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Elfric's *Colloquy*

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Ælfric's *Colloquy* was written primarily for schoolchildren. It is, first and foremost, a teaching tool, and it was used in a classroom to educate young Anglo-Saxons, aged seven and above, in spoken Latin. As a teaching tool, the *Colloquy* is engaged in a long tradition of shaping the English student. As well as suggesting something about Anglo-Saxon pedagogy, the *Colloquy* offers a glimpse of the social world of Anglo-Saxon England—if only in stereotypes. Like Chaucer in his *Canterbury Tales* almost four hundred years later, Ælfric briefly describes plowmen and huntsmen, monks and knights, cooks and merchants. His purpose is to introduce students to vocabulary specific to these crafts and, as one might expect, to introduce the nuances of Latin grammar. Students probably would have had to memorize the *Colloquy* and recite it under threat of a beating. The *Colloquy* presents a number of characters who engage a master in dialogue, each trying to outdo the other in expressing the necessity of his craft to the welfare of the community. In this stilted exuberance, each character is able to expound in some detail on the method and aim of his adopted trade. The *Colloquy* suggests something about the dynamism, if not the drama, of an early medieval classroom just after the turn of the first millennium.¹

The Text of the *Colloquy*

The text translated here is edited by G. N. Garmonsway as *Ælfric's Colloquy* for Methuen's Old English Library. He consulted the four extant Latin manuscripts of the work, choosing to follow for his edition Cotton MS Tiberius A. iii, the only manuscript with a continuous Old English (hereafter, OE) gloss. Tiberius A. iii was at Christ's Church, Canterbury, and was written, according to Garmonsway, in the "second quarter of the eleventh century" (4) in the Carolingian minuscule of the Continent. Neil Ker is a little less pre-
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cise about the date, offering instead the middle of the eleventh century for the text, and the second half of the eleventh century for the gloss. Tiberius A. iii is an interesting manuscript in which to find the Colloquy, since it contains a number of glossed ecclesiastical texts. These include the Benedictine Rule, glossed continuously in OE; the Regularis Concordia, another monastic rule; and four additional texts concerned with the Rule. Clearly, this manuscript was directed at the monk in his duties and intellectual responsibilities. The version of the Colloquy in Tiberius A. iii tends to be considered the “base text” to which later additions and interpolations are made in other versions, such as that in Oxford St. John’s College 154 (Gwara and Porter, 4). The Latin Colloquy was written by Ælfric, while the OE gloss was added later by someone else, perhaps Ælfric Bata, Ælfric’s student. Bata, which means “barrel” in Latin (he was either stocky or fond of drink), may have compiled the codex, as his name is written at the front of Tiberius A. iii. Two scribes were involved in copying this entire manuscript, and the first scribe copied out the Colloquy. Later, three other scribes worked to gloss much of the codex in Old English, and the first of these three glossed both the Colloquy and the Rule of St. Benedict (Ker, 248). The OE gloss does not always correspond to the Latin. In line 172, for example, the Latin reads caligas, which are Roman boots studded with nails, but the OE gloss is lepherhoa, meaning “leather pants.” There are not many such errors, but the fact they exist at all suggests that Ælfric did not gloss his own Latin. David Porter has pointed out a number of other errors and argues that the gloss probably originates later with Ælfric Bata or his school (Gwara and Porter, 44.).

Translating the Colloquy

This translation differs in only a few regards from the one suggested by Garnonsway’s glossary and a number of other extant translations. I have tried to modernize the syntax and lexicon for contemporary students only when such modernization is permitted by the sense of the original. On the whole, I stay very close to the Old English. Where the OE deviates from the Latin, I follow the version that makes most sense to the continuity of the whole. For example, at the beginning of the Colloquy the monk says in Latin that he is busy all day with reading and singing, “lectionibus et cantu” (1. 14). In the OE gloss of Tiberius A. iii, he says only that he is busy with singing, “on sange.” But next in the OE, the monk says, “Between these I would like to learn to speak properly in Latin.” Clearly, in order to make sense of the OE “between,” one has to translate the Latin. Where the versions deviate, I have italicized the translation.

Intriguingly, Ælfric did not characterize his bakers and fishermen with ungrammatical speech. While such a tack would obviously contradict the purpose of the exercise, it nevertheless mitigates against considering the Col-
loquy a dramatic work. Consequently, I have refrained from colloquializing the speech of the students. Their speech in both Latin and Old English is free of error. Neither do we see much syntactic play in the Tiberius A. iii Collo-
quy, which further recommends its use to teachers trying to set a grammatical norm. In later versions of the Colloquy, Ælfric Bata has sometimes shifted words around, possibly to instruct students in Latin’s variable word order. He also experiments with enclitics, ellipses, and synonyms. Porter argues that Bata’s emendations suggest his text was written for students who today would be considered at the intermediate level of language proficiency (Gwara and Porter, 46–47). Yet the original Colloquy written by Ælfric, as Garmonsway argues, was probably written for beginners (Garmonsway, “Development,” 254).

The Colloquy describes a conversation between a master and several students. He asks them questions about their everyday duties, and they respond. It begins with a young Benedictine monk and his companions approaching the master in the afternoon after their prayers and asking to be taught proper Latin. The master agrees and asks the monk and each of his companions in turn what it is they do. The companions include a plowman, a shepherd, an ox herder, a hunter, a fisherman, a fowler (someone who catches birds), a merchant, a leatherworker, a saltier, a baker, a cook, and a wise counselor. They are unlikely companions for a young monk, but they represent the various trades a monk may come into contact with during his years in a monastery. Each of the tradesmen describes what it is he does and how his craft is important to the community. At one point, a number of the companions get into a spirited argument about whose craft is more important. The argument is settled in favor of the plowman, who provides not only bread, but also ale. The Colloquy ends with the monk describing his daily schedule, including the monastic Offices he sings. The master concludes the Colloquy with a call to obedience and proper behavior, reminding the students not to get up to any high jinks when they leave church.

The text is clearly for beginning students and is addressed to children, puer, boys between seven and thirteen. The lexicon, while varied, is not eclectic. Even the Latin names of the monastic hours are translated into English. Nocturn, the first hour of the monastic day, becomes utsche (line 270) —literally, “day-break song.” The syntax of the Latin often follows the OE, suggesting that Latin’s syntactic variety was not on the menu for the Colloquy’s young audience. Consider line 48, which is typically a direct translation of the Latin into OE. It reads in Latin, “Est iste ex tuis sociis?” which translated word-for-word into OE is, “Ys pas of þinum geferum?” The entire Colloquy is like this, suggesting that the Latin was composed with an eye to the syntax of OE and the needs of less experienced Anglo-Saxon students. The Colloquy offers short, sometimes humorous portraits of
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craftsmen. We see the bumbling cook trying desperately to describe the necessity of his craft while the master dismissively thumbs his nose at cooking. We also see a fisherman admit he won't catch a whale because he has a cowardly soul! The fowler catches the master asking a particularly stupid question and asks in return what good it would be to keep a hawk he couldn't train (1. 131). The merchant, too, balks at a silly question when the master asks if he'll sell goods at the price he paid. "I won't," the merchant replies sharply, "what would my labor profit me, then?" At one point, the master tries to get the hunter to admit that he hunted on a Sunday, which is inappropriate, but the hunter is too quick for him. The master may rule the schoolroom, but the craftsmen show him that he doesn't have all the answers. One can imagine schoolchildren happily imagining the discomfort of the Colloquy's master.

ÆElfric and Education

ÆElfric (c. 955–1020) began his education at Winchester under the famous Bishop Æthelwold, one of the instigators of the Benedictine reform. In his early thirties, he was sent as a teacher to Cerne Abbey in Dorset, where much of his writing was done. When he was about fifty, he was appointed archbishop of the newly established monastery of Eynsham. ÆElfric is perhaps the greatest prose stylist of the Old English period. His Catholic Homilies and Lives of the Saints stand today as monuments of Old English prose. His contribution to classroom education is really his Latin-English Glossary and Grammar, which David Porter has called "the most important Latin-learning text among the Anglo-Saxons" ("Anglo-Saxon," 476). ÆElfric, like so many monks of his day, understood that his pastoral duty included teaching Latin to novitiates, young boys about seven years of age and older who were entering into the service of the Church. Although it was common that monks and even bishops in ÆElfric's day knew little or no Latin, on the whole, a rudimentary knowledge of the language was important for a monk. Yet ÆElfric faced a culture so in decline in its ability to speak and to understand Latin that he issued his homilies in English. He was also translating the Old Testament into English, although he never finished.

The Anglo-Saxon classroom was an important part of a monastery, but not all of the brothers were called upon to study. The Venerable Bede, a monk of the twin monastery of Wearmouth and Jarrow in the eighth century, speaks of brothers who were unlettered and were taught Scripture through illuminations (Riche, 393). Similarly, ÆElfric was presiding over a monastery in the heart of a country only recently reviving itself from the upheaval and destruction of the ninth century. Benedictine monks, especially Dunstan and his student Æthelwold, were at the forefront of a reform movement that attempted to reestablish both learning and monasteries long neglected. Æthelwold
instructed a number of pupils at Winchester, including Wulfstan and Ælfric. Wulfstan later wrote that Æthelwold was very learned in grammatical arts and in the "honey-sweet system of metrics" (quoted in Lapidge, 90). Ælfric would have learned his grammar and metrics, or verse form, from Æthelwold and taught them at Eynsham.

Grammar was essential to the budding Anglo-Saxon Latinist for the simple reason that Anglo-Saxons were learning Latin as a foreign language. The Carolingians, for example, were speaking a language that, although the ancestor of French, seems to have been considered Latin.8 Grammar included a great deal more than parsing sentences: Augustine called it the custos historiae, the guardian of history, or of cultural memory (quoted in Irvine, 4). Grammar—or, rather, grammatica—was the road by which one accessed the written word, especially Scripture. It included a knowledge of syntax, lexicon, and morphology, as well as of more sophisticated interpretative schema, such as the allegorical method.9 Scripture, as St. Augustine of Hippo had pointed out in the early fifth century, spoke to man indirectly, by means of allegories and figures. Thus, coming to an understanding of Scripture required significant training in the grammatical arts. Still, not all of Scripture was allegorical. Alcuin of York, an eighth-century English monk who was recruited by Charlemagne to undertake his educational reforms, warned that readers ought not to ignore the literal sense in plumbing for deeper mysteries (Evans, 8). Nevertheless, contemplation of the divine, whether in its material or spiritual manifestations, required Latin. While on the Continent, schools were being arranged according to the trivium and quadrivium, Anglo-Saxons focused mainly on grammatica. Peter Hunter Blair points out that our assumptions concerning the curriculum of English education are based primarily and probably improperly on what was happening on the Continent (Age of Bede, 237–52). Pierre Riché concludes, "Most of the liberal arts, then, were consciously ignored by educated Anglo-Saxon men" (388). In the Colloquy, we can see the master’s implicit condemnation of the rhetorical arts in his diatribe against deceitful speech (1. 254 ff.).

The study of Latin that Ælfric’s students undertook began with the Latin grammarians, probably Priscian and Donatus. After Ælfric wrote his Grammar, chances are students would have learned from that rather than from Donatus—Helmut Gneuss calls Ælfric’s Grammar "no doubt the greatest 'publishing success' in England’s early vernacular literature" (668). Ælfric himself had written a grammar to which he prefaced the sentiment, “And ic þohete, þeþpeþes boc mihte fremian iungum cil dum to anginne þæs crafþes, oþet hi to maran andgyte becumon” (“And I thought that this book might benefit young children undertaking this art, so that they might come to more knowledge”). To the grammar he attached a long glossary. Both the Grammar and the Glossary would have been used in concert with lessons treating of the parts of speech, declension, conjuga-
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tion, and so forth. In fact, grammars represent some of the earliest Anglo-Latin manuscripts. Latin poetry, too, would have been studied, not for its content as much as for its form. Anglo-Saxons seemed to have been fond of Juvenecus, Sedulius, Prudentius, Virgil, Paulinus of Nola, Venatus Fortunatus, Lactantius, Statius, and Juvenal. To teach spoken Latin, the colloquy form was ideal.

The Colloquy was used to teach unfamiliar vocabulary, often in the form of catalogues of items. Perhaps the best example of such a catalogue is Student "Fisherman's" list of fish. The terms here would be difficult for a student. For example, the Latin lucios, which probably refers to a pike, is a notoriously rare word. Alan of Insulis, in his late-eleventh-century Liber de Planetu Nature, pairs salmon and lucios (calling them both delicious, which might surprise anyone who has eaten pike), as does an early-twelfth-century anonymous continuation of Rudolfus Trudonis, Gesta Abbatum Trudonisium. There are but a few other extant instances of the word. The jargon of the trades, trades with which the young monks would be familiar, would serve the students well in their monastic life. This use of familiar trades in colloquies is characteristic of the Hisperica Famina, an influential sixth-century codex written probably in Ireland or Cornwall. More than just a formal influence, Hisperic Latin, as it is called, typically flamboyant in its figures, included rare or unique terms (Garmonsway, "Development," 250). Another source, and one that seemed especially influential on Æfric Bata, was the Hermeneumata Pseudodositheana, a Greek-Latin lexicon possibly introduced into England by Archbishop Theodore (Gwara, Colloquies, 12 ff.). At the end of the day, colloquies were used to help students master spoken Latin, which would include manners of address, some awareness of the maxims of quantity and quality, and, of course, vocabulary.

Æfric's Colloquy is one of the more popular Anglo-Saxon prose texts. Virtually every generation of modern student that has studied Old English has come across the Colloquy. Its modern descendent is the dialogue found in so many foreign-language textbooks. Those of us who spent warm spring days in grade school trying to concentrate on foreign-language dialogues, reciting the gastronomic adventures of Pierre and Jean as they trekked through a Parisian boulangerie, can sympathize with the Anglo-Saxon student who must have timidly recited the catalogue of fish as his magister hovered above him, a birch rod in hand. More important, though, we can imagine that the practical topics and real-life characters of the Colloquy spoke to a pedagogical need to arrest students' attentions, which wandered as easily in the eleventh century as they do today. When we turn to the colloquies of Æfric Bata, we see colloquies filled with drunken characters, scatological humor, and lascivious innuendo. If nothing else, such colloquies show that the medieval classroom was a place of laughter, as well as of learning.
Notes

1. G. N. Garmonsway bemoans the lack of dramatic art in any of the colloquies. They were clearly utilitarian in aim, although some of Ælfric Bata's colloquies do engage the dramatic. See Garmonsway, "Development," 248. See also Gwara.

2. Garmonsway, Ælfric, and Ker, item 186.

3. The contents are listed in Ker, 240.


5. See also Porter's discussion of Bata's grammatical emendations to one of his sources, the De Raris Fabulis Retractata, in "Anglo-Saxon," 470.


7. See Laistner.

8. Linguists and historians disagree on whether the Carolingians were conscious of their language being distinct from Latin. See Wright.


10. The list is from Gneuss, 666.


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STUDENTS (PUERI): We children bid you, master, that you teach us to speak correctly, for we are unlearned and we speak corruptly.

TEACHER (MAGISTER): What would you like to talk about?

STUDENTS: What do we care what we talk about? As long as it's correct! Let it be useful, not worthless or base.2

TEACHER: Will you be flogged in order to learn? (7)

STUDENTS: We would rather be flogged on behalf of wisdom than not to know it. But we know you to be mild and unwilling to lash out against us unless you're compelled by us.

TEACHER: Let me ask you, what do you say? What work do you pursue? (11)

STUDENT "MONK": I am a professed monk, and I sing each day with my brethren, and I am busy with reading and singing; but between these, I would like to learn to speak properly in Latin.3

TEACHER: What do these companions of yours know?4 (17)

STUDENT "MONK": Some are plowmen, some shepherds, some oxherders, some of them are also hunters, some fishermen, some fowlers, some merchants, some leatherworkers, salters, bakers.
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TEACHER: What do you say, plowman? How do you keep busy at your work? (22)

STUDENT "PLOWMAN": Oh, dear lord, I work very hard. I go out at dawn, driving oxen to the field, and yoke them to a plow. (24) Nor is there so stark a winter that I dare to lay hidden at home because of my master's ire. But the oxen having been yoked, and the shear and coulter fastened to the plow, I must plow a full acre or more each day.

TEACHER: Do you have any companion? (26)

STUDENT "PLOWMAN": I have a young boy driving the oxen with a goading rod, who now is hoarse because of cold and shouting. (29)

TEACHER: Do you do anything else during the day? (28)

STUDENT "PLOWMAN": Certainly, I do more than that. I must fill the oxen's bins with hay, and water them, and carry out their dung. Oh boy, it's a lot of work. Honestly, it's a lot of work, and on account of it, I don't have any free time. (135)

TEACHER: Shepherd! Do you have any work?

STUDENT "SHEPHERD": Yes, lord, I have. First thing in the morning I drive my sheep to their pasture, stand over them in the heat and cold with my dogs lest wolves devour them. And I lead them to their pens, and milk them twice a day, and I maintain their pens, and that's where I make cheese and butter. And I'm faithful to my lord.

TEACHER: Well, ox herder, what do you get up to? (43)

STUDENT "HERDER": Well, my lord, I work a lot. When the plowman unyokes the oxen, I lead them to pasture, and all night I stand over them watching for thieves. And then, in the morning, I take them to the plowman well fed and watered.

TEACHER: Is this one of your companions? (48)

STUDENT "HERDER": Yes, it is.

TEACHER: Do you know anything?

STUDENT "HUNTER": I know one craft. (51)

TEACHER: Which one?

STUDENT "HUNTER": I'm a hunter. (53)

TEACHER: Whose?

STUDENT "HUNTER": The king's. (55)

TEACHER: How do you keep busy at work?

STUDENT "HUNTER": I make nets for myself and set them in a good spot, and charge my dogs so that they pursue game until they come into the net unaware, and so they get snared, and I kill them in the net.
TEACHER: Do you know how to hunt without nets? (61)
STUDENT "HUNTER": Yeah, I can hunt without nets.
TEACHER: How?
STUDENT "HUNTER": I pursue game with fast dogs. (64)
TEACHER: What game do you catch mostly?
STUDENT "HUNTER": I catch harts, boars, roes, does, and sometimes hares.
TEACHER: Were you hunting today? (67)
STUDENT "HUNTER": I wasn’t, since it’s Sunday! But I was hunting yesterday.10
TEACHER: What did you take?
STUDENT "HUNTER": Two harts and a boar.
TEACHER: How did you catch them? (72)
STUDENT "HUNTER": The harts I caught in a net, the boar I killed.
TEACHER: How did you dare to spear the boar!??
STUDENT "HUNTER": The hounds drove it at me, and I stood in its way and rapidly speared it. (75)
TEACHER: You were pretty daring, then.
STUDENT "HUNTER": A hunter can’t be timid simply because erratic game live in the woods. (78)
TEACHER: What do you do with your catch?
STUDENT "HUNTER": I give the king whatever I get because I’m his hunter.
TEACHER: What does he give you?
STUDENT "HUNTER": He clothes me well, and feeds me, and sometimes he gives me a horse or money so that I’ll perform my craft more gladly.11
TEACHER: What craft do you know? (86)
STUDENT "FISHERMAN": I’m a fisherman.
TEACHER: What do you get out of your trade?
STUDENT "FISHERMAN": Food, clothing, money.
TEACHER: How do you catch fish? (90)
STUDENT "FISHERMAN": I board my boat, and cast my net into a river, and I throw in a hook or bait and baskets, and whatever they trap, I take.
TEACHER: What if they be unclean, the fish?12
STUDENT "FISHERMAN": I toss the unclean ones out, and take the clean ones as food. (95)
TEACHER: Where do you sell your fish?
STUDENT "FISHERMAN": In town.
TEACHER: Who buys them?
STUDENT "FISHERMAN": Townsmen. I can’t catch as many as I can sell!
TEACHER: What fish do you land?13 (100)
STUDENT "FISHERMAN": Eels and pike, minnows and burbot, trout and lampreys, and whatever swims in the water. Small fish.14
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TEACHER: Why don't you fish in the sea?
STUDENT "FISHERMAN": Sometimes I do, but rarely, since it's a lot of rowing for me to get to the sea.

TEACHER: What do you catch in the sea? (105)
STUDENT "FISHERMAN": Herring and salmon, porpoises\textsuperscript{15} and sturgeon, oysters and crabs,\textsuperscript{16} mussels, winkles, cockles, plaice and flounder and lobster, and many similar things.

TEACHER: Would you catch a whale?
STUDENT "FISHERMAN": No! (110)
TEACHER: Why?
STUDENT "FISHERMAN": Because it's a dangerous thing to catch a whale. It's safer for me to go to the river with my boat than to go with many boats a-hunting whales.

TEACHER: Why's that? (115)
STUDENT "FISHERMAN": Because I prefer to catch a fish that I can kill than a fish that with one blow can sink and destroy not only me but all of my companions.

TEACHER: Still, many catch whales and avoid danger, and get good money for it. (120)
STUDENT "FISHERMAN": That's the truth! But I don't dare because of my cowardly soul.

TEACHER: What do you say, Fowler? How do you snare birds? (124)
STUDENT "FOWLER": I snare birds a lot of ways: sometimes with nets, with nooses, with lime, with birdcalls, with a hawk, with a trap.

TEACHER: You have a hawk?\textsuperscript{17}
STUDENT "FOWLER": I have one.
TEACHER: Can you tame them?
STUDENT "FOWLER": Yes, I can. (130) What good would they be to me if I couldn't tame them?

TEACHER: Give me a hawk.
STUDENT "FOWLER": I'd be glad to, if you give me a fast dog. Which hawk would you like, a bigger one or a smaller one? (135)

TEACHER: Give me a bigger one. How do you feed your hawks?
STUDENT "FOWLER": They feed themselves, and me in the winter. And in the spring I let them fly to the woods; and I take young birds in the fall and tame them. (140)

TEACHER: And why do you let the tame ones fly away from you?
STUDENT "FOWLER": Because I don't want to feed them in the summer: They eat too much.
TEACHER: But many fowlers feed the tame ones over the summer so they have them ready [for autumn].

STUDENT "FOWLER": Yeah, that's what they do. But I don't want to go to so much trouble over them, since I can catch others—not one, but many more.

TEACHER: What do you say, merchant?

STUDENT "MERCHAND": I say that I'm useful to the king and the noblemen and the wealthy and all of the people. (150)

TEACHER: How?

STUDENT "MERCHAND": I board my boat with my freight, row over the high seas, sell my goods, and buy valuable goods which can't be produced here. And I transport it [all] to you here over the sea with a great deal of trouble; and sometimes I suffer shipwreck with the loss of all my goods—it's not easy to escape alive.

TEACHER: What goods do you transport to us? (158)

STUDENT "MERCHAND": Purples and silks, valuable gems and gold, little-known cloth and spices, wine and oil, ivory and bronze, copper and tin, sulfur and glass, and many similar things.

TEACHER: Will you sell your goods here for as much as you paid for them?

STUDENT "MERCHAND": I won't. What would my labor profit me then? (165)

But I want to sell them here for more money than I bought them there so I can make some profit. Then I can feed myself, my wife, and my son.

TEACHER: You, shoemaker, what do you do for our general profit?

STUDENT "SHOE": My craft truly is very useful and necessary to you.

TEACHER: How? (169)

STUDENT "SHOE": I buy hides and skins, and prepare them through my craft, and work them into footwear of various kinds: slippers and shoes, hobnailed boots and water bottles, bridles and trappings, flasks or canteens and helmets, spurstraps and halters, purses and pokes, not one of you could winter without my craft.

TEACHER: Salter, how do we benefit from your craft? (175)

STUDENT "SALTER": My craft is of great use to you all. None of you eats lunch or dinner happily unless he be amenable to my craft.

TEACHER: How?
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STUDENT "SALTER": Which man fully enjoys very sweet food without the taste of salt? (180). Who can fill his cellar or storehouse without my craft? Look, you lose butter and cheese curd unless I am present as a preservative for you; you couldn't even enjoy your herbs.

TEACHER: Baker? (185) What do you make, or can we survive without you?

STUDENT "BAKER": You might, for a while—but not for long, or too well! Honestly, without my craft, each table would seem to be empty, and without bread, each dinner would bring heartburn. I can strengthen the heart of a man; I am the strength of men, and even the little ones won't abuse me. (191)

TEACHER: What do we say of the cook? Do we need his craft in any way?

STUDENT "COOK": The cook says: If you drive me out of your fellowship, you will eat your vegetables green and your meat raw—and not even rich broth may you have without my craft. (195)

TEACHER: We don't care about your craft, and it's not necessary for us, since we ourselves can boil the things to be boiled, and roast the things to be roasted.

STUDENT "COOK": The cook says: If you drive me thus away, if you do this, then you'll all be thralls, and none of you will be a lord. (200) And without my craft you won't eat.

TEACHER: Well, monk, you who speaks to me, I have found you to have good and extremely necessary companions. And I ask you, who are they?

STUDENT "MONK": I have smiths, ironsmiths, goldsmiths, silversmiths, coppersmiths, woodworkers, and many other and various craft workers. (206)

TEACHER: Have you any wise counselor?

STUDENT "MONK": Certainly, I have. How would our gathering be guided without a counselor? (210)

TEACHER: Wise man, which craft of these do you think to be superior?

STUDENT "COUNSELOR": I tell you, it seems to me that the service of God holds primacy among these crafts, as one reads in the Gospel: "Firmly seek you God's kingdom and also His righteousness and all these things be given to you." (216)

TEACHER: And which do you think holds primacy among the secular crafts?
STUDENT "COUNSELOR": Tilling of the earth, since the plowman feeds us all.  

STUDENT "BLACKSMITH": (The smith says:) Where should he get the shear or coulter or even the goad but from my craft? (221) Where the fisherman his angle, or the shoewright his awl, or the seamer his needle? Is it not by my work?  

STUDENT "COUNSELOR": (The counselor answers:) You speak wisely, but it is preferable to all of us to live with you, plowman, than with you, [smith,] because the plowman furnishes us with bread and drink; you, what do you furnish for us in your smithy but iron firesparks and the clang of beating sledgehammers and blowing bilges?  

STUDENT "CARPENTER": (The woodworker says:) Which of you does not use my craft? Your houses and various vessels and boats I make for you all. (230)  

STUDENT "GOLDSMITH": (The goldsmith answers:) Honestly, woodworker, why do you speak like that when you couldn't make a hole without my craft.  

STUDENT "COUNSELOR": (The counselor says:) Honestly, companions and good workmen, let us stop this flyghting quickly, and let there be kinship and agreement between us and let one help the other through his craft, and to agree always with the plowman from whom we have our food and fodder for our horses. (236) And this counsel I offer to all workers, that each one perform his craft diligently, since he who neglects his craft will be given up by the craft. So whether you be a masspriest, or monk, or churl, or soldier, perform or know this: be what you are. Because it is much humiliation and shame for a man not to want to be that which he is, and that which he should be.  

TEACHER: Well, children, how do you like this speech?  

STUDENTS: We like it well, but you speak very profoundly and you draw forth speech beyond our ability. (243) But speak to us according to our intellect that we may understand the things you speak about.  

TEACHER: I ask you, why are you so eager to learn?  

STUDENTS: Because we do not want to be like dumb animals who know nothing but grass and water. (251)  

TEACHER: And what do you want?
Elfric's Colloquy

STUDENTS: We want to be wise.

TEACHER: In which kind of wisdom? Will you be plastic or multifarious in your pretense, deceitful in speech, illogical, sneaky, speaking well and thinking evil, subjugated by charming words, weakened by guile within, just as tombs are decorated on their exteriors, but full of stench within? (258)

STUDENTS: We don't want to be wise in that way, since he is not wise who seduces himself with deception. (49)

TEACHER: But what do you want? (261)

STUDENTS: We would like to be sincere without hypocrisy, and wise so that we turn away from evil and do good. However, you still dispute with us more profoundly than our age can take; but speak with us concerning our habits, and not so deeply. (265)

TEACHER: I will do just as you bid. You, boy, what did you do today?

STUDENT: I did many things. Last night, when I heard the knell, I arose from my bed and went out to the church, and sang Nocturn with my brethren; after that we sang the "Of All Saints" and morning hymns [or Matins]. (270) After this, Prime and seven psalms with litanies and the chapter-mass; afterwards, Tierce, and did the mass of the day. After this we sang Sexte, and we ate and drank and slept and again we arose and sang None. And now we are here before you, ready to hear what you have to say to us. (275)

TEACHER: When will you sing Vespers or Compline?

STUDENT: When it is time.

TEACHER: Were you beaten today?

STUDENT: I was not, since I am attentive. (51) (280)

TEACHER: And what did your companions do?

STUDENT: Why do you ask me about them? I don't dare give up our secrets! Each one of us knows if he was beaten or not.

TEACHER: What do you eat during the day?

STUDENT: I still enjoy meat, since I am a child living under the rod. (52) (285)

TEACHER: What more do you eat?

STUDENT: Vegetables and eggs, fish and cheese, butter and beans, and all clean things I eat—with much thankfulness.

TEACHER: You are exceedingly greedy if you eat everything that is in front of you. (290)

STUDENT: I am not so much of a whirlpool that I ingest every kind of food at one meal! (53)

TEACHER: But in what manner [do you eat]?

STUDENT: I enjoy at times this food, other times that—with sobriety, as befits a monk, not with voracity, since I am not a glutton. (295)

TEACHER: And what do you drink?

STUDENT: Ale if I have it, or water if I don't have ale. (54)
TEACHER: You don't drink wine? (300)
STUDENT: I am not so wealthy that I might buy myself wine. And wine is not
drink for children nor for the stupid, but for the old and the wise.
TEACHER: Where do you sleep.
STUDENT: I sleep in a dormitory with my brethren.
TEACHER: Who wakes you to sing Nocturn? (305)
STUDENT: Sometimes I hear the knell and I get up; sometimes my teacher
wakes me stiffly with a rod.
TEACHER: Well, you children and winsome students, your teacher reminds
you that you be obedient to Divine Teaching and that you keep
yourself noble in every place. (310) Go obediently when you
hear church bells, and go into Church and bow humbly before the
holy altar, and stand obediently and sing together with one
voice, and pray for your sins, and go out without any high jinks
to the cloister or to school.

Notes
1. Speaker titles have been added to the text to facilitate reading.
2. “Base” translates the OE fracod, which in turn glosses the Latin (hereafter, Lat.)
turpis. Turpis is often used to describe a lack of physical beauty or refinement.
One might also consider the terms ugly or graceless as further possibilities.
3. Underlining signals words or phrases that are in one version (Latin or OE),
but not in the other.
4. The premise of the colloquy is that a young monk has brought his lay com-
panions to his master to learn Latin. Given that the companions are pueri, or
children, the premise needs to be considered fictional.
5. The OE begeast glosses the Latin exerces, both of which mean to “keep busy.”
They all have a sense of exerting oneself, of working very hard. The master
seems to be implying that the plowman doesn’t work very hard, which
prompts the plowman to respond as he does.
6. The master is asking if the plowman has any help in the field. But the word he
uses, geferan, is the same as in l. 17, which describes the monk’s associates.
One wonders if the monk has the same relation with the workers that the
plowman has with his geferan.
7. The translation “is hoarse” comes from the Lat. modo raucus est, since has ys
seems to be a unique use of the phrase in OE.
8. The master seems skeptical about the amount of work the plowman has to do.
9. By “charging” his dogs, the hunter means he drives them at game. The Latin
term is instigare, “to instigate.” But he does not drive his dogs as the shepherd
drives (drifun) sheep.
10. This is a very interesting moment in the Colloquy, since the master is trying
to find out whether the hunter has been hunting on a Sunday. Clearly, the
hunter is not supposed to hunt on Sundays, but then what are the master and
the monk doing? If a master’s job is teaching, should he be working on a
Sunday, as he clearly is?
Elfric's Colloquy

11. The term *gladly* translates as *lustlicor*, which can also be translated as “lustily.” “To perform” here is actually *beganege*, or “attend to.” The king wants the hunter to be more motivated in his job.

12. “Unclean” is usually thought to mean unclean according to religious dietary laws. But the fisherman catches eels. Since eels are unclean, and since the fisherman meets with no reproof from the master, what the master is implying with this question is unclear. Compare the master’s attempt to trick the hunter into admitting he hunted on a Sunday.

13. “Land” translates the OE *gefehst*, “to win by fighting.” It’s not the same word the fisherman uses to express “to catch.”

14. “Anguillas et lucios, menas et capitones, tructas et murenas, et qualescumque in amne natant, saliu. / alas — hacodas, mynas — aleptan, sceotan — (Cam- predan), — swa wylice swa on wateere swyvmap, sprote.” Anguillas and alasc are certainly eels; hacodas is usually translated “pike” on the basis of the Latin, but pike are not always small fish, saliu. Some pike grow to be over twenty pounds. Lucios recalls a type of minnow typically called a shiner—a small, silvery mackerel—which recollects the root of lucios, luces, meaning “light.”


16. Note that shellfish is “unclean,” which again raises the issue of the master’s intent in l. 94.

17. Hawks were usually reserved for the ruling class, which explains the master’s apparent surprise. The master immediately assumes that the fowler means he has a wild hawk, which seems to raise the fowler’s hackles. See the opening of *The Battle of Maldon* and Owens-Crocker; D’Arcussia; Landau, esp. 54.

18. The Latin, *purpura*, means purple cloth or the very expensive purple dyes used to color the cloth. Purple was the color of Roman royalty and continued to be associated with wealth and grandeur into the Anglo-Saxon Age and beyond. The Old English is *paellas*.

19. OE *selcipe* literally means “little-known,” although the sense is rare or exotic.

20. This is a strange addition to the merchant’s catalogue, since Cornwall was known all over Europe for its tin mines. Bede, in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* 1, i, tells us that Britain is renowned for its metals. Wallace-Hadrill remarks (7), following Peter Hunter Blair, that Bede strangely does not mention tin. Perhaps Elfric, like Bede, saw tin from Cornwall as an import from a foreign land—thus implying a rather limited referent of the master’s “us” in l. 158.

21. Literally, “more dearly.”

22. Literally, “shoewright.” The master’s demand that each participant reckon his usefulness to the community is gaining steam. The shoemaker answers the master’s question in superlatives and absolutes.

23. The Latin *caligus* describes Roman boots studded with nails—a *caligarius* is a bootmaker. The OE, though, is *leperhosa*, or “leather pants,” cf. Ger. *lederhosen*.

24. Lat. *marsupia*, or “pouch.” The OE *fateslæs* might mean saddlebags or pouches. The term *poke*, a small sack or bag, seems to match the sense.

25. Lat. *prandio aut cena; prandio* was a light lunch, while *cena* was the principal Roman meal, and the second meal during the monastic day.
26. We may wonder at this assertion, but the notion here is one of balance. Sweetness is to be balanced in a meal by its opposite, saltiness.

27. The salter is referring to a salt cellar, a room or outhouse usually built into the ground in which one would keep salted fish or salted meat in order to preserve it during the winter.

28. Both the Latin and the OE suggest that the salter identifies with his salt; the same is true of the baker who identifies with his bread.

29. The cook is implying that a lord forced to do his own cooking is no better than a slave. There is a sense of social propriety and class that underlies this entire Colloquy; see especially ll. 240 ff. Here, the cook justifies his role by arguing that without servants, lords wouldn’t be lords.

30. See Garmonsway, p. 38, n. 204, pa seems to be a mistake for pu, “you”; the Latin is qui sunt ilii.

31. Matthew 6:33. I am translating the OE, not offering the verse.

32. The OE is Eorptilp, and the Lat. Agricultura. The OE has not adopted the Lat. terminology.

33. Lat. ferriarius, or “ironsmith.” The OE merely has smip, or “smith.”

34. As opposed to seamstress, simply meaning tailor.


36. The plowman’s barley is used to make ale, thus drink: see 1. 299.

37. OE byliga, also “bellows.”

38. Lat. “ironsmith.”

39. OE, idiomatic ne furpon an pyrl, or “not more than one hole.”

40. OE gefliet, or “flighting”; Lat. contentiones, or “contentiousness.”

41. OE sibb & gepwarnynnys. Sibb has a sense of kinship, relations, and familial accord, while gepwarnynnys has the sense of concord, union, agreement, and peace. The Lat. pax et concordia is idiomatic, “peace and concord.” It is interesting that the OE uses a term of familial concord to translate pax: sibb is the source of our Modern English (hereafter ModE) sibling.

42. This enigmatic phrase seems to make sense in light of an identical sentiment found in Gregory the Great’s Moralía in Job, XXVIII, x, 24: “Whosoever wants to be able to do more than has been given to him wants to exceed the measure set for him. . . . He who neglects the measure of his limits risks stepping into the abyss. And recklessly trying to snatch what is beyond him, often he will forfeit even the ability he has.” Translation by Markus, 27.

43. Possibly idiomatic OE, behwyrf pe sylfne: “instruct yourself in this,” “or change yourself to this,” or “exercise yourself in this.”

44. This is possibly the clearest expression of class sentiment in OE. It presumes a manner of life and station for each person exclusive of his abilities, since the OE modal sceal, “should,” indicates future obligation—one is obliged to fulfill one’s station even if otherwise inclined. The gnomic form (a gnome is a saying or proverb) indicates the pervasiveness of an Anglo-Saxon sentiment to know one’s place, to do as one is bid, and not to reach beyond one’s place in life.

45. OE andingye, which is not the same as lare, or “teaching.” Children are clearly seen here as intellectually incapable of understanding such profundities—it is not a matter of learning, but of development or experience.
46. Lat. versipelles aut multiformes and OE prættige oppe þusentiwe. Versipelles literally means “able to change one’s skin” and is used by Pliny and Aepinus to describe a werewolf. Rhetorically, it means skilled in dissimulation. Plastic seems to convey versipelles’ sense of malleability. The OE prættige, which is the source of ModE pretty, implies superficial beauty and charm. “Multifarious” translates the Lat. milleformes, literally, “a thousand forms,” which the OE renders almost literally as þusentiwe. “Pretense” translates the Lat. mendacis, or “mendacity,” and OE leasungum, or “deceit.”

47. OE onglewlice, an adverb meaning “without prudence, wisdom, or proof. “The sense of gloswlice, of which this term is the negation, is a test or proof, which further suggests the ordering principles of reason or common sense, logic.

48. OE swæsum wordum, implying “pleasant or agreeable words.” My choice of charming recalls Evelyn Waugh’s similar indictment of charm in his Brideshead Revisited (Boston: Little, Brown, 1945). Charles Ryder has just returned from South America and puts up an exhibition of his new paintings. They are belittled by Anthony Blanche, a close friend, as charming, the superficial vice that kills English art and is killing Charles.

49. This gnome recalls the education programs of Bede, who did not teach the rhetorical arts as they were taught on the Continent. He anathematized philosophy as sophistic, indicting its tendency towards dissimulation in much the same manner as the master does in this section of the Colloquy. See Riché, esp. chapter 9.

50. Monks lived according to a monastic rule. In this case, it was the Rule of St. Benedict. Ælfric wrote an abridged version of the Winchester concord, which established the Benedictine Rule as common (with some local variation) throughout England. Most of the monk’s day was spent praying. Each hour of the day had an Office, or set of sung prayers. The day began with Nocturn, today called Matins. The Rule also allowed for extra offices, one of them being the “Of All Saints,” which consisted of Matins and Vespers. Then followed the seven hours of the day, Matins (today called Lauds, OE uhtsang); Prime (OE, prim); Tierce (OE, undertid); Sext (OE, middag); None (OE, non); Vespers (OE, ofen), and Compline (OE, nihtsange). See Symons, xxxi–xxxiii.

51. The master is asking whether the young novice was beaten for falling asleep during the offices. The OE phrase is wortice ic me heold, “warily [or attentively] I hold myself.” Older monks would walk through the choir stalls during the offices, especially Nocturn, which took place in the wee hours of the morning, and thwack a novice with a rod if he were found asleep instead of attentive or in prayer. This was meant not only to inculcate discipline, but, on a more symbolic level, to teach that one must always be attentive to Scripture, since inattentiveness brings evil and sometimes pain. This young monk keeps a watchful eye.

52. OE, under gyrdæ drohtnende, is idiomatic. The young monk is saying that he can still be beaten and is therefore still under the mentorship of an older monk.
53. ModE *whirlpool* is OE *swelgere*, Lat. *vorax*, which means swallowing greedily or voraciously. The OE has the sense of vortex, abyss, or a whirlpool—something that swallows voraciously.

54. This recalls the necessity of the plowman to the community, since it is he who provides the hops and barley for the beer. Ale, lager, and stout were far more healthy than water, since, during the fermenting process, the water is boiled, thus killing germs. The young monk's aversion to wine due to its potential to inebriate suggests that ale, a drink by implication suitable for children, may not have been as alcoholic as it is today—or it may not have contained alcohol at all.

55. OE *anmodlice*, literally the adverbial form of "with one spirit."