

Syracuse University

SURFACE

The Courier

Libraries

Spring 1989

The Punctator's World: A Discursion (Part Two)

Gwen G. Robinson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://surface.syr.edu/libassoc>



Part of the [Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity Commons](#), [Classical Literature and Philology Commons](#), and the [Philosophy of Language Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Robinson, Gwen G. "The Punctator's World: A Discursion (Part Two)." *The Courier* 24.1 (1989): 63-99.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Libraries at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in *The Courier* by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY ASSOCIATES
C O U R I E R



VOLUME XXIV, NUMBER 1, SPRING 1989

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY ASSOCIATES
COURIER

VOLUME XXIV

NUMBER ONE

SPRING 1989

- The Marcel Breuer Papers and Michael Ventris:
A Biographical Note
By Isabelle Hyman, Professor of Fine Arts,
New York University 3
- Toils and Perils of Scientific Publishing in the Late Eighteenth
and Early Nineteenth Centuries
By Eileen Snyder, Physics and Geology Librarian,
Syracuse University 13
- “Interviewing” Mr. Larkin
By Robert Phillips, poet, critic, and author 33
- Past and Present in Hope Emily Allen’s Essay “Relics”
(with the inclusion of the heretofore unpublished manuscript)
By John C. Hirsh, Professor of English,
Georgetown University 49
- The Punctator’s World: A Discursion (Part Two)
By Gwen G. Robinson, Editor, *Syracuse University Library
Associates Courier* 63
- News of the Syracuse University Library and the
Library Associates 101

The Punctator's World: A Discursion

BY GWEN G. ROBINSON

Part Two

The Grammarians: A.D. 250–A.D. 1250

Part One of this serialized survey (Courier, Fall 1988) dealt with the emergence of a late-classical and early-Christian interest in eliciting, with 'euphuistic' punctating techniques, the voice patterns inherent in text. Part Two, herewith, gives attention to the Middle Ages. In this haphazard era, logical punctuation, which concentrates on syntactical structures and is therefore more appealing to eye than ear, begins its faltering growth.

Rhetoric occupied an exalted perch in the hierarchy of ancient scholarly disciplines. Ambitious young men sought the best teachers to master its principles; and ambitious old teachers sought to display mastery by deepening their inquiry into the properties of language: its structure, its plasticity—the whole science that underlay the magic of words. Accordingly, beginning with the Sophists and Protagoras and continuing through Aristotle, elements of grammar came to be scrutinized and the fruits of discovery usefully applied to the prestigious activity of textual criticism and interpretation. Verbal moods, genders, case endings were identified; patterns noted; and connections between sound and meaning investigated. But it was the Alexandrians in the third and second centuries B.C., who, following suit in the language and metrical studies of their Attic precursors, reduced the inherited oddments to a grammatical system.¹

Crates of Mallos, a stoic from the Pergamene school and a contemporary of Aristarchus at Alexandria, assembled the first known collection of grammatical facts, introduced etymology to a respected

1. Rudolf Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 272.

position in the study of grammar, and attempted a reform in Greek orthography. Following the stimulus of his lectures in Rome, where he was ambassador in 159 B.C., Greek and the comparison of it with Latin came to be studied avidly by philhellenistic young bloods, for it was the popular opinion of the times that Latin was a dialect of Homer's sacred tongue.² With this prevailing reverence for all that was Classical Greece, scholarly output from the East was warmly received in Rome.

Dionysios Thrax (fl. 100 B.C.), a student of Aristarchus in Alexandria before the intellectual diaspora under Ptolemy VII, settled in Rhodes, a traditional center for philosophy and rhetoric and a haven for wandering *grammatikoi* (for the term was in full usage).³ There, he wrote his famous *Techne grammatika* (Τέχνη γραμματική). This slim handbook, codifying past scholarship on grammatical systems, was a classic instructional text for the young in Athenian and Alexandrian schools of the fourth and fifth centuries. As a result it was translated extensively and so survives today. The two most complete extant manuscripts, written in Armenian, date from the late fifth century.⁴ The *Techne* begins with the following definition: "Grammar is the empirical knowledge of what is for the most part being said by poets and prose writers". The overlap with what had theretofore been the domain of rhetoric is obvious. But what is also interesting is that writers of prose, that *res grossior* so voracious of punctuation, are being taken reverently into account.

'Reading' (by which is meant reading aloud) Dionysios defines as the art of rendering faithfully through (spoken) words all that is written, be it in verse or in prose. One must do it with discernment, observing the rules both of prosody and of division (punctuation), for it is by such discernment that one can apply to each discourse the appropriate tone; it is by the prosody that one can modulate that tone; it is by the division (punctuation) that one can make the relationships of the ideas distinguishable amongst themselves. The divi-

2. Pfeiffer, *Classical Scholarship*, 274.

3. *Ibid.*, 253, 266. Cicero studied in Rhodes under Molon, who taught him how to control his voice when making speeches.

4. Jacques Chahan de Cirbied, *Grammaire de Denis de Thrace, tirée de deux manuscrits arméniens de la Bibliothèque du Roi* (Paris: au bureau de L'Almanach du commerce, 1830), xxi.

sions are marked by *στιγμαί* (points), of which there are three: 1) the final point, which indicates that the sense has been achieved; 2) the medial point, which indicates that the sense is not entirely finished; 3) the hypostigma (mini-point), which indicates that a meaning has been launched but has yet some need of completion. “And how is the medial distinguished from the hypostigma?” asks Dionysios. “Ah! It is distinguished by *time*.” The medial designates the longer pause and the hypostigma, the shorter one.⁵ Having thereby dispatched the matter of punctuation, he sweeps onward through poetical tropes, obsolete words, epithets, surnames, analogies, and literary criticism—none of which quite tallies with the modern idea of grammar—then finally to the familiar ground of alphabet sounds, the concept of generic and particular, and the various parts of speech.

The *Techne* of Dionysios Thrax was published in Rome in the time of Pompey, and Latin grammars modelled upon it or at least inspired by it—most notably the twenty-five books, *De lingua Latina*, by Marcus Terentius Varro (116–27 B.C.)—were soon forthcoming. Those were days when philological pursuits were fashionable, much as they were in the days of the Grimm brothers, one imagines, or indeed are now under the stimulus of Chomsky. For example, Julius Caesar, whose energies are as surprising to the modern reader of history as they were to the ancient Gauls, was a grammar fan. He not only coined the term *ablative* for that Latin case omitted by the Greeks (to the relief of modern schoolboys), but wrote a treatise on the philosophy of language, *De analogia*. And so it was, in very general outline, that the rhetorician transmogrified into the grammarian and in that guise continued to harass the public about linguistic proprieties.⁶

Punctuation by now was very much alive. After the Hellenistic period, scholarly grammarians dealt with it increasingly as a necessary element in the art of writing. Text needed division, for how else

5. *Ibid.*, 5–9.

6. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., s.v. “grammar”. The Romans were the great transmitters and codifiers of essentially Greek ideas. Both Donatus of the fourth century A.D. and Priscian of the sixth century—the two big guns of medieval grammatical pedagogy—were essentially retrospective, rather than original.

was the reader to breathe? Thus, in that essentially oral world,⁷ where solitary readers still absorbed visual information by whispering it, the conscientious scribe conformed with grammarial example by placing pausal markers here and there along the line. But the practice was not up to its theory. The impetus for activating the new tool was feeble—almost, it seems, a moody ‘Use it if you want to’.

The following puncts (or points)—all written as dots—were the ones most consistently advocated by grammarians until the Carolingian revival. Generally thought to have derived from the Alexandrian schools of the third and second centuries B.C., they were for the most part ignored or misapplied by confused scribes in succeeding generations. Donatus (fourth century A.D.), in his enormously influential *Ars grammatica*, directed their use in terms of breathing efficiency, not syntax. Others, riding in his wake, did the same.⁸ And thus it happened that Aristophanes of Byzantium’s original system of stops (see Part One) came to be known and discussed in the following way:⁹

The *distinctio*, a dot placed at letter height above the line (·), corresponded to our period and offered the opportunity for a deep breath. It appeared at the end of a *periodos*, that

7. For an interesting discussion of reading and writing habits in the Middle Ages see Marshall McLuhan’s *Gutenberg Galaxy*, 82–95. Also to the point is Quintilian’s advice in his *Institutio oratoria*, X, chap. 3, where the writer is urged to pronounce repeatedly the phrases he wishes to set down, modifying them for the best rhythms and for the smoothest connection with what is to follow.

8. Most notably, Isidore of Seville (ca. 560–636) in his *Etymologiae*. See Peter Clemons, “Liturgical Influence on Punctuation in Late Old English and Early Middle English Manuscripts”, Occasional Papers No. 1, Department of Anglo-Saxon (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1952); reprinted in *Old English Newsletter: Subsidia* 4 (1980): 8.

9. Walter J. Ong, “Historical Backgrounds of Elizabethan and Jacobean Punctuation Theory”, *PMLA* 59 (1944): 349–60. A *periodos* according to Aristotle (cf. “*Art*” of *Rhetoric*, III, chap. 9) was a gathering of words which has “independently in itself a beginning and ending, and a length easily taken in at a glance”. Thus, it is comparable to our modern ‘sentence’, though—the *periodos* being more in thrall to sound than to syntax—the comparison is not exact. Under the ministrations of rhetoricians and grammarians, the concept of *periodos* rigidified and became freighted with elaborations, ornamentations, regulations about parallelism, apportionment, rhythms, correspondences of sound, etc.—indeed, a very complicated affair.

is, at the end of a conceived unit of thought, and thus, like the *paragraphos*, represented a true sense marker. Aristotle, it will be remembered, had given his attention to both.

The *distinctio media*, a dot placed at midway-height in the line (·), indicated a pause of semicolon/colon/comma value. Its area of applicability was extremely vague. Donatus recommended using it somewhere near the middle of the *periodos*. Fifth-century grammarians refer to its presence as spiritually refreshing.

The *subdistinctio*, a dot lying upon the line and equivalent approximately to the modern comma, was recommended for the near-end of the *periodos*. It offered the reader a charge of oxygen to see him to the finish.

Many hundreds of grammarians wrote down their thoughts during the first millennium and almost always inserted some notes on punctuation. Mostly, they followed the tracks of their predecessors and refined the dictates of authority according to the wattage of their own lights. Change was slow.

After Donatus (whose pupil was St. Jerome), the dominant figure in early grammatical exegesis was Cassiodorus (490–585), who founded the monastery of Vivarium on the Gulf of Taranto and endowed it with a good working library and a scriptorium noted for accurate copying.¹⁰ In the educational program expounded in his *Institutiones*, Cassiodorus reaffirmed the virtues of the three *distinctii*, likening them to “paths of meaning and lanterns to words, as instructive to readers as the best commentaries”.¹¹ In the seventh century, Isidore of Seville in his monumental *Etymologiae* rather confused matters by regular use of only two of the three available points. However, from the modern point of view, he redeemed himself by pinning the *distinctii* to a logical interpretation, that is, as devices “for marking off the sense into . . . colons [clauses], commas [phrases], and periods [sentences]”, where the voice “sets down”.¹² The *subdistinctio* (the hy-

10. L. D. Reynolds and N. G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), 71.

11. R. W. Southern, *The Life of St. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury by Eadmer* (London: Thos. Nelson, 1962), xxxii.

12. Ong, “Historical Backgrounds”, 353.

postigma of Dionysios Thrax, and our phrasal comma) he left to float for breathing purposes. Though the concept of sentence formulation was still riddled with physiological imperatives, syntactical issues, too, were beginning to press.

Stimulated, one assumes, by reverence for these growing ranks of august scholars, the common Greek and Roman scribe had begun to point his product, albeit erratically: his own declining literacy precluded a sure and appropriate placement. Happily for the reader, he began also to separate words from each other—in an endeavor, no doubt, to make sense for himself of the text he was producing, for most likely he would have spoken a language quite different from that which he found himself transcribing.¹³ But however it was, fashions in punctating marks might well have added to the confusion. If the scribe had had the opportunity to study volumes from scriptoria in other regions, he would have noticed at the periphery of his focus a tremendous array of pointing possibilities: dots with tails, dots afloat, dots piled in pyramids—not to mention virgules, and differing methods of initiating paragraphs and chapters. Clearly, there were things here to ponder. In fact, what exactly did one punctuate for? To reproduce the authentic sound of speech? To monitor the reader's breathing? Should one try to reflect the shape of the thought, the psychological structure of the thinking act—in so far as it could be ascertained—or attempt to distinguish the logical structures of syntax? To those few who were noticing, the problem was now full-

13. Einar Löfstedt in his book *Late Latin* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1959), 3–4, mentions eighth-century extant manuscripts that show a mix of correctly constructed legal and ecclesiastical formulae with deviations from the classical forms as well as out-and-out vulgarisms. Often these latter were pure blunders, but as many again are evidence of the contemporary street language. The syntactical change was slow to show its head; morphology and phonology were, on the other hand, rapid: for example, *suus* replaced *eius* very suddenly in the mid-eighth century. Benedict of Nursia (d. ca. 547), scholar and founder of Monte Cassino, used striking vulgarisms, such as the genitive *talius* instead of *talis* by analogy, presumably, with the genitive *nullius* of *nullus*. Is this to be explained by his wishing to be understood by the unlettered? Or, should one take such usage as reflecting the common speech habits of the sixth century (p. 17)? The ninth century witnessed the firm establishment of the definite article. Between the progressive spoken language and the conservative written language a cleavage grew, until at last the great mass of people no longer understood Latin. The school systems had collapsed in the political turmoil of the times, and so, traditional learning dwindled (p. 13).

blown. The written line was a different animal from the spoken one, and it required to be assessed in its own right.

In the period of barbaric disruption up until the reforms of Pippin the Short, scholarship slubbed along, making very little progress towards apocalyptic truth or even a flushed horizon. Priestly knowledge of Latin was thin. Boniface (675–754) reports having heard a baptism of dubious efficacy: *in nomine patria et filia et spiritus sancti* (in which mistaken case endings conjure up apparitions of fatherland and a daughter). In another memorable instance, the author of a sermon was under the illusion that Venus was a man.¹⁴ Latin literature, so much of which has been preserved only in palimpsest—supplanted by Christian writings less threatening to morals—had from 550 to 750 virtually ceased to be copied.¹⁵ In this intellectual gloom various determined figures moved to shore up the subsidence and to preserve what remnants of culture remained. A groundswell of intellectual activity—a mini-renaissance, if you will—resulted and was approved and abetted both by church and royal authority. Along with the general movement towards culture, classical Latin took on a special aura of desirability. Accordingly, vulgarisms from colloquial speech, from late Latin comedies, from popular church language—all of which had been creeping into manuscript texts—were no longer deemed proper. Classical Latin was what people needed. And so, a resurrection was ordered up. In extant manuscripts one can see purity returning, traditional norms being reinstated: for example, *illut que* became again *illud quod*; *pristetirunt* changed back to *praestiterunt*; *ipsius monastiriae* to *ipsius monasteri*.¹⁶ To aid the instigators of these activities in their program of enlightenment, biblical and liturgical as well as classical manuscripts were urgently gathered for scribes to copy. Herein lay trouble, for the bulk of copying in medieval scriptoria was being done by boys or young monks who were chosen for these intellectually undemanding labors for the very reason that they were not much given to study or reading. Copying was deemed to be merely a physical chore. Charlemagne, seeing the folly of this, in 789 issued his *Admonitio generalis*, which stipulated that important religious books be copied by men of mature age; for dependability

14. Reynolds and Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*, 79–80.

15. *Ibid.*, 72–74.

16. Löfstedt, *Late Latin*, 4, 14.

was the key to scribal success, not energy, nor even intellectual creativity.¹⁷

Prominent in these endeavors to conserve ancient knowledge and church documentation was Alcuin, Charlemagne's chief assistant in his program of reform. From 796 to 804, during the time that he presided as abbot, the monastery of St. Martin of Tours along with the scriptoria of St. Gatian's and Marmoutier (also in Tours) became principal centers for the tremendous spate of Carolingian publication,¹⁸ and for the reformation and dissemination of the scribal arts. Alcuin oversaw the refinement and universal acceptance of the clear, rounded, non-cursive script that came to be known as 'Carolingian minuscule' and that would eventually supersede the less readable Gothic.¹⁹ Also, he encouraged fresh standards of spelling. As for punctuation, there is no evidence of a clear system in the extant manuscripts of Tours before Alcuin. Alcuin's appreciation of the power that a deliberative punctating policy might inject into the page was in keeping with the tradition of Donatus and Cassiodorus.²⁰ To impress on his pupils the wisdom of proper pointing, Alcuin wrote:²¹

Per cola distinguant proprios et commata sensus,
Et punctos ponant ordine quosque suo;
Ne vel falsa legat, taceat vel forte repente
Ante pios fratres lector in ecclesia.

Apparently, it was an up-hill battle. With a very uncertain sense of the *commata* and the *cola* (phrases and clauses),²² the eighth-cen-

17. Paul Meyvaert, "The Historical Setting and Significance of the Codex Benedictus", from the facsimile edition of the *Codex Benedictus*, 2 vols. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1982), 1:30.

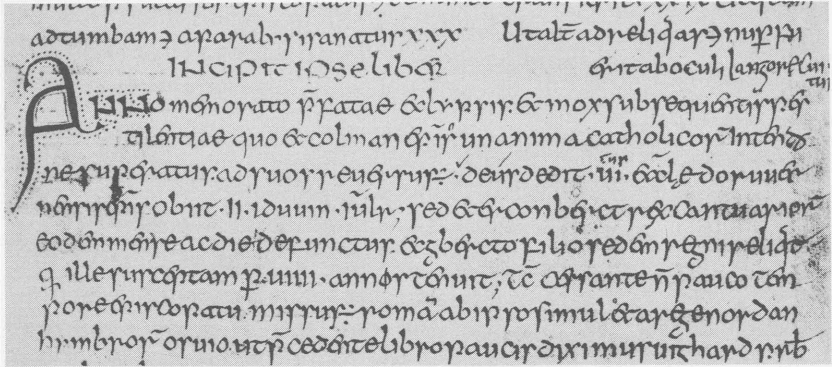
18. Reynolds and Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*, 87. These publications ranged from creative poetry, through history, biography, hagiography, theology, philosophy, and biblical exegesis, to the handbooks on rhetoric, dialectic, metrics, and grammar.

19. *Ibid.*, 81.

20. Edward K. Rand, *A Survey of the Manuscripts of Tours* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1929), 1:29.

21. Clemoes, "Liturgical Influence", 11. "They should bring out the proper sense by clause and phrase and put each point in its place so that the reader does not read falsely nor by chance fall into sudden silence before his pious brothers in the church."

22. Rand, *Manuscripts of Tours*, 31.



The fine distinctions between stops of varying levels were too complicated for unpractised scribes. The above is a sample from an eighth-century Anglo-Saxon minuscule manuscript of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (Cambridge University Library Kk.V. 16, written ca. 737, two years after the death of Bede) from vol. 2, *Codices Latini Antiquiores*, 2nd ed., edited by E. A. Lowe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pl. 139. Here, the medial point is used for most pauses; the other punctuation marks, according to Professor Lowe, have been added later. Courtesy of the Syracuse University Library.

tury scribes at Tours found punctating, in general, far too complex. Says the perturbed Alcuin: "Although distinctions and sub-distinctions are the finest ornaments of sentences, yet their use has almost fallen into abeyance because of the rusticity of the scribes".²³ To his great disgust, the Turonian scribes appeared to like the medial stop very much, for they accorded it the duty of marking indiscriminately both half-pauses and whole pauses. In time they took up the *distinctio*; but the wispy *subdistinctio*, so useful to those with bad colds, was dropped.²⁴ One imagines Alcuin, a precise man in an imprecise age, pulling out handfuls of hair that was not always his own.

Many manuscripts from St. Martin's scriptorium bear punctuational corrections in another ink. It is impossible to say when these corrections were made. E. K. Rand conjectures that they were inserted "by the director or a corrector especially assigned to the task, who would return the new book *requisitum et distinctum*". It would have seemed "unreasonable to expect the scribe while at work to

23. Southern, *Eadmer*, xxxiii.
 24. Rand, *Manuscripts of Tours*, 29.

solve the often delicate questions of punctuation; his mind [was not to be] diverted from his proper task of reproducing in clear and beautiful forms the words of the original with little attention to their sense".²⁵

However, Alcuin's scriptorial attentions could not all have ended in frustration, for undoubtedly, during his own time, he was enjoying tremendous success with the reassertion of classical purity in Latin and scholarly production. Also, evidence survives of material that was made under his certain direction and to his apparent satisfaction, in which a new punctating system (one used by many subsequent Turonian correctors down to the end of the ninth century)²⁶ has been put into operation. Interestingly, since Charlemagne himself founded a school of song and personally supervised the work done there,²⁷ the system deployed two new symbols drawn from musical notation. These, the rising stroke (√ = a half-pause) and the descending stroke (; or . = a whole pause) indicated where the reading voice should raise or lower its pitch.²⁸ This 'up-down' vocalized system addressed the special needs of hinterland monastic communities, where unenlightened monks might stumble over Latin archaisms but were well accustomed to chant.

The Carolingian renaissance flashed like a beacon, allowing a brief intellectual advance over unlikely terrain. Though the monastic and cathedral schools and the scriptoria established by Charlemagne and Alcuin were in place to save what they could of the small harvest,²⁹ no printing press existed to codify and promulgate it. Thus, when Charlemagne's empire fragmented in 843 under the pressures of invading barbarians and internal political disagreement, popular ignorance resumed its sway. One needs only to glance at the French, medieval Latin, and Anglo-Saxon interlinear glosses in manuscripts of the tenth to thirteenth centuries to realize how desperately ignorant of the classical tongues the would-be literate folk had become. Indeed, even at his pinnacle Alcuin's Greek had been shaky; his

25. Rand, *Manuscripts of Tours*, 30.

26. *Ibid.*, 31.

27. Percy A. Scholes, "Plainsong", *The Oxford Companion to Music*, 10th ed. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977).

28. Southern, *Eadmer*, xxxiii.

29. Reynolds and Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*, 91.

Hebrew, apparently non-existent.³⁰ The Benedictine spirit seemed to be dying. Society, now generally illiterate, had retrogressed into a primitive orality where reading was for the elite, and writing no more than a scribal craft.

Matters would stand this way well into the thirteenth century, despite another renascent period in the twelfth century and the sporadic successes of a number of enterprising intellects. Most memorable of these was Alfred the Great, who in the ninth century labored to resuscitate the Golden Age of Aldhelm (at Canterbury), Bede (at Jarrow), and Alcuin (at York as well as at Tours).³¹ Yet, despite his good works, four centuries later would find Roger Bacon in his *Opus majus* railing at the sloppy scholarship and the pervasive ignorance of his day.³²

For corruption of the text takes place without limit by the addition, subtraction, alteration, union, division of statement, word, syllable, letter, diphthong, mark of breathing, so that not only the letter but the literal and spiritual sense is changed. The faults are found not only in one statement, but in many, nay they affect many folios. . . .

Modern scribes, paying no attention to the difference in translations, nor considering what translation they were using, have inserted the negative on their own authority and in the first instance someone noted among the best did this. In this way a terrible error was spread abroad, since a contradiction is given for its opposite.

In such an environment, grammarians and scholars must have been extremely wary of any recently produced texts they were studying. When scribes do not understand the materials that they are copying, punctating marks tend to wander, producing havoc of the sense.

30. Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), 339.

31. Eleanor Shipley Duckett, *Alfred the Great* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 107.

32. Roger Bacon, *The Opus Majus of Roger Bacon*, ed. and trans. Robert Belle Burke, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1928) 1:89–90.

A page from Alexander Neckham's twelfth-century description in Latin of how a novice scribe should proceed will give an idea of this awkward stage of the craft.³³

The writer should have a razor or whetstone to rub the impurities from the parchment or skin; and he should have an abrasive pumice, and a plane for cleaning and making even the surface of the parchment; he should have a drawing lead and a flax string, or ruler, with which the page may be lined and the margin left free all around, just as much on the flesh side as on the hair side.

He should have a four-leaf quire; not, I say, a quaternion who marks out his army in a number of parts. [This is a joke: a military quaternion had four soldiers under his command.] He should have the leaves joined on the top as well as on the bottom with binding strips. Also, he should have the book cord and the pricker to which he might say: "I have pricked my quire, not pierced it". He should sit in a chair in order to write, with raised arms on each side bracing the back of the chair, with a footstool appropriately placed for his feet, so that he may sit more firmly.

The writer should have a brazier covered with a screen. Let him have a knife, with which to shape his pen so that it may be maneuverable and suitable for writing, with the marrow extracted from the quill. Let him have the tooth of a boar or a goat or an elephant to polish the parchment so that the elements won't drip—I'm not talking about the weather [a pun, apparently, as *elementum* also means a letter of the alphabet]—or if a blotch should be made or letters written wrongly, he will be able to erase without inserting.

He should have a glossed speculum [a compendium of all knowledge] lest he make a costly delay because of error. Let him also have live coals in his brazier so that he can quickly dry the black ink on the parchment in humid or wet weather. Let him have a louver to let in light if by chance the assault

33. Alexander Neckam, "De utensilibus", from *A Volume of Vocabularies from the Tenth Century to the Fifteenth*, ed. Thomas Wright (London: privately printed, 1857), 1:116–17.

of the north wind strike the window; let the window be furnished with a linen curtain or piece of parchment colored green or black. For green and black are soothing to the eyes. But brilliant white scatters the vision and obscures colors far too much. Let him have vermilion in order to form rubrics, and punic or phoenician and capital letters. Let him have black powder, or blue, obtained from Salamon.

The notary or repairer of books ought to know where he should write the short accent and where the long, where the omega, where the omicron, where delta, where eta, where epsilon, where digamma, where the upsilon, the iota, the sigma, where the antisigma [marked 'i.x.' in the gloss and probably meaning the horseshoe signal that two lines are essentially interchangeable], lest in speaking or writing barbarically, he incur a solecism as if he were a false writer. Let him be called barbarian whose manner is barbaric.

He should also know where the eirmos [a punctuation mark] and the hyperbaton [a mark of transposition] should be drawn, and where the apostrofos should be superscribed or put, and where the virgule representing the diphthong.

For there is one way allotted for writing notarial signatures and deeds, documents, and transactions, and another for writing texts and another for glosses. For the gloss should be brief and to the point; it should be written over the related words.

THE MEDIEVAL CURSUS

In coordination with the pausal marks (the dots, virgules, and what not) that were so pragmatically allied to the requirements of breathing, rhythms marking the termination³⁴ of clauses and sentences

34. Varying rhythms were recommended as well for the beginnings of clauses and sentences, the bisyllabic so-called spondee being a favorite. The pervading idea was that the points of articulation should stand out as pleasing markers in the passage of words. In this way the end of sentence A gracefully adjusts to the opening beats of sentence B, which in turn terminates for the enhancement of C's entrance. Though a *cursum* beginning the sentence might also be considered a type of punctuation, for the purposes of this general survey, it is enough to keep the discussion to ending *cursum* only.

continued to be used during the Middle Ages. Within a string of words a single syllable can be differentiated from its neighbors by three fairly obvious methods. First, there is pitch change, which is used in English speech, but not for syntactical distinctions. For example:

to the honor and glory of Thy name.

Then, there is accentuation, or stress. Certain syllables are selected for louder production, creating a sense of metrical beat:

to the **honor** and **glory** of Thy name.

And finally, there is the means of lengthening or quantifying the vowel sound:

to the ho-onor and glo-ory of Thy name.

In the drama of medieval Western punctuation, all three have played a part. *Cursus* was the word used in medieval times for the accentual formulaic word groups. These were the descendants of the quantitative *clausulae*, a concept of very ancient origin, dilated upon by Cicero in his rhetorical writings and disseminated by Quintilian's very popular *Institutio oratoria* (see Part One). Generally speaking, the Latin *cursus* flourished well into the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in France and in Italy, and was alive, though somewhat less exuberantly, in Germany up through the eleventh.³⁵ England saw its peak of influence in the fourteenth century, when it was already degenerating into rigid tricks of style.³⁶ After the Renaissance it declined in vigor—blighted both by the disdain of classical scholars, who, misinterpreting its ancient quantitative origins, pronounced it vulgar,³⁷ and by the unwholesome expirations of the vernacular lan-

35. Tore Janson, *Prose Rhythm in Medieval Latin from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Century* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1975), 53–55.

36. N. Denholm-Young, "The *Cursus* in England", *Collected Papers on Mediaeval Subjects* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946), 26.

37. Albert C. Clark, *The Cursus in Mediaeval and Vulgar Latin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 21. Interestingly, Clark points out that he was able to find examples of accentual *cursus* in Cicero's very personal and private (hence, probably, most

guages, which were notoriously 'laid back' in matters of finicky detail. The *cursus* revitalized, however, to ingratiate itself into common English, a language ill-suited to accommodate its original classical ambitions. Nevertheless, with a relaxed demeanor, it survived the alien atmosphere, the effects of Anglo-Saxon retrogressive accents and single-syllabled words, to lend a glow to elevated prose: sermons, collects in the English Book of Common Prayer, and the writings of such as Sir Thomas Browne, Edward Gibbon, Walter Pater and a great many others, whose pleasure it was to expatiate grandly.³⁸ But the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, conspicuous for their prevailing intellectual ferment and their zest for discovery, offered no real livelihood to such frail, antique ornamentation. Nor does the modern era.

One's notion of the word *cursus* should take account of its classical meaning—'way', 'course', 'orbit'—and project the resultant visual image onto an acoustical field. For until printing, ears were the primary receptors of language (both spoken and written). A *cursus* was a stylistic device; its mission, to measure off word-flow and euphioniously to ease the path of expression. It appeared at the ends of schematically balanced, alliteratively interwoven segments of the rhetorical *periodos*.³⁹ Its recurrent patterns activated the perception of cadence,

naturally expressed) letters to Atticus (p. 26). If, indeed, he used the *cursus* deliberately, one is obliged to recognize both the antiquity of accentual Latin and the likelihood that the more stately quantitative rhythms were reserved anciently for formal rhetoric.

38. Morris W. Croll, "The Cadence of English Oratorical Prose" in *Style, Rhetoric, and Rhythm*, ed. J. M. Patrick and R. O. Evans (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1966), 341–46.

39. Croll, "The Cadence", 324–25. See footnote 8, above. The Gorgianic schemes were groups of words paralleling each other in matters of syllable count, verb positioning, etc. They derived from the rhetorical teachings of the Sophist Gorgias in the fifth century B.C. Albert Clark, in his study of the *cursus*, gives a good example of the medieval use of Gorgianic schemata. The lines are taken from Johannes Anglicus, writing in Paris ca. 1270 to illustrate the 'stylus Isidorianus' (based on the soliloquies of Isidore), which was said to be a good style for sermons. The lines run as follows: ". . . prius *legunt* quam *sillabicent*, prius *volant* quam *humi currant*. . . . Prius *montes scandunt quadrivii* quam per *valles incedunt trivii*, *volant* ad astra nec *penmas possident*." The sounds that bring out the balanced antitheses are italicized. From them one sees quite readily how pleasurable mesmerizing these repetitions and parallels can be.

of a cohesive sense group within the track of semantically conjoined, often (in early manuscripts) physically unseparated, words. The *cursus*, as had the *clausula*, offered an almost sensuous resolution to a logical problem. One might think of it as a muffled timpanic flourish, celebrating the finish to a stretch of thought. Today's speedreader (with his visual sense expanded by print) would not notice, let alone savor, the delicate pleasures of a *cursus*. But the device thrived in times when what was read was read aloud and, one imagines, slowly—script being a difficult medium. In that way, words rendered their full sonority. The eye passed them to the ear with all their accents and rhythms intact. Thus, the *cursus*, when interjected into arrhythmic prose to distinguish a completed sense unit,⁴⁰ both embellished and elucidated the written line.

The rhythmical cadences found in the medieval Latin authors who adopted the *cursus* were manifest in the final two (usually two) words of clauses and sentences. Although a variety of possibility was now and again put to use, the steadiest in popularity were: *cursus velox* (*hóminem recepístis*); *cursus planus* (*illum dedúxit*); and *cursus tardus* (*íre tentáverit*). The presence of these formulas, in areas where the voice might pause or fall in speech, was especially prevalent in (though by no means limited to) epistolary literature,⁴¹ where the writer is present in the intimacy of voice sounds. Although this might seem complicated to the modern eye, it can easily enough be drummed into one's system by unremitting repetition. Our nimble ancestors attacked the problem from the security of *cursus* collections, which listed fine phrases (necessarily clichés) with inbuilt rhythms ready for plucking. But for twentieth-century plodders who are truly eager to master the principles of the *cursus*, the following mnemonic verse is offered. It originated probably in Bologna before the thirteenth century and was found as marginalia in an Oxford formulary.⁴²

40. These *cursus*, according to Croll (and his exposition with examples is convincing), are also frequently to be found embedded within, as well as at the end of, segments of *periodoi*. See Croll, pp. 335–38. They emerge most powerfully in being read aloud, for their rhythmic beat emphasizes the unity of the few words they give cadence to. For example: “In holiness and righteousness [pause] all our days”. Quintilian, too, had noted the mini-pauses within *periodos* segments.

41. Janson, *Prose Rhythm*, 10, 37.

42. Denholm-Young, “*Cursus* in England”, 37. By the words ‘long’ and ‘short’, which would be suitable for classical Latin, one should understand ‘accented’ and ‘unaccented’. The piece translates:

Quando trissillaba mediam producere debet In precedenti longam penultima prebet.	[Planus]
Si tetrasillaba penultima longa probatur, In precedenti penultima corripiatur.	[Velox]
Si tetrasillaba penultima corripiatur, In precedenti penultima longa locatur.	[Tardus]

The *cursus* was regularly used throughout the Middle Ages both in Latin and Greek.⁴³ Initially, the device was mixed (*cursus mixtus*) with the ancient, long-short differentiations of vowels; but later, it purified into formulas of accented syllables, in keeping with the accentual tendency of late Latin and the vernacular languages. Grammarians, however, did not begin to exposit its virtues until the eleventh century, when the Roman Curia adopted it officially in order to authenticate documents and make forgery more difficult. Thereupon, the *artes dictandi* (textbooks on the whole art of prose composition, with special relevance to the writing of letters) took over, to generate detailed analyses and to broadcast the good news. Usually, these treatises included short notes on punctating, along with more detailed treatment of the figures of speech and rhetorical colors.⁴⁴ The *cursus* subsequently became very popular, since the prose style of the period was largely epistolary—the output consisting not only of private letters, but more generally of elaborately choreographed ‘informal’ compositions for diplomatic and ecclesiastical purposes. Although the *cursus* was not always employed according to the dictates of the Roman Curia, it was present in recognizable form in a vast body of late-medieval Latin literature, where it operated with the arrogance of a legitimate pedagogical principle. Albericus at Monte Cassino (ca. 1100) wrote the first (as far as we know) *ars dic-*

When a three-syllable word has the stress in the middle, the penultimate syllable of the preceding word is long.	[Planus]
If a four-syllable word has a long penultimate syllable, the preceding word’s penultimate syllable is short.	[Velox]
If a four-syllable word’s penultimate syllable is short, the penultimate syllable of the preceding word is long.	[Tardus]

43. In Greek, from the fourth century A.D., accents became the dominant factors of rhythmical cadences. From this date to the fall of the Byzantine Empire, it was the fashion in prose for an interval of “at least two unaccented syllables to come before the last accent in the colon or period.” See Clark, *The Cursus*, 21.

44. Denholm-Young, “*Cursus* in England”, 29.

tandi, entitled *Breviarium de dictamine*. He himself did not give rules for the application of *cursus*, but nevertheless employed it throughout. He advised that prose should be *sonoram et distinctam, id est quasi currentem*.⁴⁵

Details of the medieval *cursus* were discussed by the experts in familiar terms—like ‘spondees’ and ‘dactyls’ (for their classical aroma), but with altered duties. Any bisyllabic word was called a spondee, regardless of vowel lengths; whereas a monosyllable was ‘half a spondee’. Dactyl described a word like *dóminus*, where a stress fulfilled the requirement of the traditional long *o*. Prescriptions for the perfect *cursus*, one must remember, varied over the centuries and between places, both the Italians and the French schools offering their own authoritarian recommendations.

The *cursus* flowered late in England. Imported in the twelfth century by cosmopolitan Englishmen studying on the continent, and by documents from the papal chancery, it had come to be taught as a formal part of grammar by 1350 at Oxford University. Foreign notaries working in the English chancery in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries reinforced the prestige offered by its presence on the page. Evidence of continued *cursus* usage during the fifteenth century is strong in extant English manuscripts.⁴⁶

To demonstrate how the *cursus* distinguished the clausal cadences within and at the end of a sentence, an example is presented below. It comes from a letter written by Héloïse in the early twelfth century to Abelard. The commas, which Albert C. Clark either inserted himself or followed the habit of print in transmitting, have been discarded, but his accent marks left in, to illustrate better the demarking power of the *cursus*, as Héloïse first put it to action. The lines should be read aloud to get the full impact. Also, the positioning of the verbs should be noted, as they too tended to indicate terminations of clause and sentence constructions. The location of the original manuscript is not given.⁴⁷

45. “Sonorous and punctuated [or marked off, or separated], that is, almost flowing.” The material for a large part of this paragraph comes from Clark, *The Cursus*, 10–14.

46. Denholm-Young, “*Cursus* in England”, 30, 38, 41, 43.

47. Clark, *The Cursus*, 19. “When you were seeking me with a view to earthly pleasures, you were plying me with letters, and putting your Héloïse’s name on everybody’s lips with your frequent songs.”

Cum me ad temporales olim voluptates expeteres (*cursus tardus*) crebris me epistolis visitabas (*cursus velox*) frequenti carmine tuam in ore omnium Heloissam ponebas (*cursus planus*).

Insinuated into English, these signaling pulses were no longer so easily scanned by metres of any sort—the new language being so different in nature from medieval Latin. Instead, at fertile *cursus* spots, a rhythmic obeisance was made—as close an imitation to the *velox*, *planus*, or *tardus* as could be managed. But the interesting element is this: that the urge to wind down, to slow the speed and lower the energy of the intonement by succeeding the long (in classical Latin) and accented (in medieval Latin) syllables with short thumps—like the clatter of shard after the impact of breakage—remained in place. The strong drive towards these rhythmic cadences suggests the possibility of a universal psychological or physiological necessity. At the very least it affirms the vitality of a well-documented tradition inherited from ancient Greek and Latin.⁴⁸ Morris Croll speculates on the origins and principles of *cursus* usage in the following way:⁴⁹

The physiological explanation of verse is to be found in the dance in which it originated. In the dance the regularity of the beats is the means by which energy is artificially maintained at a uniform level, higher than that of the ordinary human occupations and movements. In the same way in poetry the regularity of accent stimulates the energy of utterance, which always tends to flag and die away, and keeps it at an artificial height throughout a line or a stanza. And, of course, this energy of utterance accompanies, interprets, stimulates energy of emotion. Prose, on the other hand, even oratorical prose, cannot, does not aim to move uniformly on this high level. Its foundation is laid on the basis of common and matter-of-fact speech: instead of forcing the physiological processes to adapt themselves to it, it yields and adapts itself to them. It rises constantly at certain points above the level of mere logical or matter-of-fact speech, heightening the intensity of its utterance to indicate the occurrence of

48. Croll, "The Cadence", 351.

49. *Ibid.*, 353.

these points, but it at once begins to fall away again toward it as the breath begins to fail, and the energy of utterance fails with it.

Cadence, then, is perhaps the euphonious way of accompanying in speech this natural fall of subsidence of energy.

How the rhythmic system—first *cursus mixtus*, then pure *cursus*—was passed on through the early medieval centuries is something of a mystery. It was certainly kept alive somehow, for its protean touch is evident in a great many extant manuscripts, in works dating back as far as Xenophon. Tore Janson conjectures that its preservation owes much to oral guidance. Though indeed no one knows, “It may well be that sometimes the teacher just drew . . . attention to the fact that certain cadences were desirable and recommended and/or prescribed the usage found in certain texts”.⁵⁰ To a pupil attuned to such notions, that might well have been enough.

In England the greatest degree of combined ornateness and rhythm, of elaborate phraseology, was reached during the reign of Edward III in the fourteenth century. Thereafter, interestingly, as rhythm and balance declined in importance, writers adopted a less cliché-ridden, and a more complicated, self-conscious turn of phrase.⁵¹ In other words, the release from schemata and rigid metrical formulas rendered practicable a flexible expression of ideas. As the latitudes of written language expanded, so the writer relied on new forms of punctuation, to put order into the shifting structures of his text and to clarify ambiguities. Through experience with fresh perspectives, his grip on logic and syntax had firmed, and he could give rein at last to his fancy in the free spaces of his imagination.

LITURGICAL INFLUENCES: THE INTONING OF PHRASES

The *cursus* was used by major participants of the Carolingian renaissance, though Alcuin himself appears never to have taken it up.⁵² He, ostensibly, favored the simpler ‘up-down’ method of punctuating, which, as it turned out, was the prime inspiration for the most

50. Janson, *Prose Rhythm*, 36.

51. Denholm-Young, “*Cursus* in England”, 40.

52. Janson, *Prose Rhythm*, 52.

complex and sensitive set of pointing refinements ever to be developed. These *positurae* expanded the ‘up-down’ notation into subtler classifications of meaningful rises and falls of voice pitch. They grew to be widely used and reached their peak in the twelfth century—the second notable period of intellectual daylight before the Renaissance.

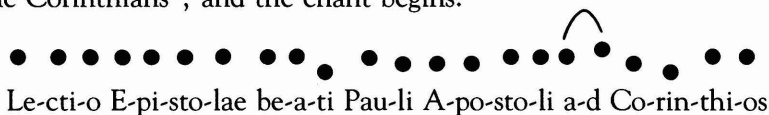
It is important to remember that although medieval monasteries were often centers of learning, monastic orders in general included all types of men, a great many of whom were ignorant, superstitious, ordinary folk-of-the-day, who (to judge by comments of Ambrose and Augustine) suffered the affliction of clonic inertia when it came to spiritual matters. The reinforcement by melody of the sometimes nebulous precepts of religion was considered by church authorities to have a quickening effect on monkish sloth. Harmonious music was added to the Psalms, said John Chrysostom (d. 407), “so that those who are still children should in reality be building up their souls even while they think they are only singing the music”.⁵³ St. Augustine (354–430) felt similarly, approving “the use of singing in the church, that so by the delights of the ear the weaker minds may be stimulated to a devotional frame”. But he worried about his own emotional response to the “dangerous pleasure” of music, lest a “clear and skillfully modulated voice” should distract his attention from the content of what was being sung.⁵⁴ Admittedly, it was a keen line that needed to be drawn between the body of Christian tenets and their dulcet trimmings. As one would expect, there was conflict: word against note, a tug-of-war that divided plainchant into two stylistic camps. Liturgical recitative stayed close to the text. It was held on a single recitation tone, which was broken by inflections of pitch to mark off perceived divisions in the flow of language: *flex* for a mini-section; *metrum* for a more important segment; and a *full stop* for a major one. “A question, or at least its final phase, normally [began] on a lower reciting tone and [ended] with a rising inflection. Most tones have a special formula to mark the conclusion of the text.”⁵⁵ The success of such an operation lay in the quality of the performer and

53. Donald J. Grout, *A History of Western Music* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1960), 32.

54. *Ibid.*

55. Richard H. Hoppin, *Medieval Music* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 79.

implied a facility with Latin sufficient to render a meaningful text while in the full spate of song. In his *Anthology of Medieval Music*, Richard H. Hoppin gives an example of the use of these musical puncts.⁵⁶ It is the “Reading of the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians”, and the chant begins:



The entire line is sung on only four notes. On Hoppin’s sample a mark denoting the *metrum* appears strangely over the *Pau* of Pauli, directly following a drop of two intervals. A *flex* is indicated over the *po* of Apostoli; a *full stop* over the rising two-noted syllable *ad*; and a *flex* over the low *rin* of Corinthios. No other ‘grammatical’ marks in this chant appear to have survived into modern notation; but later transcriptions have added double bars throughout the work at phrase and clause endings to mitigate the confusion.

What is known as free composition took off from this basic liturgical recitative and, in varying degrees of complication, provided distinctive melodies which were sung by unaccompanied men’s voices.⁵⁷ The official mission of all liturgical music was functional: to enhance religious doctrine in the purest way.⁵⁸ Not surprisingly, from time to time, a natural exuberance carried that melody into proscribed areas of excess—too much ornamentation, too much pagan-associated emotion, too many sense-confounding elaborations of unaccented syllables. All these vanities colluded to eclipse the sacred text. But once the orgy was over, the fundamental principle of enhancing the words, of keeping the music aligned to speech modes, would reassert itself to remain the dominant expectation in medieval church music.⁵⁹

Being endowed with melody, Gregorian chant fell into the category of free composition, of which it became the supreme expression. At its best, it appropriately shaped musical phrases to correspond

56. Richard H. Hoppin, *Anthology of Medieval Music* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 12.

57. Hoppin, *Medieval Music*, 78–79.

58. Grout, *History*, 34–35.

59. *Ibid.*, 30–67, *passim*.

with those of text, and exercised over all a comely restraint.⁶⁰ Like all chant it was a formalized system of heightening the intonations of speech—as one does when speaking to be heard in a large room—to form a sort of speech song. “The melodic outline reflected the normal accentuation of the medieval Latin words by setting the prominent syllables on higher notes or by giving such syllables more notes” (the multi-noted syllable being called a *melisma*).⁶¹ Rhythms were modeled after the natural sounds of words, rather than metrical song, for which reason they were both flexible and irregular.⁶² The standard Gregorian phrase took the shape of an arch:⁶³ that is, a gradual rise to a peak, followed by gradual descent to a cadence—similar in outline to the pronouncement of a speech phrase. Indeed, the theory of the prose *periodos* is built on the rise and fall of the voice. There, internal roughness is permissible as the sentence storms forward, but peace (through the beneficence of *clausulae* or *cursus*) must be restored at the finish of it.⁶⁴ Similarly, the body of a recitation was introduced and terminated graciously by a formula of notes (often melismatic) in lower registers. The closing figure that referred the ear back to the dominant monotone (that is, the reciting note)⁶⁵ was the more florid one. Its presence in this terminating position intimates a familial likeness to Cicero’s rhythmic *clausulae* (see Part One) and therewith, a congenerous affinity to the medieval cadenc-

60. “Gregorian Chant”, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980).

61. Grout, *History*, 40. Grout cautions, however, that Gregorian obeisance to text was a rule with exceptions, as witness the many appearances of extended *melisma* on unimportant syllables and also the *jubilus* (the long *melisma* that stretched out the final *a* of ‘alleluia’).

62. There is much unresolvable argument over the nature of Gregorian rhythms. Hoppin in *Medieval Music* (pp. 85, 89) is critical of the Solesmes Monks’ usage (for their own acclaimed performances) of post medieval chantbooks in determining rhythms. He feels strongly that the Solesmes interpretation of mensural equality for all notes (except the dotted ones taken from newer manuscripts) is erroneous. “Again and again, theoretical treatises of the early Middle Ages make it clear that the chant did use long and short notes.” If that is the case, then Gregorian Chant was very much liberated to follow the measures of speech.

63. Grout, *History*, 41. Pace Hoppin, who is sceptical about arches being a standard feature of classic Gregorian melodies.

64. Clark, *The Cursus*, 5.

65. Scholes, “Plainsong”.

ing *cursus*. Again, the characteristic rise in pitch level (rather than the classical elongation of sound) to represent the accented syllables reflects the spoken Latin of post-classical times.⁶⁶

The Gregorian advance, as far as punctuational excitements are concerned, lies in the development of the mediation—a mid-verse cadence that marked a breathing post and inclined, as did the ending cadence, to appear at the end of a sense group. In the old Roman chants, individual melodic phrases flowed directly into each other. The cadence of the first part completed only with the opening of the second part.⁶⁷ Gregorian phrasal schemes, on the other hand, are definitively cadenced. To give a sample of how the melodic inflections of voice constituted a sort of punctuation in a prose text where meaning was paramount, we will turn to the *Credo* as published by the monks of the French Benedictine Abbey of Solesmes, where much research into, and restoration of, ancient chants has taken place. In this rendering of the *Credo* there is “no grandiloquence or superfluous ornament. The words themselves suffice, set to a sober line of melody. The composition gives an impression of liberty combined with strict logic in the treatment of the literary prose and adaptation of the melodic formulae to the necessities of the literary cadences.”⁶⁸

“*Crédo in unum Déum*” [I believe in one God] is introduced by a descending and rising horseshoe of eleven notes. The next phrase is carried along, modulating essentially among three notes: “*Pátre omnipoténtem factórem caéli et térrae*” [Father almighty maker of heaven and earth] and ends thus: •••• Then: “*visibílium ómnium et invisibílium*” [of all visible and invisible things] •••• “*Et in únum Dóminum Jésum Chrístum Fílium Déi unigénitum*” [And in one Lord Jesus Christ only son of God] •••• “*Et ex Pátre nátum ante ómnia saécula*” [And born of the Father before all time] •••• This cadence motif reappears throughout, with slight variations, such as: ••• or •••• (which seem to signify no increase in emphasis), and the piece ends with a melismatic flourish for the Amen.

Thus, though not explicitly manifest, plainchant (of which Gre-

66. Hoppin, *Medieval Music*, 85.

67. “Gregorian Chant”, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*.

68. Justin Bayard Ward, “Chant Grégorien” (phonodisc brochure, accompanying *Chant Grégorien*, London Records A4501), 8–9.

gorian represented the artistic pinnacle) paralleled the course of natural speech with signals rather akin to the mini-pauses between short phrases, which have little to do with sentence structure and which, in what has come to be known as logical punctuation, would not be indicated. Since monastic life centered on the celebration of the tenets of Christian belief, the resultant interplay between talk, chapel, and scriptorium is not surprising.


Two distinct scribal traditions had now been brought together: manuscript pointing and musical notation. "It was the association of musical cadences with the close of *commata*, *cola*, and *periodoi* which was the peculiar contribution of the liturgy to the development of punctuation."⁶⁹ To guide the reader in his breathing pauses, a book scribe had theretofore had the alternative of laying out his text with *caesurae*, indentations, or fresh lines (that is, Jerome's *per cola et commata* formula—see Part One); or, of carrying on the line (as became the tendency both with majuscule and with minuscule manuscripts) and applying capital letters and puncts to indicate where breaths should be taken and intonation changed. Generally, divisional distinctions consisted of the capital letter (often colored and jutting into the margin) to mark the beginning of a sentence or chapter; points for intermediate use; and a bigger array of points to mark the end of a main pause or section end. Meanwhile, the music scribe had been dealing with a system of sixth-century musical neums (or neumes, from G. *pneuma*, meaning breath), which were essentially the grave and acute accents derived from graphical representations of hand movements to guide voice inflection along a line of familiar melody. In simple plainsong (liturgical recitative) they had marked a prolonged phrase, or group of notes, sung to a single syllable at the end of a sense group. As a guide to the varying cadences of liturgical readings, the point was combined with the neum to produce four *positurae*, which were used in service reading books from the late tenth to the fifteenth centuries in England.⁷⁰ Given the natural pitch cadencing in human speech and the examples set in Gregorian chant, it was inevitable that the *positurae* be associated with certain syntactical constructions: for example, the drop in one's voice preceding the clausal conjunction 'and'; and again, the rise—reflect-


69. Clemons, "Liturgical Influence", 8.



70. *Ibid.*, 12.

ing a suspension in the idea being given expression—at the close of an introductory subordinate clause, or a non-final vocative.⁷¹

The four *positurae* are:

The *punctus circumflexus* (∫ or .) was used at the end of a *comma* (phrase)  and followed by a lowercase letter.

The *punctus elevatus* (∫) was used at the end of a *colon* (clause)  .

The *punctus versus* (; or .)  and the *punctus interrogativus* (∫)  were used at the close of a period and often followed by a capital letter.

It is not surprising that so expedient and so supple a convention as this was soon adopted by the textual scribes. Here was a system very closely related to the vocality of speech; and facility with it, aided by regular repetition in church, came more easily than did the rigid dot hierarchy of the grammarians. To illustrate how such a method looks in text, the following few lines are presented, from a tenth-century homily by Aelfric in which two of the *positurae* (the *punctus circumflexus* and the *punctus elevatus*) are put to use.⁷²

Nu andet ure geleafa cristes setll ∫ forðan þe he is se soða dema lybbendra 7 deadra. 7 se eadiga cyþere stephanus hine geseah standende. forðan þe he waes his gefylsta swa swa we aer saedon ;

A later sample is the following excerpt, the opening lines of the gospel according to St. John, from a twelfth-century Worcester Bible.⁷³

IN PRINCIPIO erat uerbum. et uerbum erat apud deum ∫
et deus erat uerbum. Hoc erat in principio ∫ apud deum.

71. Clemoes, "Liturgical Influence", 4–6.

72. Ibid., 17. "Now confess your belief in Christ's throne, how he is the true judge of the living and the dead, and the blessed Martyr Stephen beheld him standing, how he was his support just as we are told." A surer division would have given a *punctus elevatus* again before the second *forðan*.

73. Ibid., 13. From the Corpus Christi College Library (C.C.C.C. 48).

Omnia per ipsum facta sunt √ et sine ipso factum est nihil.
 Quod factum est √ in ipso uita erat. Et vita erat lux
 hominum √ et lux in tenebris lucet. et tenebre eam non
 comprehenderunt. Fuit homo missus a deo √ cui nomen erat
 iohannes. Hic uenit in testimonium √ ut testimonium perhi-
 beret de lumine. ut omnes crederent per illum. Non erat
 ille lux √ sed ut testimonium perhiberet de lumine.

As scholarly activities shifted from the monastery to the univer-
 sity, so the *positurae* became less controlled by the liturgical tradi-
 tions of intonation and more adapted to the increasingly logical
 structure of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century prose. As has been sug-
 gested, they first came into the English vernacular through the hom-
 ily. The *punctus elevatus* mark, the most significant of the intra-sen-
 tence puncts, was used with growing frequency as we today use the
 comma. Denoting a major clausal break, it served both the antiph-
 onal Hebrew psalms and Old English poetry, where the pause central
 to each line required a marker. In time it established itself in legal
 documents as well as in historical and didactic treatises.⁷⁴

Professor Clemons regrets the fading away of complex intonational
 pointing. To show how it might yet be used to advantage—that is,
 to give added precision to the balance and antithesis of clearly artic-
 ulated logical units—I will tackle a few lines of Edward Gibbon,
 whose un-English faith in melodious verbiage makes him a satisfying
 author to quarry for this purpose. The sample beneath is taken from
 chapter twenty-seven of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*,⁷⁵
 and has been pointed with *positurae* at spots where he himself pointed
 only with commas.

They were encountered. on the sacred threshold. by the
 archbishop. who √ thundering against them a sentence of
 excommunication. asked them in the tone of a father and a
 master √ whether it was to invade the house of God that
 they had implored the hospitable protection of the republic √
 The suspense of the Barbarians . . .

74. Ibid., 14–19.

75. Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 7 vols. (London: Methuen, 1909), 3:167.

The liturgical *positurae* mark the opening of the grand era of euphuistic, or elocutionary punctating, of which Eadmer (twelfth-century English historian, and monk at Canterbury) represents, by general consensus, the zenith. His extant works give proof of the scrupulousness with which he handled pointing details. Southern has described his writing as follows:⁷⁶

Perhaps the structure of Eadmer's sentence can best be expressed by an image: each sentence resembles a stretch of country which is either flat or hilly. If it is flat, the stages are marked by a succession of medial points. If it is hilly, the point where it rises to a peak is marked by √ and a subordinate peak by ζ. Both in rising and declining the sentence may be punctuated by medial points, but the symbol √ is reserved for a relaxing of tension when an upward is replaced by a downward movement.

To illustrate with Eadmer's own writing:⁷⁷

Cum constet solos malos in inferno torqueri · et solos bonos
in caelesti regno foveri √ patet nec bonos in inferno si illuc
intrarent ζ posse teneri debita poena malorum · nec malos
in caelo si forte accederent ζ frui valere felicitate bonorum ·

Eadmer's punctuation follows the melody of his simple and straightforward prose, but at the same time illuminates understanding, even when read silently. Euphuistic in intention, it was a style that coordinated well with Gorgianic patterns but came to maturity in sinuous partnership with speech. Primarily it adhered to the urges of music, and derivatively to those of drama, poetry, hymn, and song. At its best this style of punctuation did not obtrude its own goals upon the perquisites of logical syntax.

76. Southern, *Eadmer*, xxx.

77. Southern, *Eadmer*, xxix. "Since it is agreed that only the bad are tortured in hell · and only the good are comforted in the heavenly kingdom √ it appears that the good if they enter hell ζ cannot be held there as a punishment owed for their wickednesses · nor the bad if they should happen in heaven by chance ζ be able to enjoy the happiness of the good."

As euphuistic pointing continued its march out of the twelfth-century renaissance, it would grow less sensitive, more disposed (in spite of meaning or syntax) to divide and interrupt—as though the reader, like an uncouth child, were not to be trusted with too large mouthfuls.

Although by the thirteenth century there were signs of significant settling down in the formal shape of a textual line, the lack of overall agreement about punctuation choices often meant that time values for the pause symbols were not fixed. Full stops, commas, or semicolons were indicated by idiosyncratic symbols and might fleck (“as if from a pepper-box. It is their way”)⁷⁸ the pages of a single work scribed by a single man, yet demonstrate no hierarchical distinction. If a pause was desirable, then of what determination should it be? Was it better to mark off sentence segments of equivalent measure, or to indicate that something subsidiary was being presented? Joe Scribe seemed not to care. If indiscrimination of this sort regularly marred a single man’s product, imagine the ravages of inconstancy in a whole library of manuscripts. Without a scribal newsletter to keep him up-to-date, Antonio of Bologna had no idea what fashions or theories were alluring to Demetrios in Alexandria. Both time and distance (not to mention a pervasive and appalling illiteracy) worked against a scheduled education for this delinquent and uncoordinated juvenile, punctuation.

UNFOLDING INTO ENGLISH

In a highly inflected language such as Latin or Greek, where the accreting sentence ramified inwardly, the relationship between discontinuous words was manifest. Pausal divisions internal to the conceived *periodos* were not imperative for comprehension. Of course the danger of misinterpretation was minimized when the scribe punctuated the major breaks (the ends of sentences, fresh paragraphs, and chapters) in the continuum of the text. But whether he did or not, the reader was helped by the formality of the language and the tendency of the verb to ride at the end of the sense group. In prose modeled after the precepts of Cicero, the rhythms of the finalizing

78. George P. Marsh, *Lectures on the English Language* (New York: Scribner, 1863), 419.

clausulae alerted the reader; in prose modeled to “Attic” (or Senecan) criteria, the *periodoi* were brief and in any case the Senecan syntax was easy,⁷⁹ more direct and simple. When medieval Latin rhetorical studies had popularized the Gorgianic and Isocratean *schemata*—patterns for the balancing of phrase with phrase and clause with clause within the sentence⁸⁰—they too, by virtue of providing standard expectation, would have encouraged comprehension. Additionally, the reader could rely on ‘ties’ within the text to render coherence—ties being, in very general terms, words (conjunctive, pronomial, lexical, or even just ‘understood’) that refer anaphorically to material already set down and cataphorically to material about to come.⁸¹ All languages use ligatures of some sort to bind, to cross-reference, to anticipate the direction—so that the heaps and strings of words can be wholly comprehended within the context. English, being syntactically open-ended, is particularly reliant on them.

But of paramount importance to the reader’s easy understanding was his familiarity with the subject at hand. Be it legendary, homiletic, or biblical, he would have strong anticipations from the topic under focus. Much of today’s reading is of texts that convey ‘news’: rapidly dished-out ideas, events, and information that the reader has not previously encountered. He is no longer the passive absorber that he used to be when the big stories came out of the Bible or well-known oral lore. In the old days refinements of heroic problems tended to slow but not to demolish the narrative pace. When a sword was drawn, the reader was not informed of percentages of iron and bronze, or labor squabbles at the forge. He was told that the hilt was exquisitely tooled, that the blade shone in moonlight, was sharp, and that

79. Morris W. Croll, “Attic Prose: Lipsius, Montaigne, Bacon”, in *Style, Rhetoric, and Rhythm*, ed. J. M. Patrick and R. O. Evans (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1966), 186. Seneca favored the short, plain statement over the rambling and ornate *periodos*.

80. Morris W. Croll, “The Sources of the Euphuistic Rhetoric”, in *Style, Rhetoric, and Rhythm*, ed. J. M. Patrick and R. O. Evans (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1966), 251. See footnote 39.

81. M. A. K. Halliday and R. Hasan, *Cohesion in English* (London: Longman, 1976), 332 and *passim*. Specific examples of ‘ties’ in English might be any synonymic substitution, any referential pronoun like ‘him’, ‘its’, or ‘theirs’; or any of the semaphoric conjunctives: e.g., ‘conversely’, ‘in such an event’, ‘alternatively’.

the giant's head, which the reader already knew was going to come off, came off cleanly at the first swipe.

Classical Latin, incorporative as it was of modification and abrupt in sound, acquired a special megalithic quality which was foreign to the more pliant, vocalized, and quickly paced classical Greek. Consonantal clusters in lines like this one, for example, randomly found in Catullus (Loeb III, 2)

et quantumst hominum venustiorum

do not trip lightly off the tongue. Compare with this the highly vocalized chain of sounds from the opening line of the *Iliad*:

Mainin aïde, Thea, Peleïado Achilaios

This line, rendered into Latin by Leonizio Pilato in the fourteenth century,⁸² took on three plosive consonants and squeezed the vowel songs of Peleus and Achilles onto a single note, becoming:

Iram cane, dea, Pelidae Achillis

But it was Latin, not Greek, that prevailed in Western Europe and left its heavy imprint on the English language, whose essential make-up is so different. Whereas Latin is terse, inflexible, patterned into tight mosaics and strongly finished with a verb, English expands with munificence from a basal vocabulary of predominantly single-syllabled Anglo-Saxon words, tacking idea to idea with couplings of 'ands' and 'buts' that often straggle to a finish. There is a superfluity of words; a vagueness as to boundaries; subordination does not always accord with syntactical position.⁸³ Necessarily, English is consuming of punctuation. George P. Marsh in his *Lectures on the English Language* describes this well.⁸⁴

There is a necessity, or at least an apology, for the use of punctuation in most modern languages, English especially,

82. Reynolds and Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*, 122.

83. George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (London: Printed by Richard Field, 1589), 58.

84. Marsh, *Lectures*, 414.

but which applies with less force to Greek and Latin. I refer to the otherwise inevitable obscurity of long sentences, in languages where the relations of the constituent words are not determined by inflection, but almost wholly by position. The use of commas, semicolons and brackets, supplies the place of inflections, and enables us to introduce, without danger of equivocation, qualifications, illustrations and parenthetical limitations, which, with our English syntax, would render a long period almost unintelligible, unless its members were divided by marks of punctuation. Without this auxiliary, we should be obliged to make our written style much more disjointed than it now is, the sentences would be cut up into a multitude of distinct propositions, and the leading thought consequently often separated from its incidents and its adjunct. The practice of thus framing our written style cannot but materially influence our use of language as a medium of unspoken thought, and, of course, our habits of intellectual conception and ratiocination. It is an advantage of no mean importance to be able to grasp in one grammatical expression a general truth, with the necessary limitations, qualifications and conditions, which its practical application requires, and the habitual omission of which characterizes the shallow thinker.

Before beginning any concrete comparisons, it will perhaps be useful to the reader who has not recently dispatched a chunk of Cicero to refresh his memory of the sculptural quality of classical Latin prose.⁸⁵

GENTLEMEN OF THE JURY: Whatever talent I possess (and I realize its limitations), whatever be my oratorical experience (and I do not deny that my practice herein has been not inconsiderable), whatever knowledge of the theoretical side of my profession I may have derived from a devoted literary apprenticeship (and I admit that at no period of my life has the acquisition of such knowledge been repellent to me),—to any advantage that may be derived from all these

85. Cicero, *The Speeches*, trans. N. H. Watts, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1923), 7.

my friend Aulus Licinis has a pre-eminent claim, which belongs to him of right.

One sees how this extract (dismantled into the more linear English) demands distinction at every turn. In Latin the piece adheres by virtue of its inflections. English renditions (like the Loeb Classical Library's Cicero volumes from which this came) give aid to the reader by appropriate insertions of both parenthetical and pausal marks.

But to Cicero and his highly literate audience, punctating would not necessarily have been a vital matter, for "the fulness of the ancient inflections was a sure guide through the intricacies of the most involved period".⁸⁶ Though he was renowned in his own time for the force of his oratory, Cicero wrote down his speeches for posterity after they had been given—a common practice of the time. Thus, what subsequent generations inherited for compositional paradigm was actually 'rhetoric', well contemplated in private. His embedded ornaments, parenthetical concessions—all the subsidiary complications—introduced an architectural dimension to his statements.

One can imagine a scribe in the early centuries A.D. timidly implanting a point, perhaps the very first point, to mark the way through a Ciceronian thicket that he had labored to assort. And if such courage had indeed been mustered, one can again (recalling Roger Bacon) imagine how it happened that a succeeding scribe—this time a bored potato-head whose personal language mixed pigfarm patois with Latin church versicles—might land that point on the line beneath the line where timidity had first placed it, and from where over the centuries it might very well migrate and breed wantonly. Through sheer scholarly ignorance, written Medieval Latin had parted company with its learned ancestor. No longer so structurally compact, so incorporative of tiered modification, it had begun to flow like melody.

To illustrate more specifically the change in language formulation over a multi-century period, we will look at a single *periodos* from Cicero's *De senectute* as it was written down in three manuscripts (now in the British Library) of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; then as it is found translated into fifteenth-century English in a

86. Marsh, *Lectures*, 412.

Caxton edition printed in 1481; and finally, as it appears in the modern 1953 English translation from the Loeb Classical Library. In the selected passage Cicero is making his dedication to Cato, whose calm and philosophic dignity at the approach of old age he commends. Take note how punctuation grows to assert itself; how it battens on the fecundity of the English language. But first, let us see how Loeb has laid out this sentence in Latin—commas, colons and all—for modern, fully-interiorized literary consumption.⁸⁷ (For the English translation, see the last page of this article.)

Nunc autem visum est mihi de senectute aliquid ad te
conscribere, hoc enim onere, quod mihi commune tecum
est, aut iam urgentis aut certe adventantis senectutis et te
et me ipsum levari volo; etsi te quidem id modice ac sapien-
ter, sicut omnia, et ferre et laturum esse certo scio.

All three British Library manuscripts exhibit the phenomenon of word separation. Only one carries an estimated date on its catalogue card. This one, from the thirteenth century and the apparent oldest physically as well as the most archaic conceptually, includes in this selection of lines only two punctuation marks. The first, a line dot after “conscribere” (followed by a lowercase *h* in “hoc”), indicates a short breath pause, which in this case does not run counter to the sense. The remaining lines, to the final word “scio”, are free entirely of punctuation of any sort; “scio” itself is succeeded by a line dot and a capital *S* for the subsequent “Sed”. Indicative of a final stop, this line-dot-with-following-capital-letter marks the finish to a contained and complete idea, and is present in all the inspected Latin and English examples of this passage, not excluding the Loeb version.

Another manuscript from the British Library, written in very legible Carolingian script, carries an array of pausal marks. It runs as follows (note the repositioned “mihi” and the fact that the passage is now split into two shorter sentences, the second beginning at

87. Cicero, *De senectute*, trans. William Armistead Falconer, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge and London: Harvard Univ. Press and William Heinemann, 1953), 10.

“Hoc”): “Nunc autem mihi visum est: de senectute aliquid adte scribere. Hoc enim onore quod . . . senectutis: et te et me . . . volo: etsi te . . . omnia: et ferre . . . scio. Sed . . .” The three colons of the last sentence give equal weight to: a) the details of their advancing age (which is the burden he wishes to ease for himself and for Cato); b) the main subject, the main verb, and the two pronoun indirect objects; c) subject of the infinitives not present in this segment, along with descriptive adverbs; d) the clausal verb and controlling infinitives. For logical lucidity the break between b and c, the break that distinguishes the although-yet clausal notion, needs to carry more weight, just as it does in the Loeb rendition.

The last of these manuscripts (written in dense Gothic) seems more modern in its punctating divisions. It, too, breaks into two sentences but at the “volo”, where “etsi te” introduces the retracting clause, and where Mr. Falconer of Loeb placed a semicolon, mindful perhaps of consultations with other early manuscripts where the entire passage, indeed the whole paragraph might have appeared as a monolithic whole. But in the manuscript at hand, the two sentences are each divided once. The first pause appears after “conscribere” (completing segment a)—a line dot and a lowercase *h* in “hoc”; and the second after “sapienter”—a line dot followed by a lowercase *s* in “sicut”. This second placement leaves the fragment “sicut omnia” (attached in meaning to “modice ac sapienter”) to cling somewhat counterintuitively to the final “et ferre” phrase, though interestingly, its unity is preserved by a line break. Indeed, the line breaks in this gothic sample appear to express some vigor of their own. They are placed where well-sculptured sense might call for minute refinement: after “onere”, after “senectutis”, and after “omnia”. In the thirteenth-century manuscript, line breaks fall willy-nilly when the scribe reaches the end of his line, despite phrase mutilation and word slicing. Clearly, the concept of writing out segments of the spoken language, either *per cola et commata* or with pausal stops, was nothing to him. As for the Carolingian scribe, he neither marred nor enhanced his text with line breaks. The modern reader, of course, is inured to the tortures provided by the ‘justified’ margins of printed text. The delicacy of line breaks engaging with perception is accessible to him only in poetry.

Next comes a translation of the same sentence from William Cax-

ton's *Tullye: Of Olde Age and Frendship* (translated by John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester) and printed at Westminster in 1481.⁸⁸

But nowe me semyth it is good that I write unto the som thyng of the worship and recomandacion of auncient age for I wyll that thou & I bee re-comforted/ and releved of that sore burthen whiche is comyn both to the & me, that is to Bite of Age whiche nowe constreyneth us and that full certaynly comyth & noyeth us I will by this boke comforte the and me not withstondyng that I wote certaynly that nowe thou suffirst & endurist attemperately & wysely all thyngs which comyn unto the.

The charm of this passage to the modern eye lies in the word choice, not the lucidity. A modern editor would be compelled to 'clean it up', and a major tool in doing so would be punctuation.

Now, finally, we turn to the 1953 translation made by William Armistead Falconer for the Loeb Classical Library. In this cohering sample, logical pointing is shown at the summit of its powers. But for the moment in this long story of punctuation, that triumph lies far in the future.⁸⁹

However, at the present, I have determined to write something on old age to be dedicated to you, for I fain would lighten both for you and for me our common burden of old age, which, if not already pressing hard upon us, is surely coming on apace; and yet I have certain knowledge that you, at all events, are bearing and will continue to bear that burden, as you do all others, with a calm and philosophic mind.

88. Cicero, *De senectute*, trans. John Tiptoft ([Westminster]: William Caxton, 1481), B1–B2. Despite the intervening French influence, Caxton announced in the prologue that "this book is more amply expounded and more sweeter to the reader, keeping the just sentence of the Latin". See Edward Gordon Duff, *Caxton's Tully on Old Age and Friendship, 1481* ([London]: Printed for J. Pearson, 1912), 4, 6, who adds: "Before the book was printed Caxton appears to have revived and edited the English version".

89. Cicero, *De senectute*, Loeb Classical Library, 11.

Uffor sooth my very frende Attitus I knowe and vnderstonde the temperance and the naturall lawe of Justice in thy courage exercised and also I knowe and vnderstande that by the magnifying of thy science and vnderstondyng I knowe not one onely in the scole & study of attenes of so grete lawe and renomme to be of/as that thou hast of worship in that ciuylite, but many men knowe there & vnderstonde the grete benygnyte the attemperaunce and also the prudence of the in that behalf, & how be yt that thou hast thyes excellent vertues surmountyng othys yt I trowe and deme that thou art Somtyme meuyd and troublid in thy spiritys for the said causes ministryng / wherof I am of the same disposicion my self / wherupon thou must nedis haue greter comfort thaune I may geue the at this tyme, therfor I shal abyde to recomforte the tyll an othe tyme. **B**ut nowe me semyth it is good that I write vnto the som thyng of the worship and recomfordacion of auncient age for I wyll that thou & I be recomforted and releued of that sore burthen whiche is comyn both to the & me, that is to wite of Age whiche nowe constreyneth vs and that full certaynly comyth & noyeth vs I wyll by this boke comforte the and me not withstondyng that I wote certaynly that nowe thou suffrest & endurist attemperately & wysely all thyngys whiche comyn vnto the. **N**euertheles whanne my will was to write any thyng of the age of auncientnes I remembred of the as of hym whiche was worthy for to haue this present booke of whiche eche of vs shal nowe

A page from William Caxton's edition of Cicero's *De senectute*, printed at Westminster in 1481. Courtesy of the Syracuse University Library.