Materialidades da Literatura

MAT LIT

Orality, Germanic Literacy and Runic Inscriptions in Anglo-Saxon England

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Abstract

The presence of runic writing before the influx of Latinate literacy in Anglo-Saxon England is often neglected when investigating the transitional nature of orality and literacy in vernacular Anglo-Saxon writing. The presence of runes in Anglo-Saxon society and Old English manuscripts supports the theory that Old English poetry operated within a transitional period between orality and literacy (as argued by O'Keeffe (1990), Pasternack (1995), Amodio (2005)). However runic symbols problematize the definition of orality within Old English oral-formulaic studies because runic writing practices predate Latinate literacy in England. This article explores the possibility that the orality contained within Old English poetry is a form of secondary orality due to the pre-existence of runic writing in Anglo-Saxon England. This form of secondary orality occurs within the wider social cultural shift between primary orality and modern hyper-literate states as runes act as a literary representation of change within the construction of thought and literature in the English language. This article suggests that runes can be understood as a type of 'transitional literacy' between primary orality and Latinate derived literary practices. They act as a way of composing and recording thought as text while still maintaining elements strongly associated with the construction of a primary oral culture in how the texts are interpreted by a culture familiar with writing. Therefore clarification must be made when understanding Old English as a transitional poetic form, namely that the nature and degree of transition contained within Old English poetry builds upon runic inscriptions as it represents a transition between a Germanic and Latinate forms of textuality and literacy. **Keywords:** runic writing; Old English poetry; secondary orality; transitional literacy; textuality.

Resumo

A presença de escrita rúnica antes do influxo de alfabetização latina na Inglaterra anglo-saxónica é muitas vezes negligenciada quando se investiga a natureza transicional da oralidade e da literacia na escrita anglo-saxónica vernácula. A presença de runas na sociedade anglo-saxónica e os manuscritos em *Old English* apoiam a teoria de que a poesia inglesa antiga operou dentro de um período de transição entre oralidade e alfabetização (como argumentaram O'Keeffe (1990), Pasternack (1995), Amodio (2005)). No entanto, os símbolos rúnicos problematizam a definição de oralidade no âmbito dos estudos da oralidade formulaica em *Old English*, porque as práticas de escrita rúnica são anteriores à alfabetização latina na Inglaterra. Este artigo explora a possibilidade de que a oralidade contida na poesia em *Old English* seja uma forma de oralidade secundária devido à pré-existência de escrita rúnica na Inglaterra anglo-saxónica. Esta forma de oralidade secundária ocorre dentro da mudança cultural e social mais ampla entre a oralidade primária e os estados modernos hiper-alfabetizados, pois as runas atuam como uma representação literária da mudança na

construção do pensamento e da literatura em língua inglesa. Este artigo sugere que as runas podem ser entendidas como um tipo de "literacia transicional" entre a oralidade primária e as práticas literárias alatinadas. Elas funcionam como forma de compor e registar o pensamento enquanto texto ao mesmo tempo que mantêm elementos fortemente associados à construção de uma cultura oral primária no modo como os textos são interpretados por uma cultura familiarizada com a escrita. Por conseguinte, torna-se necessário clarificar o entendimento do *Old English* como forma poética de transição, a saber, que a natureza e o grau de transição contidos na poesia em *Old English* se desenvolve a partir de inscrições rúnicas que representam uma transição entre as formas germânica e latina de textualidade e de literacia. **Palavras-chave:** escrita rúnica; poesia em *Old English*; oralidade secundária; literacia transicional; textualidade.

U nlike oral performance which exists only when going out of existence, writing leaves a residue (Ong 11). This would suggest that a primary oral culture cannot have any 'texts' (in a modern sense) because these remnants of a pure oral form would be preserved through a medium that contradicts orality being the primary or only form of sonic communication. As a primary oral culture has no residue, Anglo-Saxon England cannot be described as one because the location of runes within their literary canon shows an evolutionary attempt to preserve sound in a definite, visual form. Pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon culture is generally perceived as a one of primary orality into which Christianity introduced literacy. This would suggest that the transitional period in which Old English poetry is said to operate in refers to a transition from the full states of primary orality to literacy. However runic texts and the Anglo-Saxon fuþorc alphabet predate Latinate writing in England and go as far back as at least the early fifth century with the *Kentens Comb Case* (Looijenga 324).

The existence of runes within the pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon landscape shows Anglo-Saxon England to be a secondary oral culture, a culture that is surrounded and/or supported by literacy (Ong 136). A technology of inscription has already been conceived. This calls for the need to re-examine the definition of orality in Old English discourse as a Germanic literary form predates the adaption of Latinate literacy in England. This form of writing does not function in the same as Latinate literacy as it is speech centric and can thus be understood as a transitional form of literacy. It is a form of writing but one that is deeply rooted in orality. Runes act as a literary representation of the degrees of change within the transition from an oral centric community towards the progressive establishment of an Anglo-Saxon textual community. They maintain the same prominence of orality and voice as Old English texts do but operate in a climate with little active awareness to Latinate textual culture. The etymology of runes, their origins and how they

operate as an oral form of writing all support runic writing as a transitional form of literacy, one that operates between the oral and literate absolutes of Milman Parry and Albert Lord.[1] The subsequent investigation of Anglo-Saxon runic inscriptions which both predate and coincide with Old English writing will demonstrate further that the climate in which Old English 'oral literature' operates in is not a preliterate culture but a form of secondary orality.

The transitional nature of runic literacy is communicated within the etymology of its very name. The word *rún* from which rune is derived is often explained to mean 'secret', coming from the corresponding Gothic and Old Irish *rún* (Malm 139). This explanation has not been ruled conclusive however which has lead to some continued debate over the origins and meaning of the word. De Vries puts forward the suggestion that the word is related to the Old English *rýnan* and the Middle High German *rienen* which translate as 'roar' and 'wail' respectively (453-4). These interpretations maintain an association between sound and inscription within runic writing. In Gothic and Old Irish, *raunen*, *rúnen*, and *rúnian,* which have *rún* at their root, can be interpreted as meaning 'to speak secretively' or 'to whisper' (Malm 139). Sound and speech are central to all reading practices (Ong 9) but the making of sound would seem to be a preoccupation within runic literacy so much so that its name facilitated this form of writing being understood as a type of sound. Mats Malm explains that the majority of words in Germanic languages meaning 'secretive speaking', 'whisper', 'wail', 'moan' or 'sound' are either derived from the word 'secret' or that the word 'secret' must actually derive from a root meaning 'to make sound'(139). This shows that this form of literacy still exists in a culture that is primarily oral in nature but one that have evolved to grasp the concept of verbal images. It is at an early transitional stage as it has the technology of writing but the mentality of speaking. This spoken nature is favoured in the employment of written forms and corresponds with the orally formulated techniques employed within Old English texts (see Magoun 1953).

Richard Morris interprets the word *rún* as originating from a dialectal Germanic word *raunen* and suggests it means 'that which is dug' or 'cut' (352-6). In this interpretation *rún* refers to the act of writing runes through carving them on wood or in stone and conveys the sense of a written message as a text. Morris dismisses the idea of *rún* referring to 'whisper' or 'secretive speaking' as this understanding confuses a written message for an aural communication (348). This view ignores the complex interplay between these two forms of communication as it maintains writing and aural communication as mutually exclusive in a period of transition between primary orality

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[1] Parry and Lord are the originators of oral-formulaic theory and believed that orally composed works are predominantly formulaic with little formulaic expressions while literary texts are to be considered non-formulaic with few formulaic expressions (Parry 1971; Lord 30-67).

through secondary orality to full literacy. *Rún* meaning 'secret' or 'whisper' shows a transition from speech being solely an aural, external voice to also becoming an internal, silent and secret form of speech which only writing can communicate. As reading is an act of internalized speech (Ong 8), the idea of runes being a whisper shows the process of transition taking place through runacy[2] as a progression towards the interiorised reading process we are familiar with today where orality and literacy operate within the same sphere of thought and action.

The Wanderer demonstrates this later awareness of the power of literacy/runacy to become a vehicle for the singular internal voice. Diamond translates the half-line "sundor æt rune" as "sat apart in secret meditation" ("The Wanderer" Trans. Diamond 111) while Alexander translates it as "sat apart in thought" ("The Wanderer" Trans. Alexander 111). *Sundor* suggests that the exiled warrior's vocal performance of this oral-formulaic poem is a solitary or internal one. *Rune* may also be read to directly mean 'rune' where the warrior is alone with runes. This shows an emergent awareness of literacy or runacy being an act of introspection where reading and writing have become more consciously associated with thought or meditation. This coincides with the understanding of *rún* to have originated from 'whisper' or 'secretive speaking' as the performative voice of the poem becomes an internal one which facilitates singular reflection, favouring textuality for the communication of interiority rather than orality. This fictionalises the reality of this poem as an oral performance through reducing its performance to secretive speech. This stage of literary development demonstrates a society that is evolving the mentality to coincide with the technology of writing as it demonstrates the emergent awareness of the power of literature as vehicle for thought rather than simply as a means to communicate normative speech acts. This is a key aspect to the Old English Elegies in general which all focus around mediations on solitary settings and situations as vehicles for Christianised/moral introspection. Even though these texts are communicated through the speech of an established character, they are not textual utterances but reflexive sermons which play upon the reader's emotions through appealing to Christian empathy and faith in meditation. *The Seafarer* tells us that *meotud meahtigra þonne ænges monnes gehygd* ("God is mightier than any man's thoughts") (116) and through this tells us to *hycgan* ("ponder") (117a) God. Here again thought and meditation have become the primary purpose of literature within this Christian textual community that emphasises the spirituality of a literate mentality. Stock reminds us that "what was essential to a textual community was not a written version of a text… but an individual

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[2] 'Runacy' is a term suggested by Terje Spurkland in "Literacy and 'Runacy' in Medieval Scandinavia" (2004) to differentiate Scandinavian runic inscriptions from the Latin implications of the term 'literacy'. Spurkland uses the research of Brian Stock to argue that runes function as a literary form but one that has a differing medium, mentality and situational reality than the medieval definition of literacy.

who, having mastered it, then utilized it for reforming a group's thought and action" (Stock 90). A literate writer manipulates Anglo-Saxon oral-centric reading practices to give the character of the seafarer a performative voice. It is the scribe's utilization of the power of literacy to "transform experience through writing" (Lerer 22) that allows him to create a protagonist that plays upon his own situation to evoke the subjectivity of the Christian reader. This awareness of the power of literacy utilises the interiority which textuality brings as a communicative medium in order to further the moral and philosophical implications of the Old English Elegies.

Pasternack reminds us that "literacy... is defined not by the presence or absence of texts made up of letters on pages but by the uses made of texts" (3). Runacy constitutes a Germanic form of literacy but its inscription on runestones and other various surviving objects shows it was employed in a manner where the culture did not interpret the text itself as much more than speech (upon a speech centric object). It is not just runes as a form of writing which reflect this primarily oral dominated mentality but also the construction and shaping of its inscribed phrasings and textual units which reflect this oral centric transitional literacy.

Ong asserts that literacy was achieved within human consciousness "not when simple semiotic marking [were] devised but when a coded system of visible marks [were] invented" (83). The fuþorc alphabet can be interpreted as this codified system of visual sounds which also have their own individual meanings. Runes thus act as a form of technology for recording, prolonging and preserving a spoken or mentally conceived utterance. The runic alphabet constructs a "phonemic sign system" (Spurkland, *Norwegian Runes and Runic Inscriptions* 4), one in which each symbol is assigned both a name and a sound value. These runic sound symbols function as a visual way of communicating sound and meaning through creating textually inscribed verbal images. Indeed, human communication has always existed in the sensory world of sound; it is something to be spoken and heard (Siertsema 11). To read a text, one must convert it to sound, either internally or externally, in order to turn it into an oral performance. This practice functions to create a secondary oral performance where writing becomes a 'secondary modelling system' of speech (Ong 8). This speech is inseparable from the consciousness of a secondary oral culture because it facilitates any literacy found within it. Therefore, runic symbols act as semiotic marks which have been assigned (singular or multiple) meanings by a community to facilitate thought and enable a transition from speech being facilitated in a purely vocal/aural medium of communication to that of a visual one. Like Old English, runic writing has a lack of punctuation or visual cues to aid the reader to interpret the text. O'Keeffe and Pasternack both argue that this suggests an audience with a deep understanding of the conventions and traditions of reading these texts (21; 9). This would mean that like Old English, those who read runic inscriptions did so by applying orally formulated reading practices. This serves as a

literary precursor to the practices of punctuation in Old English as it is an earlier oral-centric writing practice which operated within the same cultural and geographic space and shared the same topical uses of punctuation in sync with reader knowledge to mark out the largest movements of text.

Spurkland argues that "both runes and Roman letters are writing, but Roman letters with their classical anchoring were literacy, while runic inscription represented an oral genre" (*Norwegian Runes and Runic Inscriptions* 201). If we are to understand runes as a developing or developed device for storing and prolonging speech, then, like writing, they are a form of technology. It is important to understand that "technologies are not mere exterior aids but also interior transformations of consciousness" (Ong 81). Rosamund McKitteric argues that the transformation to full literacy in any society is a process of the mental, emotional, intellectual, physical and technological adjustments which are necessary to accommodate its transition from its initial primary orality (5). What makes runic literacy a 'transitional literacy' is that the mental and emotional processes of conception have not evolved to coincide with the technological advancements runic writing brings. The vast majority of runic inscriptions (like the *Harford Farm Brooch, Frank's Casket* and the *Ruthwell Cross*) are brief in length, demonstrating that the technology of writing has not yet been fully utilized in an oral society which features the mechanisms of literacy. This ability to write runes was "confined to a small circle of rune-masters" (Green 35), meaning that runic literacy was not widespread or commonplace in early Anglo-Saxon society. The same can be said of Old English and Latin writing in Anglo-Saxon England which were both generally confined to the clergy and the upper classes. However these systems institutionalised literacy through their social power and their employment of literacy to implement and represent their positions of political and religious power in society.

Runacy therefore lacked a coinciding textual community which Anglo-Saxon Latinate literacy and the majority of Old English poetry had in the form of Christianity. A textual community consists of a group of people who use texts "both to structure the internal behaviour of the group's members and to provide solidarity against the outside world" (Stock 90). Through the use of texts in this pragmatic fashion, a society gives authority to the written word as a fixed code and transitions away from the variability of orality. As runacy was "removed from the everyday world and used for monumental and epigraphic purposes" (Green 36) in Anglo-Saxon England, it lacked the same practical functions given to writing in literate societies and works as a transitional literary form between orality and literacy in a secondary oral culture which still prioritises orality in its social (and artistic) construction.

Early Anglo-Saxon runic inscriptions like that found on the *Harford Farm Brooch* are constructed in the form of speech acts characteristic of a definitively oral style of communication. This would suggest that the runic culture remains an oral one at heart as the construction of mentality remains unal-

tered by literacy as orality authoritatively constructs this transitional form of literacy. Speech act theory argues that speech is made up of oral performative utterances which operate through three acts. The locutionary act consists of the performance of the utterance, the illocutionary act consists of the intended significance of an utterance and the perlocutionary act consists of the effect (intended or not) of the utterance (see Austin 1962).

The *Harford Farm Brooch* is dated around the turn of the seventh century and carries the short inscription *luda: giboetæsi gilæ*. This has been translated as "Luda repaired the brooch" or alternatively, "may Luda make amends by means of the brooch" (Bammesberger 133-5). There is a 'doing' central to this item's textual utterance in which the voice of the text acts in this locutionary act (Zimmerman 88). Through this the text evokes the power of the sounded word in an oral culture to maintain the action which the brooch, as the text, enacts or has been acted upon (see Ong 31-3). This illocutionary act can be either a declaration or a commissive speech act in which the textual nature of the brooch – as more than simply an item to be written upon – prolongs the power of the statement through capturing its residue in its textuality (Austin 98). The perlocutionary act of this inscription increases the power of the oral utterance over the future as its act does not cease to exist with its speech. In this form, runic culture remains an oral culture at heart but is one which has the support of verbal images to prolong the authority which the community places in speech acts. As there is little difference between what is said and how it is said in a primarily oral culture, all statements in all their forms are "carried by a voice" (Malm 139). This serves as a potential influence on (later) Anglo-Saxon scribes who relied on this residual prominence in voice (as a communicative medium) to construct a textual sense of oral performance through the deployment of oral-formulaic tropes. Old English poems operate through the interpretive frame of traditional performance where the power of speech as an act is used to create an artistic register within which textual works can be interpreted as oral performative expressions.[3] Old English texts "construe meaning through a dynamic that is more clearly seen through orality than through writing" (Pasternack 4). This prominence of voice has originated from a primary oral culture but has transitioned to Old English poetry through its employment in the secondary orality of runic literacy. Runacy therefore can be seen as influencing the performative nature of Old English writing because it serves as an older (Germanic) textual form with communicative performative speech acts. These runic speech acts operate through the pragmatic function of normative speech while later Old English poetry has evolved to textually evoke the

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[3] For a full investigation into how the act of performance functions as an interpretive frame in which the reception of a performed text is shaped, see Bauman's *Verbal Art as Performance* (1984).

power of speech within the elevated cultural register of (traditionalist) artistic performance.

Later and more elaborate runic inscriptions such as those found on the eight century *Frank's Casket*[4] and on the longer than typical eight century *Ruthwell Cross*[5] represent another stage of transition between the speech act central runic inscriptions and a more Latinate form of "Writtenness" or "literary character" (Bäuml 41). Their alliterative verse structure functions to frame these texts as operating within the artistic performance register rather than being simply normative utterances similar to those found on the *Herford Farm Brooch*. This textual deployment of artistic speech puts these texts in another communicative medium than simply functioning as pragmatic textual utterances. These texts offer the reader a sense of orally formulated poetry rather than simply a locutionary act while their locations and adornments show an author with clear connections to the Latinate Christian textual community. The presence of Christianity as well as Latin script within these inscriptions offers a clear movement away from an oral centric society in which textuality serves solely as a means for prolonging speech acts and demonstrates a clearly conscious awareness of both Latin writing practices and its textual culture (Green 36). As Christianity is a textual community in which its authority originates and is maintained within a body of literature, the Christianity of these inscriptions shows an author/inscriber and audience that are familiar to some extent with religious writing. This author/inscriber and audience have either interacted with these Christian texts through reading them or through receiving them through the oral medium of performance where these Christianised works have been mediated by a performer who has engaged in this Latin textual culture. In this process of transmission

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[4] Inscriptions on *The Frank's Casket* - Top of Casket: ᚠᚷᛁᛁᛁ ("Egill").
Front Panel: ᚹᛁᛋᛁ•ᚹᛁᚠᚹᛗᛞ•ᚠᚻᚠᚹᛏᚹᚹᛗᚱᚷ / ᛗᛏᛒᛗᚱᛁᚷ /
ᚹᚠᚱᛞᚹᚠ:ᚼᚱᛁᛚᚷᚱᚠᚱᛏᛞᚠᚱᚻᛗᚠᛏᚷᚱᛗᛁᛏᚷᛁᚼᚹᚹᛗ / ᚻᚱᚠᛏᚹᚼᛒᚠᛏ / ᛗᚠᚷᛁ ("The flood lifted up the fish on to the cliff-bank; /the whale became sad, where he swam on the shingle/ Whale's bone / Magi").
Back Panel: ᚻᛗᚱᚹᛗᚷᛏᚹᛞ / ᛏᛁᛏᛞᚼᛗᛏᛗᚷᛁᚾᛞᛗᚹᚼᛞ / HICFUGIANTHIERUSALIM / ᚠᚹᛁᛏᚠᛏᚠᚱᛗᚼ / ᛗᚠᛗ / ᚷᛁᚼᚱ ("Here fight Titus and the Jews. / Here the inhabitants flee from Jerusalem. / Doom. / Hostages").
Left Panel: ᚱᚠᛗᚹᚠᛁᚾᚼᚠᛏᛗᚱᛗᚾᛗᚹᚠᛁᚾᚼᛏᚹᚷᛗᛏ / ᚷᛁᛒᚱᚠᛞᚠᚱ /
ᚠᚹᛟᛗᛗᚠᚻᛁᚠᚹᚾᛁᚹᛁᛏᚱᚠᛗᚠᛚᚼᛏᚱᛁ: / ᚠᛞᛁᚠᛁᛏᛏᛗᚷ ("Romulus and Remus, two brothers: a she-wolf fed them in Rome city, far from their native land").
Right Panel: ᚻᚷᚱᚻᚼᚼᚼᛖᛏᚼᛞᛏᚻᚷᚱᛗᛒᚷᚱᚷᚼᚷᚷᚷ / ᛗᚱᛖᚷᛖᛞᚼᚹᚷ /
ᚻᛖᚱᛖᚷᚱᛏᚼᚷᚷᛖᚼᚷᚱᚷᚹᚼᚷᚱᛗᛗᚼᚼᚼᚱᚷᚷᚷ / ᛏᚼᚷᚼᚹᚠᛏᚼᚱᛏᚷ / ᚱᛁᚼᛁ / ᛒᛁᛏᚠ ᚠᚾᛗᛞ ("Here the horse stands above the mound of woe, / It suffers tribulation; just as to her Erta appointed anxiety, / A grave of grief, in sorrow and anguish of heart. / Wood. Biter. Rush"). All inscriptions and translations from Elliot 96-109.
[5] Though the *Ruthwell Cross* is dated to the eight century, Connor provides sufficient evidence to suggest that the runic inscriptions found on it were added in the tenth century. This addition bears a striking similarity to lines 39-64 of the *Dream of the Rood* which also dates from the tenth century but operates through the more literary media of parchment in the Vercelli Book. For more see Connor 2007.

and transition, Latinate textual culture and learning has unconsciously been given authority over older forms of (oral) wisdom by the converted community as the source of wisdom becomes literature rather than speech. Any authoritative Christian speech gains its power through its referencing of the Bible. This transition facilitates authority coming from written sources rather than an oral one. Accepting Christianity is accepting literacy and writing as a structure for knowledge and wisdom. Though illiterate peoples who have been converted to Christianity through preachers and missionaries may have no direct interaction with Latinate textuality, their conversion to Christianity shows their placement of authority and trust in a community that holds literature central to its construction. This constructs the textual community which runic literacy lacks and facilitates secondary orality as orality supported by literacy rather than just surrounded by it. Like the cross, the Bible (as a book) becomes a symbol of power and becomes a feature of the iconography of power and authority in Anglo-Saxon manuscript illuminations such as King Athelstan presenting a manuscript to St. Cuthbert in Bede's *Lives of St. Cuthbert* (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 183, F. 1v 3).

The *Lancaster/Cynibald's Cross* serves as an intermediate stage between the previous examples of runic utterance given as its short inscription *gibidæþ foræ cynibalþ cuþbere[ht]* maintains the sense of a speech act through issuing the command to "Pray for Cynibalth, Cuthbert" (The Archaeological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland 72-3) as a locutionary act with a directive illocutionary act. However, this speech act now takes place within a Christianised typeset as it is upon a stone cross. Like the *Harford Brooch*, its expression operates through the pragmatic communicative function typical of runacy. Its Christian textual nature marks it as similar to the later *Ruthwell Cross* but while the *Ruthwell Cross* is artistic in its expression, the *Lancaster/Cynibald's Cross* remains purely functional. The *Lancaster/Cynibald's Cross's* performative utterance prolongs its plea and has the power to increase the speech act's illocution through improving its ability to achieve prayer for its subject, helping it achieve salvation in the afterlife in which the call for prayer must outlive its speaker/writer. This inscription represents a transitional act of social adaption between runic and Latinate textual cultures as it takes the practical expressive means of runacy and places it upon a text with Latin connotations. Its textuality functions as a precursor to the *Ruthwell Cross* as it uses the same medium but different register (pragmatic rather than artistic), in its unexpanded expressive means.

As *rún* is often understood to mean simply 'secret', it is often perceived as an "occult script" (Page 257) and associated with magic and concealment. Green argues that runacy does not constitute a literary form because writing "was adapted not as a technology... but as a mystery" as it served to conceal rather than communicate to those outside the limited pool of runic proficiency (36). This perception seems to forget that this could also to be said to be true of Latin to those uneducated in it and of Old English for illiterate people

who may speak the language but remain unable to comprehend its sound through a structure of symbols. All forms of writing constitute concealment and secrecy to those unfamiliar with its individual nuances. Social structures and education offer access to literacy and the potential to decode its mystery. The communicative hindrance created by runes operating as a literary form would be most pronounced in a period of transition between literary forms because both Germanic and Latin literacy generally operate on different social levels within either their respective oral or textual communities. Anglo-Saxon secondary orality refers to the society's exposure to writing as a technology, not differing cultures of textuality.

The uses of runes in Old English manuscripts show runic textuality becoming aligned with and interpreted through the same reading practices as their surrounding Latin derived Old English characters. One needs to have knowledge of runes and be literate in Old English to fully decode Cynewulf's poetry and must have relative exposure to runacy to understand runic abbreviations in manuscripts (even if only from understanding it as a Latin shorthand practice). This is similar to how one would need to be proficient in both Latin and Old English to read the marginal glosses of the 'tremulous hand'.[6] As Old English was not a codified language, Pasternack notes that there was little to no standardisation in spelling or syntax in Old English manuscripts (21). Therefore there would have been no unity in approach to runic abbreviations by readers in the period. The scribe may have only understood the most common runic symbols or known them purely for what they represented but there is no guarantee that the reader would have shared this understanding. The lack of standardisation further increases the secretive quality of runes as those who would have had the same understanding of these symbols would have most likely came from the same textual microclimate e.g. monastery or geographic location. These runes remain based on sound but it is their textual nature that allows them to be read amongst the Latin alphabet. It is their visual differences from their surroundings which gives them textual significance as a means of concealment to those unfamiliar with runacy or as a means of communication to those familiar with it. Eaton notes that "as more people became familiar with runes and were able to read them, their connotations derived more and more from the experience of reading and from the nature and interpretation of texts" (26). Thus runes were adopted as a form of 'secretive speech' within Old English literacy but became interpreted through the textually aware practices of reading over listening as it is this visually based process which gives runes their power as symbols within a manuscript context.

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[6] The 'Tremulous Hand of Worcester' was an unknown thirteenth century glosser of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts. His glosses are characterised by their unsteady handwriting and the use of brown ink. He is accredited over 50,000 manuscript glosses and edits, varying between Old English, Middle English and Latin. For more see Franzen 1991.

The complex relationship between orality and literacy which runacy represents in the crux of a transitional period is further complicated when we examine the origins of runic writing as a Germanic form of literacy. Much has been written which traces runic inscription to have originated from relations between Germanic tribes and Roman civilization through trade, commerce and invasion (Spurkland, "The Older Fuþark and Roman Script Literacy" 68-71). The growth in administration and trade that these relations brought about meant that memory alone was no longer able to record transactions solely (Spurkland, *Norwegian Runes and Runic Inscriptions* 3-4). When we look at the characters represented in the *Anglo-Saxon Rune Poem*, these runes fall into four categories of relationship with Latin script. (1) ᚱ, ᚺ, ᛁ, and ᛒ are parallel in form and sound to their Roman equivalents R, H, I and B. (2) ᚹ, ᚾ, ᛏ, ᛚ, ᛋ and ᛗ are similar in form but parallel in sound to their respective Roman equivalents F, U, T, L, S and M. (3) ᚷ, ᛈ, and ᛖ are parallel in form to the Roman letters X, P and M, but represent different sounds to their corresponding Latin sound symbols G, W and E respectively. (4) ᚦ (th), ᚠ(a), ᚾ (n), ᛄ (j), ᛓ (p), ᛇ (ë), ᛟ(n), ᛡ(ia), ᛟ(œ) and ᛗ(d) are unique to runic writing and completely unknown in Roman script (Spurkland, *Norwegian Runes and Runic Inscriptions* 6; Robertson 11-4). This suggests that the Latin alphabet may have had some influence on the shaping of runic script during its inception and development. Williams maintains that the relationship between the shape for the fuþorc and Latin alphabets "determines the formal origins of the runes" (214). Spurkland makes the point that "it is an oft-neglected fact that whoever conceived the older fuþark must have been familiar with the script that inspired it, and also with texts written in that alphabet" ("The Older Fuþark and Roman Script Literacy" 65). This means that runic script originated in a literate context (Spurkland, "The Older Fuþark and Roman Script Literacy" 66).

As the development of the related older fuþark alphabet coincided with the peak of Roman stone inscriptions around A.D. 150, Spurkland also suggests that the habit of erecting runestones was another cultural import from Roman epigraphy ("The Older Fuþark and Roman Script Literacy" 79). Stone rising has been a common tradition across Europe since the Bronze Age but the practice of using these stones as texts through which to communicate utterances was a new concept during the origins of runic inscription. The process of commemoration, communication and preservation found on the *Lancaster/Cynibald's Cross*, *Ruthless Cross* and the *Herford Farm Brooch* could then be seen as originating from the Roman Empire's culture of Latin literacy. However, these inscriptions were created in a landscape that adapted and distanced themselves from this Roman form of literacy through altering Roman character shapes and sounds to create their own system of sound symbols. If we are to take the medieval definition of literacy as *literartus* (i.e. knowledge of Latin), these inscription practices and overlapping letter forms suggest a degree of Latin literacy supporting the orality of Anglo-

Saxon culture (Spurkland, "Literacy and 'Runacy' in Medieval Scandinavia" 340). This makes it a secondary oral culture by both modern and medieval standards. The public nature of these carvings complement their oral centric nature as they function as illocutionary acts, aiding the purpose of their textually uttered speech act by increasing the receptive range of their representative, directive, commissive, expressive and/or declarative function(s) through being a public object which contains a voice (see Searle 10-6). Like spells or charms, runic speech acts illicit an outcome through enacting speech and action together to achieve its goal. In this case it is the act of inscription or carving combined with the speech this action contains and communicates which gives the utterance its significance. This would suggest that runacy supports secondary orality rather than a literate culture as the speech acts within these inscriptions communicate through an adapted writing form which is oral in its formation but underlined and established by a distanced literacy of Roman origin. Anglo-Saxon literacy could therefore be argued as representing a transition both away from and back towards Latinate textuality. These runic inscriptions show a growing textual culture but textuality does not equate with literacy as the reception of texts does not require knowledge of reading (Spurkland, "The Older Fuþark and Roman Script Literacy" 66). Here interpreting runes does not yet represent an awareness of reading but a textual form of listening which is what separates it from its Latin counterpart.

Runes show that the culture in which Old English 'oral literature' operates is not a preliterate one but a form of secondary orality. Ong reveals that "intermediate stages exist" within institutionalised writing systems (83). Runacy can be understood as a transitional form of literacy as it is a definitive literary form which serves as an intermediate stage between orality and literacy. With Old English being a literary form conceived in a secondary oral culture, the transition between oral and literate which is central to the theory of a transitional period has already begun before Old English writing. Thus clarification must be made as to the nature and degree of the transition central to this theory, it being in this instance a transition from a Germanic to a Latinate form of literacy. This changing of the definition of orality in Old English studies extends the transitional period in which it operates as the scale of the transition no longer falls from being between a pure primary orality and the development of a new technology of Latin originating textuality. It falls within a wider cultural transition between Germanic and Latinate forms of literacy. These forms of literacy had different functions for literacy due to their relative social constructions but both of these writing systems had their own effects in shaping of Old English writing. The extension of the transitional period within which this operates highlights the adaption and adoption to the emerging Latinate textual community by a Germanic oral centric community. This period does not simply consist of the transition from orality to literacy but is part of a wider evolution from the reception of sound in hearing a text to reading it on a page. The point at which Old Eng-

lish writing exists on this transitional timeline transmits the entire process of this conversion from oral composition to written composition as the technology of writing begins to be utilized.

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