



The Politics of Language: Byrhtferth, Aelfric, and the Multilingual Identity of the Benedictine Reform (Toronto Anglo-Saxon Series)

Rebecca Stephenson

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Old English literature thrived in late tenth-century England. Its success was the result of a concerted effort by the leaders of the Benedictine Reform movement to encourage both widespread literacy and a simple literary style. The manuscripts written in this era are the source for the majority of the Old English literature that survives today, including literary classics such as *Beowulf*. Yet the same monks who copied and compiled these important Old English texts themselves wrote in a rarified Latin, full of esoteric vocabulary and convoluted syntax and almost incomprehensible even to the well-educated.

Comparing works by the two most prolific authors of the era, Byrhtferth of Ramsey and Ælfric of Eynsham, Rebecca Stephenson explains the politics that encouraged the simultaneous development of a simple English style and an esoteric Latin style. By examining developments in Old English and Anglo-Latin side by side, *The Politics of Language* opens up a valuable new perspective on the Benedictine Reform and literacy in the late Anglo-Saxon period.

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