguished from reception history has deprivileged the work of making medieval Latin texts accessible to a wider scholarly audience (much less to a general reading public) for whom the original language remains inaccessible. (Concerted attempts at redress have included several series surveyed by Jan Ziolkowski elsewhere in this volume.)

To be sure, the abstention of medieval Latin studies from many of the theoretical engagements of the last thirty-five years might admit some partial

justification. The more ludic aspects of deconstructive criticism of the 1980s now seem dated, the protest against the fiction of semiotic stability that they embodied at the time now something of a restatement of the obvious. More to the point, post-structuralist criticism presupposed from its outset linguistic conditions that hardly corresponded to the circumstances of medieval Latinity. As a protest against the orthodoxies of structuralism, the deconstructionist project aimed to expose the scientific certitudes of structuralist linguistics as chimerical, in the face of texts that embodied an illusory epistemological stability. Methods based in objection to an understanding of language as natural and stable within a community of native speakers merely belabored the obvious, in the eyes of many medieval Latinists, in relation to a language native to none of its users from the end of the eighth century on (to follow Roger Wright's and Michel Banniard's hypotheses on the definitive Carolingian split between Latin and Romance, as addressed elsewhere in this handbook by Carin Ruff). The founding premise of Derrida's grammatology—that the always already alienated semiotic slippage of writing is in fact prior in language to the illusory presence and solidity of speech—was arguably so self-evident to students of texts written in a language artificially acquired and self-consciously polished beyond the norms of any oral usage, that from some it elicited impatience rather than engagement. Analyses of epistemic and sociological shifts predicated on the work of Michel Foucault labor under the spectacular over-generalizations about the nature of medieval culture pervasive in his work. Post-structuralism's explosion of traditional philological rigor as an obscurantist myth was spectacularly ill-suited to analysis of a linguistic and literary culture that existed only by virtue of artificially internalized standards, in which the demonstration of semiotic slippage is arguably valid only *after* one has gotten the grammar right—in short, the culture of *grammatica* so extensively mapped by Martin Irvine. Ironically, the linguistic ambiguities of medieval vernaculars, particularly Old French, became more fertile ground for the application of post-structuralist method, in part because orthographic variation reflected and amplified the wider continuum of oral usage of a “natural” language—and more extrinsically, in part because scholars of these languages had more immediate institutional cause to engage colleagues in conversations across lines of periodization. The instability of the text as material object, in spite of its projection as a platonic ideal transcending its individual instantiations, is so obvious from the vantage of medieval book production that elaborate demonstrations of the point articulated in the context of post-Enlightenment culture were easily passed over as redundant by those whose work continuously engaged the fluidity of all but the most canonical medieval texts. (Medieval Latinists might have found more widely convincing critiques of editorial practice mounted with a view to the specific circumstances of medieval culture—like those of Paul Zumthor and later of Lee Patterson—had the vernacular focus of such treatments not limited the attention Latinists accorded them.)

And yet ironically, the grounding of pervasive resistance to contemporary theory in a deep respect for the circumstances of medieval Latin culture has itself

further marginalized the field's study in the modern academy, precisely since those circumstances constituted the very elements of medieval Latinity's own powerful ideology of presence, continuity, and unifying authority—and so constitute today that ideology's recapitulation in secondary literature. By failing to push beyond the *prima facie* anachronism of contemporary theory, in order to adapt its insights to the objects of our study, we have risked abnegating analysis of the primary texts, instead merely replicating their conceptual frameworks. (Nancy Partner's appeal in 1996 to the “double discourse” advocated by Georges Devereux, in the course of her reply to objections against the anachronism of Freudian psychoanalysis, offered one trenchant critique of such a “surrender to ideology.”) Instead of taking the foundational circumstances of medieval Latinity as a transparent given of the texts' semiotic condition, we might choose instead to interrogate them as parameters of the ideological formations that both enabled and circumscribed Latin as a discursive regime. Such an alternative approach might arguably equip us better to articulate the cohesion of our field as distinct, on the one hand, from the ancillary importance of reading competency in medieval Latin as a tool for anyone engaged in research in virtually any medievalist discipline, or on the other, from reliance upon an anachronistic concept of medieval Latin “literature” as a body of texts somehow unproblematically distinct from the vast preponderance of medieval Latin primary texts.

Medieval Latin studies cannot effectively resist further ghettoization by simple derivative adoption of methodologies framed as critiques of post-Enlightenment culture. Medieval Latinists must instead press the circumstances of medieval Latinity as a counterweight to the claims of received hermeneutic paradigms and, as a consequence of that counterweight, must assess and modify methodological orthodoxies. We can hardly afford to remain aloof from current conversations. We must instead inflect those conversations in terms better suited to the analysis of Latinate literary culture. (No better model for such interventions exists than the astute implicit responses of Brian Stock to the claims of postmodernist theory, beginning with his landmark study, *The Implications of Literacy*.) The field's ongoing vitality depends upon such engagements. Three areas are arguably of particular importance for its further development: sustained sociolinguistic attention to the fact of Latinity's status as an alienated mode of expression whose artificiality is itself the basis of its flexibility, throughout the period, as a tool of cultural agency; building on this, attention to the awareness specific texts demonstrate of their relation to a metropolitan centre of cultural authority from which the norms of this artificiality are disseminated—an approach obviously in dialogue with the interpretive resources of postcolonial theory; and a rigorous critique of the binary by which Latinity and vernacularity are articulated as a stable and mutually exclusive opposition—a critique that necessarily incorporates the legacy of deconstruction but which also must engage postmodern translation theory on issues of intertextual and interlinguistic exchange and the cultural work effected by the act of translation. The remainder of this essay offers a few brief sketches of the possibilities such approaches might offer for the study of specific texts.