

1 In the Schoolroom (from Ælfric's *Colloquy*)

A 'colloquy' is a sort of formal dialogue between a master and his pupil and was a format much used as an educational tool in the Middle Ages, both for imparting essential knowledge and in the learning of languages, especially Latin. The text known today as 'Ælfric's *Colloquy*' is ascribed to Ælfric on the strength of a note written in one of the manuscripts by someone who may have been a pupil at Cerne Abbas in Dorset, where Ælfric spent some twenty years teaching in the monastic school. Ælfric was the most prolific and influential of the writers who made the later tenth century, following the reform and expansion of the monasteries, the most productive in Anglo-Saxon letters. Little is known about the man himself, but he was probably born about c. 950 somewhere in Wessex and entered the Old Minster at Winchester as a boy, attending the monastic school run by Æthelwold. Probably in 987, he moved to the monastery at Cerne Abbas, newly founded by Æthelmær, son of the wealthy Æthelweard, who was a kinsman of King Æthelred and ealdorman (i.e. ruler under the king) of the West Country. Æthelmær and Æthelweard were great patrons of the church, and thus of learning, and Ælfric dedicated a number of his works to them, including his two great series of *Catholic Homilies* (see p. 181) and his *Lives of Saints* (see p. 170). Ælfric did most of his writing at Cerne Abbas, but in 1004 or 1005 he moved to Eynsham, near Oxford, to become abbot of another foundation endowed by Æthelmær, and there he died c. 1010.

Thus the *Colloquy* fits well with Ælfric's role as an educator, and it would have been an obvious companion for two other teaching aids which he prepared – a beginner's grammar of Latin (the *Excerptiones*: see Text 4) and a Latin–English *Glossary*, which appears with the grammar in some manuscripts. The OE version of the *Colloquy* given here was not, however, the work of Ælfric (who would scarcely have needed it and would not have made the errors of translation which characterise it) but was added later above a copy of his Latin text. Although four manuscripts of this are preserved, only one of them (British Library, Cotton Tiberius A. iii, fols. 60v–64v) has the complete OE gloss; text and gloss were probably copied together in the second quarter of the eleventh century from an older manuscript, perhaps at Canterbury, for the manuscript belonged to the library of Christ Church. The OE gloss was perhaps made by a pupil, or even by a teacher who was less accomplished than Ælfric and in need of a crib for himself. Such glosses usually

follow strictly the order of the glossed language (here Latin) and therefore do not read idiomatically as a continuous text. Nevertheless, the glossator of the *Colloquy* has usually preferred natural OE word order in short phrases: thus he writes *ic eom bysgod*, 'I am occupied', above the Latin *occupatus sum*, not a literal rendering, 'occupied am'. In the edited extracts given below, a few alterations have been made, mainly in the word order, and in a few cases frequently used phrases which the glossator did not bother to repeat have been supplied.

Apart from its proven usefulness as a learning text, one of the most fascinating aspects of the *Colloquy* is the light it throws on the everyday life of members of feudal Anglo-Saxon society who are otherwise hardly known to us, such as ploughmen and shepherds. The extracts given here are from the opening section, where we meet some impressively virtuous pupils, and the closing section, where a youngster who might be from the classroom itself is quizzed about his day in the monastery. It is a wearying day (and night). Monks were required to attend a series of eight church services (the canonical 'hours' or 'offices', specified in the Benedictine Rule), each of which consisted of its own arrangement of psalms, hymns, readings and prayers. They began around 2 a.m. or 3 a.m. with the longest and most elaborate, the 'Night Office' (also known as 'Nocturns' or 'Matins'), and ended in the late evening with 'Compline'. But, as will be seen below, the simple series became elaborated considerably by additions; many of these were made in the tenth century by the industrious continental reformer Benedict of Aniane. In its original form, the Latin component of the dialogue was obviously contrived to give schoolboys practice in the use of the correct terms for all these devotions.

The language shows many of the characteristics of WS written in the first half of the eleventh century, but with much inconsistency. Late variations in unstressed word-endings (the result of 'levelling': see p. xxi) include *-on* for *-um* in *mīnon* (37; but cf. *hundum* in 34) and *-on* for *-an* in *oxon* (20, but cf. *oxan* in 25). In *scēphyrdas* (15) there is typical late WS 'smoothing' of the diphthong of *scēap-*, but cf. *scēap* (33). The writing of *k* for *c* is common in late OE texts, as in *geiukodan* (21), *melke* (35) and *weorkes* (10), but cf. *weorc* (18); *t* for *d* is written in *mit* (22) and *synt* (15), but cf. *mid* (11, 25, etc) and *synd* (45); and intrusive *c* is written after final *g* in *yrþingc* (18) and *þingc* (56), but cf. *þing* (39). Other orthographical variation includes the frequent use of *y* for the short vowel *i*: thus *byþ*, *syndon*, *ys*, *sprycst*, *syngan*, etc; but both *hit* and *hyt* occur (4 and 30), *þisum* and *þysum* (43 and 42), and so on. For the second-person present tense of *etan*, 'eat', both *etst* (58) and *yfst* (53, 55) are used. The glossator of the *Colloquy* committed many clear errors (that is, spellings which it is hard or impossible to accept as variant forms or mere inconsistencies); these have been corrected in the text below (and are listed on p. 345).

Further reading

- G. N. Garmonsway, ed., *Ælfric's Colloquy*, rev. edn. (Exeter, 1978)
 G. N. Garmonsway, 'The Development of the Colloquy', in *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in some Aspects of their History and Culture presented to Bruce Dickinson*, ed. P. A. M. Clemoes (London, 1959), pp. 212–47
 E. R. Anderson, 'Social Idealism in Ælfric's Colloquy', *ASE* 3 (1974), 153–62; repr. in *OE Poetry*, ed. Liuzza, pp. 204–14
 J. Ruffing, 'The Labor Structure of Ælfric's Colloquy', *The Work of Servitude, Slavery and Labor in Medieval England*, ed. A. J. Frantzen and D. Moffatt (Glasgow, 1994), pp. 55–70.
 D. W. Porter, 'Ælfric's Colloquy and Ælfric Bata', *Neophil.* 80 (1996), 639–60

'Wē cildra° biddaþ° þe°, ēalā° lārēow°, þæt þū° tæce° ūs° sprecañ°, forþām° ungelērede° wē° syndon° and gewæmmodlice° wē° sprecaþ°.'

'Hwæt° wille° gē° sprecañ?'

'Hwæt° rēce° wē° hwæt° wē° sprecañ, būton° hit° riht° spræc° sý° and behēfe°, 5 næs° tdel° obbe° fracod°?'

'Wille° gē° bēon° beswungen° on° leornunge?'

'Lēofre° ys° us° bēon° beswungen° for° lare° þænne° hit° ne° cunnañ°. Ac° wē° witon° þe° bilewitne° wesan° and° nellan° onbelāden° ūs° swincglā°, būton° þū° bī° tōgenyðd° fram° ūs°.'

10 'Ic° āxie° þē°, hwæt° sprycst° þū°? Hwæt° hæfst° þū°° weorkes°?'

1 children beg you O master you teach *sbj* to speak because 2 ignorant are badly (*i.e.* ungrammatically) speak 4 as long as correct speech is *sbj* proper 5 not frivolous or base 6 be beaten during 7 for (the sake of) learning than not to know But 8 know [*witon*] kind to be unless be *sbj* [*bēon*] 9 compelled by 10 ask have

3 wille *gē* 'want you', *i.e.* 'do you want'. The pl. inflection on the vb. is reduced (*wille*, not *willaþ*) because it precedes its pron. [§G6f].

4 Hwæt rēce wē 'What care we?', *i.e.* 'What do we care?'; again, *-e* for *-aþ*. The Benedictine Rule stressed the importance of the correct articulation of Latin, both in reading aloud and in chanting. Boys were punished for errors; see also 48n.

7 Lēofre ys ūs bēon 'It is dearer to us to be', *i.e.* 'We would rather be'. hit The antec. is *lāre*, a fem. noun, so the obj. pron. 'ought' to be *hēo*, 'her' (not 'it') in OE, but here 'natural' gender is being used [§B/overview].

8 nellan onbelāden ūs swincglā The infin. vb. *nellan* (a conflation of *ne* and *willan*) is, like *wesan* in the same line, governed by *wē witan*: '(we know you) to be unwilling to inflict strokes on us'; infin. *onbelāden* would more regularly end with *-an*.

10 weorkes gen. of respect: 'by way of work'; *k* for *c* is a late spelling.

'Ic eom geanwyrd° monuc and ic sincege ælce° dæg seofon tīda° mid° gebrōþrum°, and ic eom bysgod° on° sange° ac þēahhwæþere° ic wolde° betwēan° leornian° sprecañ on lēden° gereorde°.'

'Hwæt cunnon þās þīne gefēran?'

15 'Sume synt° yrþlincgas°, sume scēþhyrdas, sume oxanhrydas, sume ēac swylce° huntan°, sume fisceras, sume fugeleras°, sume cýpmenn°, sume scēwyrhtan°, sealteras°, bæceras°.'

'Hwæt sægest þū, yrþlinge? Hū° begæst° þū þīn weorc?'

20 'Ealā° lēof hlāford°, bearló° ic deorfe°. Ic gā° ūt on° dægdrād°, þýwende° oxon tō felda°, and iugie° hig° tō syl°. Nys hit swā stearc winter þæt° ic durre° lūtian° æt hām° for ege° hlāfordes° mīnes; ac, geukodan° oxan and gefæstnodon° sceare and cultre mit þære syl°, ælce dæg ic sceal° erian° fulne° æcer° obbe māre°.'

'Hæfst° þū ænigne gefēran?'

25 'Ic hæbbe sumne° cnapan° þýwende oxan mid gāfīsene°, þe° ēac swilce nū hās° ys for° cyldre° and hrēame°.'

'Hwæt mære dēst° þū on° dæg?'

'Gewyslice° þænne° mære ic dō. Ic sceal fyllan oxena° binnañ mid hīge° and wæterian hig, and heora° scearn° beran° ūt.'

11 professed each times with 12 (my) brothers (*i.e.* fellow-monks) occupied with singing nevertheless would like 13 in the meantime Latin language 15 are ploughmen 16 hunters fowlers merchants 17 shoe-makers bakers 18 How carry out 19 very hard labour go at daybreak driving 20 (the) field yoke them (the) plough dare 21 hide home fear (of +g) 22 must plough full (*i.e.* complete) field (or acre) 23 more 24 Have 25 a (certain) boy 'goad-iron' (*i.e.* cattle-prod) who 26 horse because of cold shouting 27 do during 28 Certainly still of (the) oxen bins *ap* hay 29 their muck *as* carry

14 Hwæt cunnon þās þīne gefēran The vb. is used in its sense of 'know how to' or 'be able to (do something)'; 'What can these friends of yours [lit. "these your friends"] do?' 15–16 ēac swylce 'also likewise', or simply 'again'; see 25 also.
 17 sealteras 'salters'. The salting of meat to preserve it was a crucial aspect of food production.

19 lēof hlāford *lēof* is the adj. 'dear', so the phr. is lit. 'dear lord', but *lēof* can also mean 'sir', as in 31 and 33; the phr. here may best be translated simply as 'master'.

20 Nys hit swā stearc winter þæt lit. 'It isn't so stark a winter that...'. *i.e.* 'There is no winter so severe that...'; *nys* is a contraction of *ne ys*.

21–2 geukodan... mit þære syl '(with the) oxen yoked and the share and coulter fastened to [mit for *mīd*, lit. "with"] the plough...'. The OE imitates a Latin construction known as the 'ablative absolute'. The share and the coulter are iron blades which perform the cutting action of the plough.

- 30 “Hig! Hig!” Micel¹ gedeorf² ys hyl.
 ‘Gēa³ lēof⁴, micel gedeorf hit ys, forþām ꝛ ic neom⁵ frēoh⁶.’
 ‘Hwæt sēgest þū, scēaphyrde, hēfst þū ænig gedeorf?’
 ‘Gēa lēof, ic hebbe. On forewerdne⁷ morgen ic drīfe mīne scēap tō heora lāse⁸ and stande ofer hig on hēte⁹ and on cyle¹⁰ mid hundum¹¹, ꝛ þē lās¹² wulfas forswelgen¹³ hig; and ic āgenlāde¹⁴ hig on heora loca¹⁵ and melke¹⁶ hig tweowa¹⁷ on dæg, and heora loca ic ‘hæbbe’; and cýse¹⁸ and buteran ic dō¹⁹ þærro²⁰. And ic eom getrywe²¹ hlāforde mīnon.’
 ‘þū, cnapa, hwæt dydest tōdæg?’
 ‘Manega²² þing ic dyde. On þisse niht, þā þā²³ cnyll²⁴ ic gehýrde²⁵, ic ārās²⁶ on²⁷ mīnon bedde and ēode²⁸ tō cyrcean²⁹ and sang³⁰ ūhisang³¹ mid gebroþrum. Æfter þām, wē sungon be³² eallum hālgum³³ and³⁴ dægredlice lofsanges³⁵; æfter þysum, þrim³⁶ and seofon seolmas³⁷ mid letanian³⁸ and capitolmæssan³⁹; syþþan⁴⁰
- 30 Great labour **31** Yes sir am not [*þe eom*] free **33** early **34** pasture heat cold dogs **35** devour *sbj* lead back folds *ap* milk twice **36** cheese make as well **37** loyal (to +d) **39** Many ‘knell’ (i.e. sounding of the bell) heard got up **40** from went church **41** about saints **42** psalms the litany first mass then
- 30 **Hig! Hig!** Here *hig* represents an exclamation, ‘O!’ or ‘Ho!’ In 29, etc. the same spelling is used for the pl. pron. (nom. or acc.) *hir* (or *hite*) and in 28 it is the word for ‘hay’ (with long vowel, and given the dat. ending *-e*).
- 31 **ic neom frēoh** Ploughmen in Anglo-Saxon England generally were slaves (see 7/headnote).
- 34 **þē lās** lit. ‘the less’, i.e. ‘lest’ or ‘in case’ (*þē* is instr.).
- 36 **hæbbe** ‘hold’, in the sense of ‘look after’. In fact, the glossator has misunderstood Lat. *moveo*, ‘I move’.
- 39 **On þisse niht** The Anglo-Saxons associated the night-time with the day following; thus ‘this night’ (lit. ‘in this night’, acc.) would for us be ‘last night’. **þā þā** lit. ‘then when’, but simply ‘when’ in trans. The noun *cnyll* is without a def. art., which would be *þone*, acc. sing. masc.
- 40 **ūhtsang** lit. ‘dawn-song’, i.e. ‘Matins’ or ‘Nocturns’, the name given to the first of the series of fixed ‘offices’ or services; it might be held at 2 a.m. or 3 a.m., depending on the time of year, and could last as long as two hours.
- 41 **dægredlice lofsanges** ‘morning hymns [lit. ‘songs of praise’]’. This refers to the second fixed office, that of ‘Lauds’, sung at first light – and here apparently elaborated to include hymns to ‘all saints’. *Lofsanges* is a late (or simply erroneous) spelling of acc. pl. *lofsangas*.
- 42 **prim** ‘Prime’. The first of several shorter fixed offices for the day. It was held at 6 a.m., the time considered to be the start of the day and thus called in Latin *prima hora*, the ‘first hour’. Prime for our schoolboy is followed by yet more ‘extras’: recitation of the seven so-called ‘penitential’ psalms (ps 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143), a litany (an invocation for mercy addressed to God through a series of named saints as intercessors), and a ‘first mass’.

- ‘undertide¹, and dydon² ꝛ mæssan be dæge³. Æfter þisum wē sungon ꝛ middæg⁴, and æton⁵ and druncon and slēpon⁶, and eft⁷ wē ārison and sungon ꝛ nōn. And nū⁸ wē synd⁹ hēr ætforan¹⁰ þē, gearuwe¹¹ gehýran hwæt þū ūs secge¹².
 ‘Hwænne wylle gē syngan æfen oppbe nihtsangc?’
 ‘Ponne¹³ hyt tīma ‘byþ’.
 ‘Wære þū tōdæg ‘beswunegen?’
 ‘Ic næs¹⁴, forþām wærlice¹⁵ ꝛ ic mē heold.’
 ‘And ‘hū þīne gefēran?’
 ‘Hwæt mē āhsast¹⁶ be¹⁷ þām? Ic ne dea¹⁸ yppan¹⁹ þē digla²⁰ ūre²¹. ‘Ānra gehwylc²² wāt²³ gif hē beswunegen wæs oppbe nā²⁴.
 ‘Hwæt yst²⁵ þū on dæg?’
 ‘Gýt flæscmetum ic bruce²⁶, forðām cild ic eom under gyrda²⁷ drohtniende²⁸.
 ‘Hwæt māre yst²⁹ þū?’
 ‘Wyra³⁰ and æigra³¹, fisc and cýse, buteran and bēana and ꝛ ealle clāne þingc³² ic ete mid micelre þancunge³³.
 ‘Swýpe³⁴ waxgeom³⁵ eart þū bonne³⁶ þū ealle þingc etst þe³⁷ þē tōforan³⁸ synd.’
- 43 (we) attended **44** ate slept next **45** are before ready may say *sbj* **47** When was not [*þe wæs*] carefully **51** Why (you) ask about that dare betray (to +d) secrets our **52** knows not **53** eat **54** rod living **56** Vegetables eggs **57** thankfulness **58** Very greedy when that before
- 43 **undertide** This is ‘Terce’, the next fixed office, which took place at 9 a.m. (at the ‘third hour’, Lat. *tertia hora*). The OE word, properly *undernīd*, means ‘morning-time’, *undern* referring to the period between 9 a.m. and noon. **mæssan be dæge** ‘the mass for the day’; another extra act of devotion. **middæg** The next fixed office, ‘Sext’, so called because held at the ‘sixth hour’ (Lat. *sexta hora*) or ‘midday’, as the OE has it. Only after this office do the monks have their first meal of the day, followed by a little sleep.
- 44–5 **nōn** ‘None’; the fixed office held at 3 p.m. (the ‘ninth hour’, Lat. *nona hora*). **And nū** Finally, in the late afternoon, the boys reach the classroom.
- 46 **æfen . . . nihtsangc** These are the last two of the eight fixed offices: evening ‘Vespers’ (lit. ‘event(s)’) and finally the Night Office, ‘Compline’ (lit. ‘night song’).
- 47 **byþ** ‘is’ or ‘will be’. On the use of *byþ*, see §G1a.iv.
- 48 **beswunegen** Beating students for poor performance in chanting the psalms and for falling asleep, among other transgressions, seems to have been a common practice. See also the references in 54 and 72–3.
- 49 **ic mē heold** ‘I kept myself’, i.e. ‘I conducted myself’.
- 50 **hū þīne gefēran** ‘how (about) your companions?’ Along with beatings, reporting others’ transgressions appears to have been a central element of monastic discipline.
- 51–2 **Ānra gehwyle** ‘Everyone’; lit. ‘each of ones’ (partitive gen.).
- 54 **Gýt flæscmetum ic bruce** ‘I still partake of meat’. The Benedictine Rule (chs. 39–40) forbids monks to eat red meat but there is latitude for youngsters who are as yet novices. The vb. *brucan* here (and in 62) takes a dat. obj. (though more usually it takes a gen. in OE).
- 56 **ealle clāne þingc** ‘every clean thing’. There were strict rules about what could be eaten by monks; taboo foods included especially those contaminated by blood (see previous note).

‘Ic neom swā micel swelgere° þæt ic ealle cynn° metta° on ānre gereordinge°

60 etan mæge°.

‘Ac hū?’

‘Ic brūce hwīlon° þisum mettum, hwīlon oþrum, mid sýfemyssse°, swā swā dafnao° munuce, næs° mid oferhropse°, forþām ic eom nār° gluto°.’

‘And hwæt drincst þū?’

‘Ealu°, gif ic hæbbe, oþþe wæter gif ic næbbe° ealu.’

65 ‘Ne drincst þū wīn?’

‘Ic neom swā spēdig° þæt ic mæge bigean° mē wīn. And wīn nys drenc° cilda° ne dysgra° ac ealdra° and wīstra°.’

‘Hwær slæpst þū?’

70 ‘On slæpem° mid gebrōþrum.’

‘Hwā° āweop° þē iō° ūhtsancge?’

‘Hwīlon ic gehyre cnyll and ic ārīse, hwīlon lārēow mīn āweop mē sifþlice° mid gyrde.’

59 glutton kinds of food(s) meal **60** could *sbj* **62** sometimes moderation **63** (it) is

fitting for (+d) not voracity no **65** Ale don't have [*he hæbbe*] **67** wealthy buy

drink **68** of children of foolish (men) of old (men) of wise (men) **70** dormitory

71 Who wakes for **72** sternly

61 **Ac hū?** lit. trans. of Lat. *sed quomodo*: ‘but in what way?’; perhaps, ‘But how is that?’

62 **swā swā** Double conj. (lit. ‘so so’ or ‘as as’): ‘just as’.

63 **gluto** The Latin word is used to gloss itself, though *swelgere* was used earlier (**59**).

Later English adopted the word, initially as ‘gluton’, then ‘glutton’.

66 **wīn** The Benedictine Rule in fact allowed novices a little wine in the morning; but in England all wine was imported, and thus expensive.