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An Appreciation of Joyce Hill

Roberta Frank

A collection of writings by the humorist S. J. Perelman advertised on its jacket an introduction by Al Hirshfield, followed by an appreciation by George S. Kaufman. Hirshfield contributed a few paragraphs in praise of his friend. Then came the heading: 'An Appreciation of S. J. Perelman by George S. Kaufman'. The page was blank except for one sentence: 'I appreciate S. J. Perelman. Signed, George S. Kaufman'. Would such reticence seem golden in this anthology? John Donne suggests not: that to reach Truth, we her Hill 'about must, and about must go'. So I add here my own pebble to the lofkostr 'praise-pile' towering high in honour of Joyce on her sixtieth birthday.

Joyce's output and activities are paralleled by few, if any, of her contemporaries. In important ways, she resembles one of the Reform figures she writes about, the (hyper)active Archbishop Wulfstan, homilist, statesman, legislator, tract-writer, and practical administrator. Wulfstan was God's servant and the king's too; Joyce has served both the academy and her nation with grace and distinction. If the boundaries between his literary and administrative achievements were porous, it is almost as difficult to separate her scholarly and community service. As I began this piece, I asked a few colleagues to list the adjectives that came first to mind when they thought of Joyce's work. The terms most frequently mentioned were 'incisive', 'authoritative', 'solid', 'formidable', 'sound', 'well-organized', 'thorough', 'reliable', 'useful', 'adroit', 'trustworthy', and 'intelligent'. One respondent supplied 'stalwart', fitting for, like 'trustworthy', the compound derives from an Old English word, stælwierđe 'serviceable' (<*staðolwierđe 'worthy in its foundation, firm'). Published reviews of Joyce's articles stress again and again their pedagogical usefulness, clarity, accessibility, and profound learning: 'a characteristically readable piece'; 'most
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felicitously expressed\textsuperscript{5}; she 'clears up something of a mystery'\textsuperscript{6}. Andrew Galloway puts it elegantly in his recent Speculum review:\textsuperscript{7}

Joyce Hill's authoritative opening essay on Ælfric's English Grammar, his Latin-English Glossary, and his (originally) wholly Latin Colloquy uncovers with great finesse Ælfric's pedagogical sequence of texts for teaching Latin in a non-Romance-language world, inspired in part by Carolingian, in part by local models. The essay does not directly engage arguments about medieval literacy, but, as perhaps the most authoritatively learned essay in the collection about its chosen topic, it contributes significantly to our understanding of modes of school-room literacy, English and Latin, about Ælfric's project, and about the social meanings of various kinds of Latin and vernacular adaptations of that project.

Hill's essay moreover allows appreciation of Ælfric's pedagogical works in terms of their genres and those genres' nuances of cultural meaning [...]

'Authoritative' (as adjective and adverb), 'learned', executed 'with great finesse': these are the very qualities Joyce has uncovered in the great figures of the Anglo-Saxon Benedictine Reform, whose impact on tenth-century ecclesiastical and national life has been her concern in recent years.

Different aspects of this subject lie at the heart of the three named distinguished research lectures she has presented in the past decade: the Toller lecture (1996), the Jarrow lecture (1998), and the British Academy Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial lecture (2004).\textsuperscript{8} An overriding image emerges of a chain of authority running from the Fathers of the Church to Ælfric, with the latter relying on Carolingian homiliaries as his immediate, as opposed to ultimate, source. How Bede rose to prominence in this catena was the subject of her plenary address 'An Anglo-Saxon and the Continent: The Elevation of Bede's Authority', presented at the 2005 meeting of the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists, and is examined in her recent article, 'Carolingian Perspectives on the Authority of Bede'.\textsuperscript{9} In a recent overview, she summarizes in a single sentence some of her discoveries over the last twenty years. The purpose of Ælfric's Catholic Homilies
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was to make accessible to secular clergy and thus to their lay congregations the Biblical and doctrinal teaching that had come into England with the Reform, which was encapsulated in the Carolingian Latin homiliaries that Ælfric must have known at Winchester and that he evidently had available at Cerne: the homiletic anthology of Paul the Deacon, and the homiliaries of Smaragdus and Haymo of Auxerre.  

Many of her essays and reviews raise questions about the way modern scholarship identifies and catalogs the 'sources' of Old English prose, and urge readers to repent their ways and to come to terms with the nature of the textual culture that shaped and was shaped by the Reformers. Joyce was a founding member of the Fontes Anglo-Saxonici project (a database of all written sources used by authors in Anglo-Saxon England), serving first as General Secretary and now, at time of writing, as Chair of the Management Committee. In a kind of feedback-loop of influence, her interest in the multi-dimensional and complexly intertextual body of source materials available to Ælfric led to her participation in Fontes, whose broad vision has inspired some of her subsequent writings.

Joyce has written several studies concerning a central document of the tenth-century Reform, the monastic consuetudinary known as the Regularis concordia, especially its adaptation in transmission. Some are on the word choices made by different Old English versions of the rule, including the ways in which one was adapted for women, and assessed the special vocabulary of the reformers. Here, too, a Frankish connection sometimes raises its head. In 'The Litaniae maiores and minores in Rome, Francia and Anglo-Saxon England: Terminology, Texts and Traditions', Early Medieval Europe, 9 (2000), 211-46, for example, she demonstrates that nomenclature that can seem puzzling and inconsistent to scholars in reality follows the precedent of Gallican observance. Joyce is a specialist advisor/reader for the Dictionary of Old English in Toronto and a loyal friend of this project, as her recent essay in its honour, 'Dialogues with the Dictionary: Four Case Studies' testifies. I see a link between her cultural and lexicographical studies on the Reform movement – from her Regularis concordia articles to those on Ælfric and Wulfstan, only a few of which have been mentioned here – in the ideal of uniformity of observance and expression that she traces in every aspect of the Reformers' thinking, a commitment to authority rather than originality or independence of mind, a conceptual framework radically different from our own.
But Joyce, as Anglo-Saxonists are well aware, is not only a 'prose person'. Her first published articles were on Old English poetry, and include a brave and forward-looking essay on *Widsith* and the tenth century.\(^\text{13}\) The same clarity demonstrated in her Ælfrician source criticism is visible in studies such as 'Confronting Germania Latina: Changing Responses to Old English Biblical Verse',\(^\text{14}\) in which she surveys the history of criticism of the Junius 11 Biblical poems in terms of the opposition between Germanic – native, vernacular, pagan, secular – and Latin approaches, the latter focusing on learned Christian backgrounds; she ends by urging a more balanced approach. Her 1983 edition (2nd edn 1994) of *Old English Minor Heroic Poems* is a standard resource in the field, reliable, informative, and glimmering with good sense; the glossary of proper names alone is invaluable, and the commentary – as one would expect – invariably helpful.\(^\text{15}\) Leofric of Exeter as book collector and the provenance of the Exeter Book of Old English Poetry are discussed in several more articles.\(^\text{16}\) It says something about Joyce's range and reputation that not only was she asked to contribute a survey article on 'The Benedictine Reform and Beyond' to the Blackwells *Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature* (see n. 9) but also to write the entries on *The Battle of Finnsburh, Deor, Heroic Poetry, Waldere, and Widsith* for *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*.\(^\text{17}\) And when the editors of *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia* needed articles on *Leiðarvisir* and *Tristrams saga ok Ísoddar*, they, too, turned to Joyce.\(^\text{18}\)

For she is also a Nordicist. Her early (1977) translation of the probably fourteenth-century 'Icelandic Saga of Tristan and Isolt' (recently reprinted) is an accurate and lively rendition of a work once dismissed as a 'boorish account of Tristram's noble passion'.\(^\text{19}\) Another of her translations (1983) from Old Norse, the itinerary (*leiðarvisir* 'guide') of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land dictated by a certain Abbot Nikulás (probably Nikulás Bergsson), is a precious document describing his journey across Europe and to the Eastern Mediterranean coasts in the period following the capture of Jerusalem in the first crusade and during the establishment of the Crusade states.\(^\text{20}\) Joyce's publications over three decades show an interest in travel narratives, from her first pilgrimage piece (1976) through a study of pilgrim routes in medieval Italy (1986, for 1984) and a review of seventeenth-century travels in France and Italy (1988), to an article on pilgrimage in Icelandic sagas (1993).\(^\text{21}\) Joyce herself is one of the great travellers of our profession. In recent times, her feet have touched the soil of almost fifty different countries, from the storied shores of the Nile, the Yangtze, and the Don to the mud-flats of Delaware and the flesh-studded sands of Wreck Beach in British Columbia.
Joyce is – like her admired Ælfric and Wulfstan, Æthelwold and Dunstan – a builder and organizer, a legislator and regulator. At the University of Leeds, she served as Director of the Centre for Medieval Studies, as Head of the School of English and as Pro-Vice-Chancellor. She spent five years as Director of the Higher Education Equality Challenge Unit, based in London. At time of writing, she is chair of the Arts and Humanities Research Council research panel for English, a member of the AHRC's Research Committee and of numerous other local and national advisory groups, and in demand as a consultant from Slovenia to Belgium. She has acted as co-editor of the *Review of English Studies* (1999-2001) and editor of this journal (1988-91). Despite all these responsibilities and leadership posts, she is still younger than I am.

In the opening lines of the Icelandic Tristan saga translated by Joyce, there appears a great English queen of whom the saga-author says, with typical Norse understatement: *hún var vel at sér* 'she was OK' = 'a very distinguished woman'. Were we to follow saga-style, we would say that Joyce, too, is not entirely unappreciated.
NOTES


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14 In Latin Culture and Medieval Germanic Europe, ed. by Richard North and Tette Hofstra, Medievalia Groningana (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1992), pp. 71-88.


