

## Introduction

In his classic paper “Style,” published in 1953, the art historian Meyer Schapiro defined style as “the constant form—and sometimes the constant elements, qualities, and expression—in the art of an individual or group.” This definition is cited in a number of the papers included in the present volume as one that is still relevant to stylistic analysis across the disciplines today. Schapiro’s essay was originally written for the international conference “Anthropology Today” and appeared in the proceedings published under the same title.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of both the conference and the volume was to document post–World War II developments in anthropology and explore the possibilities offered by the new interest in other lands, other peoples, and the “inter-relatedness of all things.”<sup>2</sup> While the search for constants and commonalities was not an invention of the postwar era, it certainly became a dominant part of theory and scholarship at that time. Art historians embraced formalism, the study of color, line, shape, brushstroke, and so on; and form came to constitute style and to serve as the sole carrier for content. Form was something that all works had in common, regardless of the time and culture in which they were produced, or so critics thought. The rise of the New Criticism provided a literary parallel to the art-historical interest in form. What concerned literary critics was the unity and merit of the work, its language, which could not be separated from form or content. Language was a universal in literature, as form was a universal in art, and style was the vehicle through which language and form were expressed. Neither group was particularly interested in the cultural, historical, or personal factors that influenced artists, writers, or scholars. Nor were they interested in the arbitrary, the exceptional, or the fragmentary—though words and marks were, of course, ultimately fragments. Works of art and literature became objects to

be analyzed and researched using methodological tools borrowed from the sciences. Not surprisingly, the period also saw a dramatic increase of interest in linguistics.

By the early 1960s critics in both fields were beginning to ask different questions, and Schapiro's paper made the leap from the social sciences (anthropology) to the humanities (philosophy) when it was reprinted in *Aesthetics Today*, published in 1961.<sup>3</sup> In the 1950s philosophers too had been concerned with the language of philosophy and "unmasking the linguistic confusions" of philosophical inquiry.<sup>4</sup> Aesthetics, a "value-oriented" branch of philosophy, was not central to this concern but by 1961 was growing in popularity. The marginal was moving towards the center. Still, there was much concern with universals, with defining terms, and fields, and methods of communication. Interestingly, Schapiro's "Style" was also included in the 1981 revised edition of the book alongside essays by Edward Said, Michael Fried, Arthur C. Danto, and Jacques Lacan, essays that called into question or flatly rejected the ideas of constant form, universal language, linear development, and humanistic unity upon which Schapiro's essay rested.<sup>5</sup> By its very inclusion in that volume, the paper had not only successfully crossed disciplines, but also had successfully jumped the divide between the modern and the postmodern. The reason for this may have been that at the same time that he searched for universals, Schapiro charted differences and exceptions; while focusing on form as content, he never lost sight of the historic, the cultural, and the individual as shapers of content; above all, he never lost sight of the integrity of the object.<sup>6</sup> Anglo-Saxon England was, for Schapiro, one of the periods in which the complications of style were demonstrated most clearly. Similarity and difference existed side by side.

Today, with our interest in the personal, the ephemeral, and the fragmentary, the work as process rather than object, "style" is a frequently overlooked, if not diminished, critical tool and a problematic subject of analysis. The papers in this volume demonstrate just how vital style remains as a methodological and theoretical prism, regardless of the object, individual, fragment, or process studied. Like Schapiro's essay, these essays cross disciplines and media to consider the definitions and implications of style in Anglo-Saxon culture and in contemporary scholarship, seeking to identify constants, while at the same time marking out differences. More importantly, they demonstrate that the whole idea of style as "constant form" has its limitations. How can we talk about "constant form" in works that may have multiple authors or artists; or works

that were viewed by their creators as works in progress, being augmented or incorporated into new works over years, decades, or even centuries; or works that combine conflicting or competing systems of expression? Schapiro's definition assumes development, but does not account for deliberate change, or for the use of style as propaganda. Moreover, Schapiro did not theorize about the variety of possible meanings carried by style—indeed, he could not have done so in 1953—although he did believe that style carried meaning because it was the product of social structures and historical processes.

Style in Anglo-Saxon culture might best be defined not as the constancy of form, but more generally as “the ordering of forms” (verbal and visual). Such a definition allows for change and manipulation, and is also one with which the Anglo-Saxons themselves may well have agreed. For Augustine, beauty or beautiful style consisted of harmoniously ordered form,<sup>7</sup> and the best works of man, be they visual or verbal, reflected the biblical statement “You have ordered all things in measure, and in number, and in weight” (Wisdom 11:21). While no treatises on art or beauty survive from the Anglo-Saxon era, we can see Augustine's ideas echoed in the writings of Bede, particularly his *De schematibus et tropis* and *De arte metrica*. Scripture, according to Bede, surpasses all other writings, “not merely in authority because it is divine, or in usefulness because it leads to eternal life, but also for its age and artistic composition.”<sup>8</sup> But the idea that beauty, or artistic compositions, created through the ordering of forms or words on earth reflected divine order and universal beauty was a commonplace in the Middle Ages.<sup>9</sup> Is there anything that we can identify as characteristically Anglo-Saxon about the ways in which Anglo-Saxon artists and authors chose and ordered form? According to the essays that follow, there is. We cannot speak of one unified Anglo-Saxon style, but we can say that Anglo-Saxon styles in general are characterized by (1) ambiguity, and (2) a love of complex pattern and surface ornament. These are interrelated phenomena.

Ambiguity could carry a number of meanings and serve a variety of functions within Anglo-Saxon culture but, as discussed in the papers that follow, it is clear that it was never purely decorative, but always a vehicle for political or social messages. We are speaking here not of ambiguity as an accident or mistake due to faulty copying, incompetent artists/authors, or muddled ideas, but of ambiguity as a deliberate device designed to make the viewer or reader think about meaning, to deconstruct and reconstruct compositions in order

to understand how their structures conveyed meaning. As a feature of style, ambiguity in Anglo-Saxon culture could facilitate the transmission of ideas between time periods, cultures, authors/artists, or sets of religious beliefs (Webster, Farr, Brown); it could denote assimilation (Michelli, Orchard, Keefer), appropriation (Hawkes and Howe), or conflict (Orton and Howe). Because ambiguity was the result of competing systems of beliefs, values, or modes of expression, it was also symbolic of originary moments: something new created out of the coming together of traditions, but also something that referenced the origins of the traditions that had been brought together. Anglo-Saxon style also placed demands on its audiences, presenting them with riddles (Webster, Orton, Orchard), comic turns (Wilcox), or paradoxes (Hawkes, Farr, Keefer, Wilcox) that it was up to the reader/viewer to solve or resolve. Each viewing or reading of these works constituted, and still constitutes today, a new originary moment.

The Anglo-Saxons' love of complex patterns and shimmering surface effects in both material and textual culture has become something of a mainstay of Anglo-Saxon studies;<sup>10</sup> but new tools such as the online databases published by the Toronto Dictionary of Old English or the Anglo-Saxon Charters Committee now permit us to explore the ways in which this element of style functioned in Anglo-Saxon texts with greater precision and sophistication.<sup>11</sup> Patterns of words and phrases (Ruff and Orchard) or grammatical and syntactic features (Frank) can now be analyzed to map the ways in which authors ordered their words, and the range of meanings that were likely to have applied to those words, as well as changes and developments over time (Momma) and between authors and cultures (Ruff and Orchard). Understanding these patterns is, of course, an essential part of traditional source study, but verbal patterning and wordplay is also often riddling in nature and can be understood as a part of the ambiguity discussed by so many of the contributors to this volume. Anglo-Saxon texts were not just meant to be read but also to be seen and to be listened to, and their layout (Schipper), use of color (Ruff), script (Brown), and aural patterns (Momma) are all important elements of their style. When, sometime about 973, Bishop Æthelwold commissioned his famous Benedictional (London, British Library, Additional 49598), he requested that it contain "many arches well adorned and filled with various figures decorated with numerous beautiful colors and with gold."<sup>12</sup> Æthelwold was not just desirous of a beautiful object, but of the spiritual beauty and order that a well-made, colorful, and

shining manuscript conveyed. According to the scribe Godeman, the book was a *biblos*, a reflection of The Book, the Bible. Decorated letters and pictures attracted the eye and held the attention, as the story of King Alfred attracted to the book on his mother's knee reveals,<sup>13</sup> and Æthelwold (and Godeman) knew that the style of this book would help in getting its message across to his flock.<sup>14</sup>

The stories of Alfred and his mother's book, and of Æthelwold and the biblical sources of his book, bring us back once again to originary moments, moments that Leslie Webster and Fred Orton argue are inherent to any discussion of style. Webster traces style, motif, and the study of both over time and across media, exploring the ways in which the complexity and dynamics of visual style and language still defy our classifications. Indeed, she defines style as a form of visual language and goes on to explore its grammar and vocabulary. Far from being a passive formal element in the works considered, she shows that style is not only an elite product, but also an aid in producing our image of the elite—especially in the works we so problematically label “minor”—as well as a general carrier of meaning in art. Webster explores the importance of motifs, frames, and the ways in which new images are read through old (or old through new) in the development of what she labels “a particular kind of visual literacy.” Style for Webster is both an enabling art-historical tool and historically a facilitator in the transmission of new ideas. Orton, by contrast, considers stylistic studies as limiting as they are enabling in our attempts to understand the past and its monuments. Focusing on the Ruthwell and Bewcastle monuments, he demonstrates how style and classification have served to close down rather than open up meaning, masking what we see with the manner in which it is described. He also provides a way forward by turning our attention to what is actually present on the monuments, as opposed to what we have read or been told is there. Orton agrees with Schapiro (and all the contributors to this book) that style is an essential object of investigation, but he cautions that style is not an objective property but a carrier of meaning that demands interpretation, and is itself the product of interpretation.

Whereas Orton analyzes style as a site of conflict between Rome and Anglo-Saxon England, Jane Hawkes suggests that style can also be a site of appropriation. Whereas Orton emphasizes difference, Hawkes emphasizes similarity. In particular, Hawkes examines architectural style as a reflection of political and ecclesiastical affiliation. Anglo-Saxon stone churches are not simply passive reflections of Roman originals or examples of the reuse of

Roman sites, but public declarations of *romanitas* that helped to establish the Anglo-Saxons as heirs to the Roman world (another originary moment). As with the Ruthwell and Bewcastle monuments, the form, style, and iconography of church, column, and cross are not just vehicles for content but vital producers of content.

Perette Michelli shows us that despite our current distrust of typology and “connoisseurship,” style and motif are still essential tools in the project of classification. Using traditional art-historical methods she, like Orton, turns accepted attributions and groupings on their heads, employing conventional stylistic analysis—that is, analysis of form, iconography, and technique—to suggest that a series of ivory carvings do form coherent groups and to try to identify the provenances and the links between those groups. Michelli argues that style in the case of the ivories has been manipulated so successfully that it has led to their neglect.

Carol Farr’s “Style in Late Anglo-Saxon England: Questions of Learning and Intention” examines the meaning of copying, recycling, reforming, and rewriting. She asks us to consider what exactly constitutes a copy, and whether assimilation and transformation of style might be the results of a learning process for scribes and artists. Why were styles copied or revived? And, again, what meanings did they carry? As she demonstrates, the circumstances behind each “copy” must be examined on an individual basis. Farr also raises the complication of discussing “style” in works that were or could have been produced by multiple artists. Michelle Brown focuses on a related issue, mapping the limits of connoisseurship and the classification of works by means of style, hand, or motif in her study of style and attribution in a select group of manuscripts. Scribes can be selective and archaizing in their use of scripts, hindering all but the most concerted attempts at classification. Brown demonstrates the “pitfalls and potential” of identifying “house style” in several Anglo-Saxon scriptoria, including the problematic “Lindisfarne scriptorium.” Script, like images, can be used to make specific political, historical, or cultural points. The phenomenon of composition as compilation that Brown describes has parallels in the compilation of literary texts as discussed in this volume by Sarah Keefer. Bill Schipper demonstrates that the textual layout of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts is as much a part of their style as script, illustration, or textual content. Schipper explores the possible reasons why scribes (or patrons) might have chosen one type of layout over another, and what the implications of that might be for our understanding of the manuscripts. Examining evidence from a wide

variety of texts, Schipper concludes that the Anglo-Saxons had a marked preference for long-line rather than two-column layout in their vernacular manuscripts, a preference he traces back to the program of education and translation begun by Alfred the Great. Here we might ask further how aware Anglo-Saxon scribes were of the origins of this facet of their style.

Nicholas Howe explores the ways in which style and our understanding of style have come to be defined, passed on, and employed, often uncritically, by scholars. He, like Webster and Orton, draws our attention to the interrelationship between scholarly style and method, and our changing conceptions of Anglo-Saxon style and ideology. As Howe demonstrates, style does cultural work, but is also historically and culturally driven, and the study of style is itself a historical and cultural act. Ultimately, like so many of the contributors to this volume, he stresses that we should not speak of Anglo-Saxon style, but rather of a multiplicity of coexisting styles. While Howe is interested in scholarly process, Sarah Larratt Keefer is interested in poetic process, in what she terms the “either/and” style of Anglo-Saxon Christian poetry. Keefer returns to the notion of a style characterized by ambiguity and the reconciliation of competing or coexisting cultural realities. Having identified what she feels to be an important feature of Anglo-Saxon poetic style, she then demonstrates the way in which it works in the poem *The Dream of the Rood*. Anglo-Saxon poets, Keefer argues, were clearly concerned with resonance and redoubling, in composing unity out of layers of meaning. The result is a reconciliation of disparate elements, but one in which the tension between those elements is fully acknowledged. Reconciliation of and tension between opposites also feature in Jonathan Wilcox’s analysis of the literary style of the poem *Andreas*, a poem that combines comedy with the motif of the Eucharist, one of the most serious of Christian subjects. But comedy, as Wilcox demonstrates, is a feature of Anglo-Saxon hagiographic style. The very nature of saints’ lives demands a duality conveyed through the opposing visions of the tortured saint and his or her torturers, and comic violence is the point at which the two intersect. Torture, mutilation, and cannibalism—events that might seem disturbing, even horrific, to the modern reader—are often presented as humorous in Anglo-Saxon texts, but they are also signifiers that force us to think and puzzle out the true meaning of the text.

Carin Ruff raises some interesting questions about style and translation in her “Aldhelm’s Jewel Tones: Latin Colors through

Anglo-Saxon Eyes.” How do the Anglo-Saxon and Latin terms for colors relate to each other? How much can we rely on their accuracy, especially in cases where there seems to be some kind of discrepancy? And how closely does language capture material reality? As Ruff demonstrates, capturing the visual in the verbal is a difficult task, no less so for Aldhelm than it is for students today, and there remains an inexplicable gap between what is seen and the manner in which it can be described—a point of difference theorized in Orton’s paper. Nevertheless, Old English color words do emphasize brightness and surface reflectivity, and can be used themselves to create a shimmer of wordplay within a text. Roberta Frank also considers words and word choices as elements of literary style, focusing specifically on the Old English weak adjective, an often neglected element of Anglo-Saxon poetic style. Her paper offers a useful classification of weak adjective constructions and the contexts in which they occur, but she also asks larger questions about why Anglo-Saxon poets made specific word choices and what the effect of their choices was on the reader or listener. Frank also speculates on whether weak adjectives might have added shade or brightness to the meanings of the lines in which they occur, creating subtle nuances of meaning that are lost to readers today.

The last two papers in the volume shift to a study of the ways in which style works in individual authors and can help us to understand their personal styles. Haruko Momma looks at the question of authorial style in Anglo-Saxon prose. While recognizing the difficulties of establishing external criteria, or even a methodology for talking about style, she points out that some authors do have a distinctly personal style of writing, albeit one that can change between the “stylistically different” genres of prose and poetry. Ælfric is a case in point, and Momma examines the stylistic changes in his writing in light of what we know about the chronology of his writings. She defines style as a “predeliction for certain textual features—whether linguistic, prosodical, or lexical—which are not required of the genre of the composition in question,” or the avoidance of textual features not prohibited by it. Momma’s analysis identifies a clear distinction between Ælfric’s use of “rhythmical prose” and his use of “alliterative prose” that will no doubt form the basis for further study. Andy Orchard’s “Both Style and Substance: The Case for Cynewulf” offers an equally useful analysis of formulaic phrases in the “Cynewulf-Group” of poems (*Elene*, *Juliana*, *Christ II*, and the *Fates of the Apostles*). Locating style in rhetorical features is problematic, especially given the influence of Christian



Latin poets on Anglo-Saxon authors, yet formulaic diction is what links the poems of Cynewulf. Orchard's production of a concordance of words used in the four poems and his analysis of that concordance allow for clear progress in a murky field. Orchard's paper not only contributes to our knowledge of Cynewulf's personal style, but also identifies poems in which that style is likely to have been emulated.

Meyer Schapiro ended his 1953 essay with the words: "A theory of style adequate to the psychological and historical problems has still to be created. It waits for a deeper knowledge of the principles of form construction and expression and for a unified theory of the processes of social life in which the practical means of life as well as emotional behavior are comprised."<sup>15</sup> No such unified theory does or could ever exist, yet as the papers in this volume demonstrate, we can still identify commonalities, and they are connected to social processes and historical and cultural acts, though not in unified ways. Style remains as central to the way we understand and interpret the past as it was in Schapiro's day, and the idea of constancy in the past does give us a comforting link with that past. But style is also dangerous territory; it does political and interpretive work. The styles used by the Anglo-Saxons were not used passively, but were designed to make both their contemporary and their modern audiences look and think and unravel their meanings. Anglo-Saxon style is as much today as it was in the Anglo-Saxon era "a style designed for interrogation."<sup>16</sup>

### Notes

1. Meyer Schapiro, "Style," in *Anthropology Today: An Encyclopedic Inventory*, ed. A. L. Kroeber (Chicago, 1953), 287–312.

2. P. Fejos, preface to Schapiro, *Anthropology Today*, v.

3. Morris Philipson, ed., *Aesthetics Today: Readings Selected, Edited, and Introduced by Morris Philipson* (Cleveland, 1961), 81–113.

4. Morris Philipson and Paul J. Gudel, eds., *Aesthetics Today*, rev. ed. (New York, 1981), 3.

5. *Ibid.*, 137–71.

6. See Michael Ann Holly, "Schapiro Style," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55, no. 1 (1997): 6–10.

7. Augustine, *De quantitate animae*, trans. W. H. Stahl, *The Greatness of the Soul* (New York, 1952), 8–11.

8. See Calvin B. Kendall, ed., *De arte metrica et de schematibus et tropis* CCSL 123A (Turnhout, 1975), 142–43; translated in George Hardin Brown, *Bede the Venerable* (Boston, 1987), 33.

9. See, for example, Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, trans. Hugh Bredin (New Haven and London, 1986).

10. See, for example, C. R. Dodwell, *Anglo-Saxon Art: A New Perspective* (Ithaca and London, 1982); John Leyerle, “The Interlace Structure of *Beowulf*,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 37 (1967): 1–17.

11. Dictionary of Old English Project, Toronto: <http://www.doe.utoronto.ca/>. Charters Committee homepage: <http://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/chartwww>. The searchable *Regesta Regum Anglorum* was developed by Dr. Sean Miller under the auspices of the Anglo-Saxon Charters Committee.

12. Quoted in Robert Deshman, *The Benedictional of Æthelwold* (Princeton, 1995), 148.

13. *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, ed. W. H. Stevenson (Oxford, 1904), 20; Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth, 1983), 75.

14. On the relationship of poetic, textual, and pictorial style within the manuscript, and the relationship of Godeman's style to Æthelwold's, see Michael Lapidge, “Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher,” in *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. Barbara Yorke (Woodbridge, 1988), 89–117.

15. Schapiro, “Style,” 311.

16. Leslie Webster, this volume, 15.