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This paper seeks to explore new definitions of literacy in early medieval Ireland based on the current theory of Multiliteracy. According to this theory, literacy should refer not only to reading and writing but also to any act of taking in information from the world and being able to express ideas about that information. Multiliteracy has significant implications for the discussion of the "literate" and oral traditions in early medieval Ireland, as well as the possibility of widespread popular literacy. The level of classical influence in Ireland sheds light on the development of Irish Multiliteracy and plays a crucial role in understanding the impact of the Irish in returning classical literacy to Europe after the fall of Rome. Applying Multiliteracy to this critical period in the emergence of Western civilization provides a new framework for further study of literacy and the medieval period.

Headings:

Literacy—Ireland—History

Written communication—Ireland—History

Oral communication—Ireland—History

Ireland—History—To 1172

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CLASSICAL INFLUENCE AND NATIVE MULTILITERACY: REDEFINING
LITERACY IN EARLY MEDIEVAL IRELAND

by
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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to question and explore two long-established and widely acknowledged ideas about the nature of literacy and the history of Ireland, and to attempt to bring together a new appreciation of how both concepts intertwine. The first challenge of the paper is directed towards the understanding that literacy unequivocally equals knowledge of reading and writing one or more grammatically defined languages. This definition of literacy is too simplistic for the cognitive and cultural ramifications of what it means to be literate. I advocate the use of the Multiliteracy theory in addressing the overarching concept of literacy for both the present and perhaps more importantly, for the past as well. This theory was developed by a group of researchers seeking to address the forms of modern technology that challenge the paradigm that reading and writing alone constitutes literacy. By breaking down the cognitive process of creating, internalizing, and restructuring meaning, the Multiliteracy theory broadens the idea of literacy to include fluency in any semiotic realm that has a prescribed set of rules, referred to as a grammar. Thus, various forms of aural and visual culture, for example, can be defined as “texts,” and “literacy” can mean a type of fluency in such “texts.”

The second challenge of this paper is to the oft-repeated idea that early medieval Ireland is a land apart from the rest of Western Europe due to the fact that the island was never conquered by the Roman Empire. While it is true that there is no definite evidence that the Roman legions ever came to the land known as Hibernia, it is also true that Ireland was significantly impacted by the cultural influence of Rome. Indeed, the Irish

were connected with much of the Mediterranean world through cultural and commercial exchanges with Roman Britain and other areas of the Empire. Even after the Roman Empire fell, the continuing influence of the church was also a prominent factor in the influence of the classical tradition on early medieval Ireland. These connections become particularly important when we realize that portions of the classical tradition were passed down to the medieval period due in large part to the efforts of Irish monks and missionaries.

The impact of Ireland and the Irish tradition in conjunction with the level of classical influence on early and subsequently modern western literacy is widely accepted. However, by redefining the literacy present in early medieval Ireland we are able to explore more fully the connections between Ireland and the classical world, and in turn the connections between their literacy and our own modern literacy. Applying the theory of Multiliteracy to the evidence of early medieval Ireland allows for broad reconsiderations of literacy in Irish history, and thus, the history of all of western literacy.

Chapter One

The Multiliteracy Theory and the Concepts of Literacy and Text

The issue of literacy is often prominently featured in today's news. Kids are not reading as much and they spend most of their time playing video or computer games; the necessity of accommodating different languages in an increasingly global society has become a more pertinent issue to daily life; and the new mediums of technology such as instant messaging and online gaming threaten the idea of literacy that we have long held dear. As with so many things, we believe that we are the first generation to have encountered anything of this kind. Yet a backward glance through the pages of history reveals that rapid technological change and the resulting paradigm shifts have occurred many times over the centuries. Although numerous historical contexts deserve reconsideration using the theory of Multiliteracy, this paper will explore how the theory functions when applied to early medieval Ireland. This period in Irish history, from around the first century AD to the seventh century AD, featured remarkable changes in the material, social, and intellectual culture based on the influence of the Roman Empire and the introduction of Christianity. It is these changes, documented in the archaeological and historical record, that reflect the applicability of Multiliteracy to this period of history in Ireland. First, however, it is necessary to understand the

Multiliteracy theory itself and the resulting definitions of “literacy” and “text” that will be used to illuminate the changing concept of literacy in early medieval Ireland.

In response to our supposedly unique situation in terms of the rapidly changing world of communication and literacy, a group of literacy educators and theorists met in 1994 to discuss and develop a theory that would provide the framework for literacy in the emerging Digital Age. By combining the theoretical ideas of linguists and semioticians with the practical focus of educators, the group was able to approach the idea of literacy from a variety of angles, and this resulted in a widely applicable theory. The name for their theory, Multiliteracy, reflects both the growing variety of mediums for communication as well as the increasingly global community which necessitates knowledge of more than one language (Cope and Kalantzis 5). A large part of the dialogue surrounding the Multiliteracy theory was how to use the theory in the classroom in order to adjust the traditional ideas about literacy to the rapidly changing world. This dialogue provides a structured framework for understanding not only human communication but the Multiliteracy theory itself. It is this theoretical discussion behind the Multiliteracy theory that provides insight into how a modern approach to education can illuminate the history of literacy in early medieval Ireland.

The foremost tenet of the Multiliteracy theory is the rejection of the idea that literacy means only reading and writing in a single language, and that this type of literacy constitutes the most prominent means of communicating meaning (Cope and Kalantzis 5). According to Cope and Kalantzis, the editors of and contributors to the primary work describing the theory, Multiliteracy is based on “the increasing multiplicity and integration of significant modes of meaning-making, where the textual is also related to

the visual, the audio, the spatial, the behavioural, and so on” (Cope and Kalantzis 5). Additionally, Cope and Kalantzis suggest that the process of meaning-making, regardless of the medium, is not static: “language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes” (Cope and Kalantzis 5). In other words, meaning-makers use a variety of communication methods to convey their ideas, often changing these methods in the process.

According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, semiotics is “the study of signs and symbols and their use or interpretation” (1303). Humans use symbols of all types to communicate, from letters to the abstract shapes on a traffic sign. It is through semiotics, therefore, that we communicate and become “literate”. In order to break down the complicated semiotic process by which humans create and convey meaning, the Multiliteracy group devised a simplified system based on the concepts of Available Designs, Designing, and the Redesigned.

The Multiliteracy theory starts with the basic foundations of communication that all humans use to create meanings understood by others in one or more perceptual modes, called Available Designs. In Linguistic Design in the form of writing, for example, Available Designs can include the information conveyed as well as “the form of discourses, styles, genres, dialects, and voices” (Cope and Kalantzis 21). These “Available Designs—the resources for Design—include the ‘grammars’ of various semiotic systems: the grammars of languages, and the grammars of other semiotic systems such as...gesture” (Cope and Kalantzis 20). These grammars are the rules that

allow certain aspects of meanings and their mode of conveyance to make sense to another person who is also aware of the applicable grammar.

Part of Available Designs is the idea of cultural norms, practices, and shared ideas and information, referred to as orders of discourse (Cope and Kalantzis 20). Orders of discourse allow culturally related people to allude to concepts that are part of the culture's accepted knowledge (Cope and Kalantzis 20). The primary concept of Available Designs is the idea of a grammar that spells out the correct, culturally-dictated method of using any given semiotic mode to convey meaning. To simplify, each culture has a set of rules that its members rely on to understand and create meanings in, for example, the visual mode. The Christian cross conveys a definite meaning to members of a culture who are predominantly Christian, for example. Viewed within another culture with a different visual grammar, however, the cross can mean something very different, or perhaps, for cultures not acquainted with Christianity, nothing significant at all.

Using Available Designs, humans then create meaning through the process of Designing. The Multiliteracy theory suggests that this process is how we use Available Designs to transfer what we know into a medium perceivable by other humans (Cope and Kalantzis 22). Designing hinges upon the internal creation of meaning into its outward expression: "Transformation [of knowledge] is always a new use of old materials, a re-articulation and recombination of the given resources of Available Designs" (Cope and Kalantzis 22). In other words, the process of Designing is the way in which humans take in information, process and understand that information, and then construct a meaning for themselves or others based on the original information.

Designing, as with Available Designs, is highly dependent upon the cultural context and experiences of the meaning-maker. Designing is conducted based on not only the order of discourse for a culture, but also the particular grammar dictating the use of a given medium. Essentially, the way a person conveys an idea is based on the Available Design used for the conveyance as well as the way in which a person assimilates their culture and experiences within the message they wish to convey. For example, a written message to a friend may make use of allusions to shared memories or mutually understood idioms that are dependent on the similarity of the Available Designs and process of Designing between writer and reader.

The final concept is that of the Redesigned, the product of Designing based on the use of Available Designs. The Redesigned is any meaning or idea that is internalized or expressed, and it is important to view it as part of a varied and non-linear continuum (Cope and Kalantzis 23). Cope and Kalantzis put it best:

As the play of cultural resources and uniquely positioned subjectivity, the Redesigned is founded on historically and culturally received patterns of meaning. At the same time it is the unique product of human agency: a transformed meaning. And, in its turn, the Redesigned becomes a new Available Design, a new meaning-making resource (23).

Thus one of the most important aspects of an idea that is Redesigned is that not only has Designing altered the idea itself, but it has also altered the meaning-maker who Redesigned it in a particular way (Cope and Kalantzis 23). Redesigned ideas are cumulative, and build upon each other; they are also shared and assimilated from an array of sources. This part of the meaning-making process reflects how both Designing and the Redesigned affect the meaning-maker—the meaning is fundamentally altered by being Designed, and the meaning-maker will potentially use the Redesigned in future instances of Designing (Cope and Kalantzis 23). The idea of the Redesigned is particularly

important for an examination of history, for it shows how ideas are shaped and altered as they continue to be Redesigned and passed from person to person and generation to generation.

Given the concepts of Available Design, Designing, and the Redesigned, we can now turn to the mediums within which this process takes place. This is the “Multi” part of the Multiliteracy theory:

...[there are] six major areas in which functional grammars, the metalanguages that describe and explain patterns of meaning, are required—Linguistic Design, Visual Design, Audio Design, Gestural Design, Spatial Design, and Multimodal Design. Multimodal Design...is of a different order to the others as it represents the patterns of interconnection among the other modes (Cope and Kalantzis 25).

Multimodal Design is meaning-making in more than one of the areas mentioned above, and is particularly important as we examine the ways that the different areas of Design work together to create unique, rich meanings.

This paper will examine primarily only one of the areas of Design mentioned above, namely Linguistic Design in the forms of oral and written literacy, although mention will be made of Multimodal Design. Multimodal Design is particularly apt for exploring the nature of literacy in early medieval Ireland because of the two principles behind the idea of the Multimodal: hybridity and intertextuality (Cope and Kalantzis 29).

In terms of the Multiliteracy theory, hybridity refers to “articulating in new ways, established practices and conventions within and between different modes of meaning” (Cope and Kalantzis 30). By utilizing different areas of Available Design, meaning-makers are able to draw on the particular strengths of any given combination of Design modes. The concept of hybridity will allow us to examine how different “practices and conventions” can influence and shape the Redesigned, and this concept is crucial in

exploring the native and classical traditions in the Redesigned “texts” of early medieval Irish history.

The second principle behind the idea of Multimodal Design, intertextuality, helps explain how important cultural context is to the Multiliteracy theory. Intertextuality refers to the “complex ways in which meanings...are constituted through relationships to other texts, either real or imaginary, to other text types..., to other narratives, and other modes of meaning” (Cope and Kalantzis 30). This is allusion on a grand scale. Multimodal Design results in “texts” that include not only the details of culturally shared stories, for example, but also “texts” that refer to other Redesigned items of different Design modes, such as visual symbols.

Although this paper will primarily focus on the Linguistic Design area in part due to the limitations of the evidence still extant for early medieval Ireland, the importance of the concept of Multimodal Design cannot be underestimated. Multimodal Design recognizes “the inherent ‘multiness’ of human expression and perception...Meanings come to us together: gesture with sight, with language, in audio form, in space” (Cope and Kalantzis 211). Hindsight will not allow us to recreate the instances of true Multimodality that surely existed in early medieval Ireland, and indeed throughout much of history. Nevertheless, the Multimodal Design concepts of hybridity and intertextuality provide an excellent foundation for examining how Linguistic Design can in and of itself possess a variety of dimensions, namely in the two forms of oral and written literacy. The context of early medieval Ireland will provide ample opportunities of observing how hybridity and intertextuality can illustrate the cultural, intellectual, and social changes that make this period in Irish history, and indeed western European history, so important.

The novelty and the excitement in applying the Multiliteracy theory to history is that instead of referring exclusively to reading and writing in a given language as being literate, the possibility is now open for literacy to mean fluency in any of the grammars described earlier. People could certainly have been literate in terms of reading and writing, but now we can take into account the literacy of people who were learned yet unable to read. In addition, we can begin to theorize about popular literacy among groups of people who could not read or write, but who could fluently interpret oral tales and recited written works in terms of the grammar of their cultural context. Since this paper will attempt to explore the idea of literacy in early medieval Ireland, we need to start with a working definition of literacy according to the Multiliteracy theory.

Medievalists Stock and Clanchy have both published works that examine medieval literacy in Europe at a much later date than in this paper, but their insights are invaluable to any discussion of literacy in the Middle Ages. Stock approaches medieval literacy as a broad spectrum of levels of literacy in order to dispel the myth that orality proceeded directly to written literacy in a straight line (Stock 7). His thesis revolves around the difference between literacy and textuality, stating that “one can be literate without the overt use of texts, and one can use texts extensively without evidencing genuine literacy” (Stock 7). Stock makes strides towards the idea of literacy in different Design areas, recognizing that “the presence of writing alone was not indicative of literacy” (Stock 9). However, he still adheres to the idea that Linguistic Design in the form of reading and writing is the domain of “higher culture,” and those who do not possess such literacy are “not so much illiterate as nonliterate” (Stock 7).

Writing one year before the formation of the Multiliteracy group, Clanchy also comes very close to the ideas of the Multiliteracy theory in his work on literacy in medieval England. Clanchy defines literacy in the medieval period with the term denoting the contemporary Latin standard of literacy, *litteratus*: “to know Latin and not specifically to have the ability to read and write” (Clanchy 186). Only later did the term *litteratus* begin to be associated directly with the ability to read and write, and as Clanchy points out, assuming that modern standards of literacy in terms of reading and writing are applicable to the medieval period is anachronistic (Clanchy 226-227, 232). Although he does not offer suggestions as to how to avoid anachronism in examining medieval literacy, Clanchy describes how modern scholars are susceptible to applying today’s ideas of literacy to a time when being a *litteratus* was “a matter of opinion” (Clanchy 229). He points out that “[t]he automatic coupling of reading with writing and the close association of literacy with the language one speaks are not universal norms, but products of modern European culture” (Clanchy 232).

Unlike Stock, Clanchy recognizes the possibility that people in the medieval period could be “well-read” without having the ability to take up a written text and decipher its meaning. According to Clanchy, people in the Middle Ages expected to *hear* texts without regard for the initial format of the text as written or spoken (Clanchy 266-267). He is very close to idea of Multimodal texts recorded in one Design area and conveyed in another, and indeed seems to be on the brink of the Multiliteracy throughout his book in terms of anticipating the similarities between the decline of oral literacy and our contemporary issues with increasingly digital documents (Clanchy 21).

Taking the work of Stock and Clanchy into account along with the work of the Multiliteracy group, we can begin to formulate a working definition of literacy as it will be dealt with here. Kress, a member of the Multiliteracy group, gives a simple definition of literacy as any “socially made forms of representing and communicating” (Kress 157). With this as a foundation, we can add that a person who is literate is fluent in such forms in one or more Design areas. The artists of early medieval Ireland, for example, were fluent in Linguistic Design in terms of oral communication, but they were also fluent in Visual Design in terms of communicating a variety of ideas through images and abstract designs. The only difficulty arises in terms of discussing Linguistic Design and whether written or oral literacy is implied. This will be spelled out as the instances occur, and clarified as needed. It is important to note here that in terms of Multiliteracy, no one Design area takes prominence over another; the people of early medieval Ireland had varying levels of schooling and/or interaction with both oral and written information, yet as mentioned earlier all were literate in one or many Design areas.

Now that we have reconstructed the meaning of literacy according to the Multiliteracy theory, we have to face the issue of text. If reading and writing are no longer the only measure of literacy, then “text” no longer simply means documents that convey written communications, and we must define how the word text will be used within this paper.

Ong, in his prominent work *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, refers to the implications of the word text as deduced from its etymology: “‘Text’, from a root meaning ‘to weave’, is, in absolute terms, more compatible etymologically with oral utterance than is ‘literature’” (Ong 13). Despite this statement about the

relationship between the idea of text and oral patterns of communication, Ong still has a very rigid definition of literacy in terms of the ability to read and write. Like Stock, Ong equates “high literacy” with the physical act of writing: “[h]igh literacy fosters truly written composition, in which the author composes a text which is precisely a text” (Ong 94). Although Ong goes on to state that the difference between written and oral communication does not reflect a hierarchy, he remains adamant that despite its origins, the word text is properly defined as a written communication (Ong 94).

Stock comes much closer to accepting that there are forms of text not tied to the conventions of reading and writing. He suggests that text refers to a written or “formalized discourse” that could be read *or remembered*, and that both means of accessing the text’s contents were sufficient for the needs of the people who created the text (Stock 456). This idea is very close to the principles of Multiliteracy, which emphasizes the act of Designing rather than the mode of Design. Indeed, Kress supports Stock’s train of thought by pointing out the restrictions of interpreting literacy and text by depending solely on any one mode of Design (Kress 153).

Clanchy echoes Stock in his willingness to extend the label of “text” to sets of ideas conveyed by means that include but are not exclusively defined by writing. According to him there was little difference in the later medieval mind between written and remembered, and a text was a text “whether the record was held solely in the bearer’s memory or was committed to parchment” (Clanchy 266). I believe that this idea holds true for earlier medieval societies as well, and the rest of this paper will attempt to provide examples that demonstrate the flexibility of the medieval idea of text which has only recently begun to return to modern understanding.

To return to the problem of forming a working definition of text, it is helpful to understand the requirements of a mode of communication as described by Kress. He states that any Design grammar must meet three goals: “to communicate about events and states of affairs in the world; to communicate about the social relations of the participants in a communicational interaction; and to have the ability to form internally coherent entities- messages” (Kress 200). From these principles we can construe that a text in any Design area would follow the accompanying grammar by using the first two principles to become the manifestation of the third principle. That is to say, the text would be the product of a Design mode’s method of conveying information about both the larger world and the cultural connection of the participants in the text. Text therefore functions *independently* of the mode of Design, and a text can exist, for example, in the Visual, Gestural, or, most obviously, the Linguistic mode.

As noted above, the definitions of literacy and text proposed for this paper are not entirely without precedent. The Multiliteracy theory provides a solid foundation and vocabulary for the extension of ideas regarding the understanding of literacy and the texts that determine such literacy. This will finally enable historians to put a name to their understanding of how literacy and text functioned within various cultures and time periods. Such an understanding is especially important for historians of the periods prior to the advent of the printing press, when oral literacy was still a primary mode of Linguistic Design. By using the Multiliteracy theory in an exploration of literacy, text, and cultural influence in early medieval Ireland, I aim to set the stage for additional historical work with the ideas of Multiliteracy. Although this paper will probably raise more questions than answers, it will shed a different light upon the study of the

intellectual and social contexts that were present in early medieval Ireland. Additionally, this study will attempt to demonstrate the level and importance of classical influence in early medieval Ireland, since it was this influence that led to many of the features that make this historical context ideal for the application of the Multiliteracy theory.

A brief warning must be given before plunging into the illustrations of Multiliteracy in early medieval Ireland. The use of the Multiliteracy theory requires a very interdisciplinary approach that requires a breadth of knowledge that is difficult to come by, and therefore, as mentioned earlier, my examples will be confined to the Linguistic Design area of oral and written discourse, with occasional mention of the Multimodal Design area. Historiography allows for a fairly detailed view of this Design area in early medieval Ireland, whereas areas such as Gestural and Audio Design may be completely lost to time. Chapter Two will introduce the historical context of early medieval Ireland, especially in terms of its relation to the beginnings of written literacy and influence from the classical world. This chapter will also address the significance of the arrival of Christianity to Ireland and the widespread changes that accompanied the island's conversion to the new faith. Chapter Three will focus on the evidence of Linguistic Design in both the oral and written modes. Both native and external sources will be explored, with close attention paid to the role of the early medieval Irish learned professions of poets (*filid*) and jurists (brehons). The final chapter will highlight the importance of understanding the role of Multiliteracy in early medieval Ireland in terms of the contributions of the Irish to the learning of ensuing ages. The conclusions drawn will point out areas of further study as well as make observations about the idea of popular literacy in the Middle Ages.

Chapter Two: Literacy, Christianity, and “Globalization”

Ireland was the only Celtic land where the Roman eagles never flew. She alone carried down into the Christian middle ages the political, social and cultural traditions of central and western Europe unbroken by the impact of the Mediterranean civilisation. And she alone stood outside both the official and unofficial knowledge of the Roman world. (Kenney 129).

This image of Ireland in the early medieval period has persisted for many years, and only the relatively recent advances in archaeology, paleography, and historiography have begun to demonstrate that the situation was in fact quite different. Although the image of Ireland as a lone bastion of Celticism on the fringes of the known world quietly advancing all that western society holds dear is romantic, it is now understood to be simply untrue. A similar situation has occurred with the premise that literacy is connected solely to reading and writing, and that the practice of such literacy is the natural evolution from oral traditions. As discussed above, this myth has also been scrutinized and debated recently. This paper seeks to explore the nascent theories about relations between Ireland and the classical world in the context of broadened understandings of literacy.

Many of the works examined for this paper use words such as “probably”, “might”, “could”, etc. Any investigation of the early medieval period must proceed without large amounts of primary sources. However, a great deal of information can be gleaned from the archaeological records as well as the limited number of extant contemporary writings. The body of materials and recorded information that comes

down to us from the first through the seventh centuries cannot illuminate the finer points of the contemporary Linguistic Design grammar. It can, however, provide us with clues as to the possible nature of such a grammar and therefore the Redesigned objects it dictated (Mytum 11). In our search for these clues we must begin by examining both the native and foreign examples of literacy that influenced Ireland at this time, especially in terms of the arrival of Christianity and contacts with the wider world.

The historiography addressing written literacy in early medieval Ireland is dominated by two strains of thought. Currently historians generally agree that written literacy existed before the arrival of the Christian missionaries in the fifth century AD, although the extent and level of such literacy is hotly debated. Historians have also reached the consensus that after the arrival of Christianity, written literacy spread rapidly and flourished into sophisticated learning in both Latin and the Irish vernacular. The two ideas are intimately linked, since the extent of written literacy prior to the Christian conversion surely had a great impact on the later trend of writing in Latin and Irish (Stevenson, "The Beginnings of Literacy" 162). The ideas also present a forum for examining the foreign influences upon Ireland's early written literacy, and links established as early as the first century AD provided continuous external forces for shaping Irish Multiliteracy.

Despite Kenney's earlier statement to the contrary, we are now in possession of evidence that clearly demonstrates Roman knowledge of Ireland. The archaeological record indicates that there were two primary periods of an influx of Roman objects, one from the first and second centuries AD and another in the fourth and fifth centuries (Raftery 177). Some historians have gone so far as to suggest that certain Roman-style

burial sites indicate the presence of a community of Romans living in Ireland, beyond the edge of the Empire (Warner 274). One theory for this community is that it consisted of refugees from Roman Britain escaping reprisals for the uprising of native tribes, and given the proximity of the eastern Irish coast to western Britain, this certainly seems plausible (Warner 278-279; Raftery 175). Another theory supporting the idea of an early Irish-Roman connection is that Irish mercenaries serving with the Imperial legions in Britain picked up Roman literacy and brought it back to Ireland; Stevenson notes that written literacy was remarkably well-developed in the Roman army, and so this theory as well has merit (Stevenson, "The Beginnings of Literacy" 134-135; Thomas, *Christianity* 296; Mytum 27). Additionally, Stevenson suggests that written literacy in Gaul was also widespread due to the influence of the Roman Empire as early as the first century BC, and thus it may have reached Ireland via the close connection with Celtic and Roman Gaul (Stevenson, "The Beginnings of Literacy" 138).

This connection with Gaul was established largely through long-standing trade routes, and it is indeed the theory of trade contacts that provides the most convincing theory about Ireland's first contact with written literacy. As mentioned above, the archaeology of early Irish history demonstrates the presence of Roman goods from the first century AD; although such items may indeed have also come from refugees or mercenaries, a trade connection with Gaul may be the source for the majority of the artifacts. Harvey notes that this idea finds support not just from archaeology but also from mere geographical proximity, and he goes on to suggest that such a connection between Ireland and the Empire may have been conducted "under non-Christian auspices" (Harvey 13). This undoubtedly supports the theory that written literacy arrived

independently and much earlier than the Christian missions. We can also begin to speculate about the necessity of some kind of writing, whether truly written literacy or not, that became essential through the act of conducting trade relations under the auspices of Roman mercantile contracts (Thomas, *Christianity* 298; Stevenson, “The Beginnings of Literacy” 138). It seems highly unlikely that the trade routes, which almost certainly existed, functioned without the aid of “commercial jottings” to keep track of business (Thomas, *Christianity* 298).

Further support for the theory of early trade connections between Ireland and the Roman Empire comes from linguistics. Latin words that were adopted into the Irish language, called loanwords, came into use around the third century AD, well before the arrival of Christianity (Hughes, “The Church” 302; Di Martino 89-90). The loanwords themselves indicate that they are not connected with the Christian faith, since most of them describe commercial and military terms (Di Martino 82; Laing 261). This evidence is also used in support of the theory that Irish mercenaries served in Britain, and some have gone so far as to postulate that the Imperial legions did in fact set foot in Ireland at some point in the first or second century AD (Di Martino 1-34). Regardless, the linguistic parallels link the Roman world with Ireland before the Christian missions. The depth and extent of the knowledge of written literacy is by no means as easily determined, although another avenue for such research comes from the ogam stones.

Ogam is the early script of Ireland consisting of primarily straight horizontal or vertical lines arranged in groups and usually inscribed on the edge of a standing stone; the dates for the use of ogam vary widely from as early as the second century AD to as late as the seventh century (See Figure 1; Ó Croínín, *Early Medieval Ireland* 170;

Stevenson, “The Beginnings of Literacy” 139). The earlier dating, which has considerable support, is what draws the most interest in terms of the classical influence on Irish written literacy since ogam bears the marks of a distinct relation to Latin. Rather than alphabetic, ogam is organized “in consonant and vowel clusters which bear some resemblance to the phonetic principles established by the late Roman grammarians” (Stevenson, “The Beginnings of Literacy” 141). Indeed, the grammatical structure and spelling patterns of the extant ogam carvings reveal that both spoken and written Latin probably had a strong influence on the development of Ireland’s earliest extant script (Di Martino 79; Stevenson, “The Beginnings of Literacy” 144).

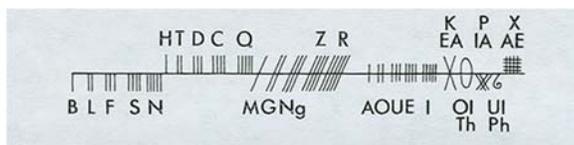


Figure 1. Ogam alphabet. Mytum 32.

According to Stevenson, inscriptions in ogam “represent an independent Irish attempt to come to grips with the phonesis of the Irish language, based on direct contact with the fringes of the Roman Empire” (Stevenson, “The Beginnings of Literacy” 144). As tempting as it may be to speculate about the extent of the use of ogam, it is perhaps more useful to consider the implications of Ireland’s familiarity with Latin at such an early date. Latin was not only known, it was known well enough to be used as the foundation for a native, probably pre-Christian script that almost certainly dates before the fourth century (Stevenson, “The Beginnings of Literacy” 144-145). Establishing the fact that the Irish were familiar in some degree with Latin in both its spoken and written forms at an early date is crucial in terms of later written literacy in Ireland. The spread of vernacular and ecclesiastical literacy in subsequent centuries as well as the development

of the Irish language owes much to the early presence of Latin, which served as an introduction to the written literacy so advocated by the Christian church (Stevenson, “The Beginnings of Literacy” 145, 162). Indeed, it is important to realize that when the Christian mission arrived in the fifth century AD, “the native learned classes of Ireland had been experimenting with literacy for something like two hundred years” (Stevenson, “Literacy and Orality” 17). Keeping in mind this foundational literacy in both the spoken and written forms of Latin and Irish, we now turn to the Christian mission itself.

Historians generally agree that the Christian mission to Ireland began in the fifth century, although this is where widespread consensus ends. The debates about St. Patrick, the earlier bishop Palladius, the origin of missionaries and many other topics are quite lengthy, and this paper will not delve into them. Regardless of whether or not written literacy on a large scale predates Christianity or not, the new faith brought with it the means and impetus for an unprecedented spread of writing. An examination of the arrival of the text-based, Latin-centered religion as the means for introducing new grammars and Available Designs is crucial to understanding how the Irish used these tools to blend native and foreign elements into their own unique form of Linguistic Design.

Just as with the discussion of the early appearance of written literacy above, there are abundant theories about the origin of Christianity in Ireland. One theory states that Irish “colonists” living in western Britain but still in contact with Ireland may have acted as an avenue for the introduction of Christianity to the native Irish (Ó Croínín, *Early Medieval Ireland* 18-19). Another theory follows the trail of St. Patrick as a kidnapped Roman-British citizen enslaved by Irish raiders. Patrick notes that he was one of many

such slaves, and some historians believe that a substantial population of British Christian slaves may have been responsible for part of Ireland's initial knowledge of Christianity (Ó Croínín, *Early Medieval Ireland* 19; Dumville 18). Indeed, the widespread presence of Christianity in Roman Britain before the end of the fourth century AD leads to the speculation that "it would be strange if Ireland, so close to Britain, had remained untouched by any Christian influence up to 430 [AD]" (Gougaud 27). Linguistic evidence based on additional Latin loanwords also supports the idea that Christianity was present in Ireland before the missionaries, and this is bolstered by the archaeology discussed above indicating that trading communities, possibly of Christians, existed in Ireland at an early date (Hughes, "The Church" 302; Dumville 17). As with the presence of writing, we are led to the conclusion that although Christianity may not have been widespread before the missionaries, it was almost certainly known.

When the first Christian missions arrived in the fifth century AD, they brought more than just a new faith. Christianity brought with it a new world view, new social structures, and most importantly for this discussion, a new emphasis on the written word (Mytum 15; Stevenson, "The Beginnings of Literacy" 151). Rather than encountering an isolated land with no knowledge of Christianity or written literacy, the evidence supports the view that Ireland had long been familiar with both. It is important to realize that the Christian mission did not arrive without its own cultural baggage, and despite the fading of the Roman Empire in the fifth century a great deal of classical influence was transmitted to Ireland through the establishment of the Church (Mytum 15). The leading missionaries such as St. Patrick were largely responsible for this transmission, since the largely Roman world they came from "was one to which they continued to belong, by

language, by religion, by training, by attitude of mind” (de Paor 14). Thus, although the form of Christianity that eventually developed in Ireland was decidedly unique, the Church’s beginnings, and therefore the beginnings of the widespread use of written literacy, bear the stamp of Roman and classical culture.

The ogham stones and the possibility of experimentation with Latin literacy prior to Christianity demonstrate that written Linguistic Design was known in Ireland before the fifth century, yet it is not until after the Christian religion began to spread that we have strong evidence of the use of written Latin. Christianity may not have brought the first knowledge of Latin letters, but it certainly provided the most extensive lesson in their use (Ó Croínín, *Early Medieval Ireland* 169). The technology of writing itself also changed dramatically in Ireland based on the presence of writing instruments such as parchment and vellum (Stevenson, “The Beginnings of Literacy” 151).

The Irish assimilated Latin quite well, developing their own style of script as well as working with Romano-British missionaries and the principles of Latin orthography to develop the written form of the Irish language by the sixth century (Ó Croínín, *Early Medieval Ireland* 169; Stevenson, “The Beginnings of Literacy” 144). The development of the vernacular will be discussed at length later as will the issues of instructing Irish students in both the oral and written use of a completely foreign language, since both issues deal with the acquisition and creation of new Available Design resources (Ó Croínín, “Hiberno-Latin Literature” 376). Hughes states it best: “Christianity gave to secular learning *another medium*, the written record, and at the same time enriched the intellectual life of Ireland with a new literature and new ideas” (Hughes, “Introduction”

24; italics mine). Far from being the sole means of bringing written literacy to the Irish, Christianity broadened the form and content of existing Irish Linguistic Design.

Despite the concentration on Christianity as a religion of the written word, the new faith almost certainly had a large impact on the oral literacy of Ireland as well. Mytum suggests that the Christian faith would have been “openly discussed, explained, [and] argued” (Mytum 38). These distinctly oral verbs point out that one of the ways in which the Irish came to grips with the new religion was by developing a new grammar and new Available Designs with which to communicate about Christianity. Thus, as quoted above, Christianity brought new ideas along with a new way to express them.

Taken together, the preceding discussion highlights the momentous changes occurring over the course of four centuries of early Irish history. These changes are made all the more important by the fact that prior to and during large parts of the first centuries AD, Ireland remained socially and culturally stable (Hughes, *The Church* 39). The Multiliteracy theory was designed in response to the rapid changes in technology and communication in the modern world, yet here in early medieval Ireland we witness a very similar occurrence. Fairclough, one of the creators of the theory, best explains the two primary cultural contexts for the modern application of Multiliteracy:

[F]irst, cultural hybridity increasing interactions across cultural and linguistic boundaries within and between societies, and, second, multimodality: the increasing salience of multiple modes of meaning—linguistic, visual, auditory, and so on, and the increasing tendency for texts to be multimodal (171).

Explored in the context of this paper, the above quote demonstrates that the Multiliteracy theory can provide a frame for illuminating the blending of both native and classical languages, Design modes, and ideas in early medieval Ireland.

The cultural hybridity and multimodality mentioned in the above quote are indeed features of the early history of Irish written and oral Linguistic Design. The influx of traders, refugees, and missionaries from as far as the Mediterranean enabled Irish culture to blend various aspects of other cultures into its own. Multimodal texts rapidly became widespread as the technology of writing began to be used in conjunction with the oral texts of both Latin and Irish.

The Multiliteracy theory works when great change is accompanied by a relative lack of centralized control (Kress 154-155). These two conditions were present in differing degrees throughout Ireland during the first through the fourth centuries, but they helped set the stage for the further development of Ireland's early Linguistic Design. The presence of Christian and vernacular writings in the seventh century that were used to record aspects of contemporary society attest to "the cultural diversity and shifting political boundaries of the age" because they sought to preserve native traditions (Chapman Stacey 224). Despite the earlier mention of early medieval Ireland as a fairly stable environment, change was afoot in things as important as linguistic development and as seemingly minor as settlement patterns (Mytum 1). Ireland lacked a centralized authority for much of its early history, and this had a great impact on the spread and amount of change occurring throughout the island; this was especially true in terms of the Christian mission, who could not simply appeal to and work through a single system (Stevenson, "The Beginnings of Literacy" 150; Hughes, *The Church* 39). Unlike in Rome, Christianity in Ireland did not receive "the massive support of a public authority," and this proved to be remarkably important for the later blending of native Irish and Christian traditions (Richter 156).

A large component of the cultural influence that reached Ireland before, and with, Christianity involves the connections with the wider world, mentioned frequently in the preceding discussion. The Multiliteracy theory was in part developed in response to the increased amount of linguistic and cultural diversity that has resulted from today's trend towards globalization (Cope and Kalantzis 6). A full understanding of the later written and oral literacy of Ireland must come from the understanding that such "global" connections also existed in the island's early medieval history. These outside influences, many of them also influenced by the classical world, are critical to an understanding of how Ireland developed a native Multiliteracy. They are also essential to realizing the full extent of Ireland's role in preserving, promulgating, and spreading the foundations of western literature that might otherwise have been lost.

The context for the introduction of written literacy to Ireland provided earlier has already presented some of the evidence for a substantial connection to Roman and post-Roman Britain. The importance of the link between the two islands merits more discussion, since this initial connection frequently acted as a path for materials and ideas to reach Ireland from the wider world. The probability that Roman settlers were living in Ireland as early as the first century AD is demonstrated by the presence of Roman-type burials near the eastern coast of Ireland (Raftery 175-176). Interactions with Romans were probably not confined to the coastal regions, and enterprising merchants "may have ventured inland on occasion seeking better markets" (Raftery 176).

As noted earlier, evidence also exists to indicate that there were settlements of Irish people on the western coast of Britain during the early medieval period (Ó Croínín, *Early Medieval Ireland* 18-19). These communities are difficult to differentiate from the

native Celtic settlements they appear to have joined, but bilingual Irish and Latin ogam stones as well as certain types of grass-marked pottery indicates their presence as an assimilated group (Ó Croínín, *Early Medieval Ireland* 34; Thomas, “Irish Colonists” 8). Familial and economic ties appear to have been maintained across the Irish Sea, and thus a path for direct and long-term contact and exchange of ideas and objects between Ireland and Roman and post-Roman Britain can be established (Mytum 34, 268).

Perhaps most significantly, however, is the theory that the importation of Roman goods, and perhaps ideas as well, was not limited to the Irish social elite (Laing 268). Laing proposes that “Romanization” of Ireland occurred around the fifth century AD, and is marked by the presence of a vast array of Roman inspired artifacts many of which probably originated in Britain (Laing 270). Laing argues that “‘Roman’-derived objects occur on all types of site[s] in Early Christian Ireland, not merely those with known or presumed ‘royal’ or ‘chiefly’ occupations” (Laing 268). This evidence is extremely interesting; if Roman-like goods were available on a larger scale than previously imagined, can we not also consider the possibility that Latin was more widely known throughout Ireland as well? This will likely remain impossible to determine, but it raises intriguing points for a discussion of the possibility of some measure of popular Multiliteracy in more than one Linguistic Design mode.

Roman Britain was not the only source of foreign influence in Ireland, however, and connections with Gaul, Spain, and the Mediterranean deserve some exploration as well. As mentioned earlier, Gaul’s early conquest by the Roman Empire resulted in the fairly widespread use of Latin oral and written literacy (Stevenson, “The Beginnings of Literacy” 138). Archaeological evidence points to Gaul as one of the possible sources for

the Roman objects found during the first and second centuries AD in Ireland (Raftery 180). Indeed, the surprising lack of Roman material in Ireland dating to the third century may be a reflection of the “political upheaval” occurring in Gaul at the time, and thus “indirectly there is evidence of the importance of Gaulish contacts with Ireland in the Roman period” (Raftery 180).

The Romans also brought their schooling system to Gaul, and both public and private schools existed through the fourth century and probably beyond (Kenney 140). The schools instructed students in the curriculum of the Empire, with a focus on grammar and especially rhetoric that “embraced a very wide range of literature and philosophy” (Kenney 140). The impact of this education upon the people of Gaul almost certainly reached Ireland via long-standing trade connections, and thus the “literary ideals and practices” Gaul adapted from the Romans were subsequently used by the Irish during the formative periods of native Irish written literacy (Kenney 141).

Although some historians believe that links between Ireland and the Continent were disrupted during the final destruction of the Roman Empire, others insist that Irish and Gaulish traders and ecclesiastics remained in constant contact through the sixth and seventh centuries (Kenney 183; Hughes, *The Church* 91). The religious connections between Ireland and Gaul were of particular importance, and ecclesiastical evidence indicates that the Irish Church was highly influenced by practices in Gaul in the (Hughes, *The Church* 91). The later missionary movement that brought the Irish and their learning to the Continent also relied on the links with Gaul when the Irish began to disperse and establish religious houses throughout Western Europe, for in many cases Gaul acted as a gateway to the rest of the Continent (Hughes, *The Church* 91-95; Mytum 77).

Yet Ireland was far from a “passive recipient” under the influence of Britain and Gaul (Mytum 77). The church in Ireland by the end of the sixth century “was active within a wider European tradition and as such in contact with ideas from many areas” (Mytum 77). One of these areas was Spain. The trade routes that brought the Irish to the coasts of Gaul also appear to have continued the short distance to Spain, thus presenting the theory that Roman and later Continental influences could have come to Ireland this way (Kenney 139). Evidence exists to support the idea of connections with “Visigothic Spain” in particular, especially the “rapid diffusion” of materials written by Isidore of Seville (Ó Néill 287). These materials had a dramatic impact upon the development of Irish ecclesiastical scholarship in the seventh century, and the importance of this later exchange of ideas lends credence to the view that earlier contacts may have existed (Ó Croínín, *Early Medieval Ireland* 213).

Beyond Spain lies the Mediterranean, and some space must be given to the discussion of Irish contacts with and knowledge of the Mediterranean world and perhaps most importantly, Greece. The issue of whether or not learned Irishmen were familiar with Greek is fiercely debated, and it may be that the discussion will never reach a complete consensus. The possibility that the Greek language was yet another of the Available Designs for both written and spoken Irish literacy is exciting, yet it may be wishful thinking.

Some of the earliest maps drawn by Greek geographers include Ireland at the farthest corner of the known world, and despite the almost complete lack of literary or archaeological evidence there is a great deal of speculation that Greek knowledge of Ireland must have come from first hand experience (Stanford 3). Much later, the system

of education mentioned earlier that the Romans brought to Gaul and Britain also included some instruction in Greek (Freeman 18). It is not hard to imagine that even as Latin learning was introduced to Ireland by Roman merchants, so too could Greek have become known to a curious Irishman with trading contacts or the scholarly impulse to study in Romanized Britain or Gaul (Freeman 18-19). The presence of Greek colonies in the south of Gaul presents another possible method of transmission for Greek language and ideas to reach Ireland, and sixth century paleographic evidence demonstrates that Greek influence that may not have come from Greece at all (Stanford 3; Brown 326).

Christianity provides one of the most probable means of bringing knowledge of Greek to Ireland. Early Irish religious tracts frequently use Greek, and some historians have taken this to indicate familiarity with the language (Kenney 251). Other historians are more skeptical. Esposito's argument hinges upon "the lack of a precise definition of what is meant by 'knowledge of Greek'" (Esposito, "On the New Edition" 195).

According to Esposito, if "knowledge of Greek" implies fluency in the written or spoken form of the language, than Ireland was not familiar with Greek; if on the other hand "knowledge of Greek" means understanding and appropriately using the Greek theological words and phrases transmitted within early Christian writings, than Ireland was certainly familiar with Greek (Esposito, "On the New Edition" 195).

Literary evidence supporting a full-fledged knowledge of Greek is insubstantial, and the Greek words used in Irish writings probably came from standard religious texts (Gougaud 247-248; Esposito, "The Knowledge of Greek" 673). In contrast to these arguments is the later evidence that ninth century Irish scholars in the courts of France were extremely well-versed in Greek, possibly indicating that they were initially

acquainted with Greek in Ireland and used their later studies on the Continent to strengthen this knowledge (Stanford 8-9). This presents an interesting problem that lies outside the scope of this paper, and it is hoped that others will be able to shed more light on Irish knowledge of Greek in any form.

Despite the shaky evidence of fluency in the Greek language in Ireland during the first through seventh centuries AD, the importation of other Greek and Mediterranean ideas and goods has more substantial support. Although evidence for connection between Ireland and the Mediterranean without intermediaries is slight, literary evidence demonstrates that through the wine trade at least Ireland probably had some link to the eastern Mediterranean (Mytum 253, 266; de Paor 15). In terms of archaeological evidence, Irish sites have produced pottery that probably originated in places such as Carthage and the Aegean region (Thomas, "Imported Late-Roman Mediterranean Pottery" 247). The Irish Church's dependence on imported sacramental wine at least made even indirect contact with the Mediterranean necessary (Mytum 266). Regardless of the direct or indirect connections and the level of Greek knowledge obtained in Ireland, there is still strong support for the importation of ideas from the Mediterranean and especially the eastern Mediterranean. The influence of these places cannot be immediately detected, but we must factor them into the early medieval Irish absorption of the classical world, which in turn resulted in a distinct native Multiliteracy that grew from contacts as close as Roman Britain and as far as the Mediterranean.

Ireland's knowledge and use of written literacy, whether in the form of business accounts, ogam, or Latin records, extends in varying degrees throughout the first through the seventh centuries. In addition to oral literacy in their native tongue, the Irish also

probably began to develop a measure of Latin oral literacy prior to the arrival of Christianity. Indeed, although neither written nor oral Latin literacy was entirely dependent on the spread of Christianity in the fifth century, it was only after the advent of the Christian missions that Latin became widely used. Connections with Rome and the wider world gave early medieval Ireland a measure of globalization, and this brought in a wide range of Available Resources that added great depth to the native Irish culture. Thus, in terms of the Multiliteracy theory, Ireland's increased cultural and linguistic diversity contributed to its ability to create texts that were not only multilingual but also Multimodal. With this in mind, we can proceed to a closer examination of the Redesigned texts that were produced in the historical context of early medieval Ireland.

Chapter Three: Oral Linguistic Design, Written Linguistic Design, and the Essence of Multiliteracy

The preceding chapter highlights the beginnings of written literacy in early medieval Ireland, a land known for its rich oral tradition. The arrival of widespread written literacy with Christianity in the fifth and sixth centuries was coupled with the accumulation of centuries of classical influence from the Roman world and beyond. With the historical and cultural context firmly established, we can now begin to fully examine the nature of early medieval Irish Multiliteracy. Two important Multiliteracy concepts mentioned in Chapter One, hybridity and intertextuality, will be of special importance here as we explore how Ireland blended native and foreign traditions in the creation of its own written Linguistic Design and the expansion of its oral Linguistic Design.

Hybridity, described earlier, can be defined as “articulating in new ways, established practices and conventions within and between different modes of meaning” (Cope and Kalantzis 29-30). Intertextuality, also discussed earlier, describes the way meaning can be constructed through “relationships to other texts, either real or imaginary, to other text types..., to other narratives, and other modes of meaning” (Cope and Kalantzis 30). In addition to these concepts, this discussion of Multiliteracy will rely on Mytum’s concept of acculturation, which he defines as “the acceptance by one society of

features from another which is technologically, economically or socially more complex” (Mytum 23). Mytum suggests that acculturation takes place when two societies are in “stable contact,” and this immediately brings to mind Ireland’s connections with Roman and post-Roman Britain, Gaul, Spain, and the Mediterranean as established in Chapter Two.

Part of Mytum’s discussion on acculturation focuses on the method by which certain foreign ideas are introduced and adapted to another culture:

Individual contacts only are exposed to a limited part of the other culture. Moreover, these aspects of the other culture are then perceived and evaluated within the world view of the recipient, leading to distortion. Some of what is then perceived may be adopted, and from thence integrated into the donor culture (18).

This process hearkens back to the Multiliteracy process of Designing. The features of the complex first culture become part of the Available Design resources of the member of the second culture, and the subsequent distortion and adoption are part of the “re-articulation and recombination” essential to Designing (Cope and Kalantzis 22). Thus, we can view acculturation as a method of producing the Redesigned on a cultural level. The introduction of new Available Designs leads to Designing in a way that combines both recently adopted and traditionally accepted Available Designs. In other words, acculturation is an important part of understanding the Multiliteracy of early medieval Ireland because it presents the method through which foreign ideas of Linguistic Design were incorporated into native Linguistic Design to produce a written and oral tradition that was uniquely Irish. It is this final statement about early medieval Irish Multiliteracy that is so important for appreciating the impact of the Irish on the later development of the Western Europe. First, however, we must begin with an examination of the Irish oral

Linguistic Design that was present before and throughout the introduction and establishment of written Linguistic Design.

Extant evidence allows us only a glimpse of the oral traditions of early medieval Ireland. Nevertheless, based on the early evidence that does survive as well as evidence from the later medieval period we can safely state that oral Linguistic Design was a rich area of early medieval Irish culture. Even after writing became widespread, oral literacy continued to be the dominant form of popular literacy; after all, the simple existence of writing does not automatically lead to committing a culture's literature to written form (Stevenson, "The Beginnings of Literacy" 129). This forms part of the idea explained earlier in this paper that written information is not necessarily the intuitive next step from information in the oral realm. Even after the introduction and spread of Christianity, native oral and written Linguistic Design operated in harmony with Christian, and primarily Latin, Linguistic Design (Stevenson, "The Beginnings of Literacy" 128). This coexistence resulted in the creation of Multimodal Design texts, which demonstrate the depth and richness of early medieval Ireland's Multiliteracy and which will be discussed later (Stevenson, "The Beginnings of Literacy" 128).

Much of what is known about Ireland's oral literacy comes from the history of its learned classes, that of the *fili* or poet (*filid* pl.) and that of the brehon or lawyer. These two positions were part of an elaborate system of education and hierarchy, and the orders of poets and lawyers dominate much of Ireland's native scholarship in the medieval period (Kenney 2). They are considered part of a class of orally literate, learned professionals because they "were only considered fit to perform [their] function if they had first received a definite and traditional education from an acknowledged master"

(Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish* 10). Both their education and their texts were based on oral Linguistic Design, at least until the availability of writing made it possible to also utilize written Design. For now though we will focus on the use of oral literacy.

The training of the *filid* relied heavily upon memorization and mental and oral exercises (Gougaud 245; Kenney 3). Far from just reciting information, however, the *filid* were the libraries of Ireland's cultural memory. A *fili* would be required to recite genealogies and tales of the past as well as expand upon this material to educate and entertain (Hughes, "Introduction" 11; Stevenson, "The Beginnings of Literacy" 150). Before the arrival of Christianity the *filid* also functioned as mystics, interpreting and controlling the forces of Nature (Mytum 54). Instead of being disbanded after the Christian missions brought a new religious system, the *filid* adapted themselves and the oral literature they retained to Christianity (Mytum 54). The format of their oral texts was altered by the influence of the structures of Latin verse, which was introduced through the coexistence and perhaps even collaboration of the *filid* and the Church (Kenney 3-4). Armed with new themes and methods of composition, the *filid* were well-prepared to adapt to the changing society of early medieval Ireland. The library of knowledge that each *fili* held was still immensely valuable to Irish society, and thus they continued to function throughout, and long after, the early medieval period.

The brehons, also instructed in primarily oral schools, were the lawyers of medieval Ireland (Hughes, "Introduction" 10). Each brehon "had not only to know the laws but to be able to interpret them in the light of custom and within the ideology which they supported" (Mytum 56). Such abilities required extensive training and experience, and brehons were required to teach aspiring brehons the knowledge they had acquired in

order to preserve the wisdom through generations (Kenney 2). As with the *filid*, the spread of the technology of writing was adapted to the profession of the brehon in the sixth century or so, but even then writing was used primarily as a supplement to the inherited oral wisdom of the past (Hughes, “Introduction” 10). This combination of native learning with the imported and largely Christian tool of writing will be discussed more in depth later; for now we must turn our attention to the oral Linguistic Design used by the *filid*, the brehons, and the general populace.

Oral Linguistic Design works within a grammar that enables information and meaning to be conveyed orally to other people and subsequent generations. Modern anthropological studies have shed light on the way that “parallelism, metrical form, rhythm, rhyme, alliteration and assonance” are parts of the grammar used to facilitate this transmission (Stevenson, “The Beginnings of Literacy” 150). Early Irish orality used these characteristics in its own way, demonstrating the strength of native oral literacy. Both the *filid* and the brehon probably used the “architectonics of poetry” such as “alliteration, consonance and rhythm” in order to distinguish ordinary conversation from the oral texts of their respective professions (Caerwyn Williams 217). Historian James Carney goes so far as to suggest that rhyme “came into being independently in Ireland” and eventually replaced alliteration as both textual decoration and memory aid (Carney 455). The literary evidence demonstrates that oral literacy was the dominant Linguistic Design mode until around the middle of the seventh century, yet even after this date certain textual features indicate that oral composition was still an important mode of communication (Stevenson, “Literacy and Orality” 21). We will examine this coexistence a bit later in our discussion of the Irish use of Multimodal Design.

Undoubtedly oral literacy remained the primary form of communication for the general populace for much longer, and was supplemented with widespread written literacy as recently as the last two centuries.

Understanding oral literacy is more than just recognizing oral elements in a recorded text, however, for the entire culture and its Available Designs influence the creation of oral texts. These factors are generally shared by the audience of the oral text, and sometimes lead to memorization and transmission. Memorization, however, does not always mean remembering word-for-word; in the case of a story “the original...is not the immediate version heard by the teller but all the possibilities of the storytelling tradition to which he belongs” (Ó Coileáin 19). By Redesigning these “possibilities”, or Available Designs, the teller transmits not only the main story but also other pieces of his cultural view more generally, including any acculturated aspects of other cultures. Thus, the presence and level of foreign influence can now be understood to have great ramifications upon the native Linguistic Designs of early medieval Ireland. The corpus of early Irish literature that bears the hallmarks of oral Linguistic Design is large and complex, and no attempt to interpret these materials will be made here. Yet we can glean further information about early Irish Multiliteracy by studying the methods used for teaching aspects of oral Linguistic Design.

The *filid* and the *brehons* only began to use writing in a supplementary aspect around the seventh century, and thus the oral mode of Linguistic Design was the primary form for creating texts and instructing pupils. Despite the discussion earlier about Ireland’s probable early contact with written texts, Irish learning largely remained in the oral domain until centuries after Christianity began to officially spread the idea of written

Linguistic Design (Richter 160). For professions based on oral Redesigning, oral teaching was obviously necessary prior to the heavy use of writing, and continued to be the preferred method later as well (Charles-Edwards, “Early Irish Law” 369). This oral instruction not only supported the dominant mode of communication and popular literacy, but it also bolstered native tradition in the face of Christianity’s deep ties to the written word. Even after religious studies became the primary subject of study in Ireland, the oral learned tradition still exercised considerable influence. Orchard suggests that references to seventh century students from Anglo-Saxon England traveling to Ireland to study almost certainly sought native learning in addition to Latin-based Christian learning (Orchard 206). Yet Latin learning played an increasingly important role in the history of Irish Multiliteracy, and the Church’s emphasis on written Linguistic Design brought new modes and texts to prominence.

As we have seen, written Linguistic Design did not immediately replace oral Linguistic Design. Instead, the two existed simultaneously for centuries, each mode drawing on the Available Designs of the other. As Chapman Stacey writes, written “[t]exts became part of [Ireland’s] oral environment; they participated in it, and they helped to shape and to change it. They did not, however, replace it” (Chapman Stacey 224). With this in mind we now turn to a brief overview of written Linguistic Design in early medieval Ireland.

The arrival of Christianity and the attendant necessity of Latin based writing, reading, and learning appears to have been accepted into native Irish learning rather readily. Nevertheless, learning Latin proved to be a major stumbling block. The Irish language is not a Romance language, and Latin written or spoken presented an entirely

new form of Linguistic Design (Ó Croínín, *Early Medieval Ireland* 204-205). Learning a foreign language was complicated by the fact that learning written Latin, an absolute necessity for Christian scholars, involved the idea that Latin was “to be understood more by the eye than by the ear” (Ó Croínín, *Early Medieval Ireland* 205). Instruction in Latin writing may have been conducted by British missionaries during the fifth century, and it became increasingly widespread as the centuries passed (Ó Croínín, *Early Medieval Ireland* 183-184). Eventually Irish scholars developed systems and grammars to instruct native Irish speakers, and these systems are remarkable accomplishments of Irish Multiliteracy.

The best example of such a system is the “syntactical notation” developed by Irish scholars to help students grasp the recorded grammar of written Latin (Ó Croínín, “Hiberno-Latin Literature” 376). This system is truly Multimodal, for by using it “the mysteries of Latin syntax and sentence structure could be *graphically* unraveled, adding to the effectiveness of *oral* instruction” (Ó Croínín, “Hiberno-Latin Literature” 376, italics mine). Thus we have a Visual Design method of teaching a written language through the oral Linguistic Design mode. This is the essence of a Multimodal text, and presents an excellent example of the way Multiliteracy can help us see the intricacies of early medieval Irish literacy.

Once the Irish began devising their own method of learning Latin through the aforementioned notation, lists of verbs and nouns, and excerpts from Latin texts, they excelled in Latin composition (Ó Croínín, “Hiberno-Latin Literature” 376). Ó Croínín describes the rapid progress of Irish scholars:

Within a century or so of their first formal introduction to Christianity the Irish had not only come to terms with this new language and its traditions, they had

assimilated them to the point where Irish Latin writers were indistinguishable, either in style or in language, from their continental counterparts (*Early Medieval Ireland* 174).

The acculturation of the Latin language introduced a vast array of Available Designs in the literature of the classical world as well as Christian works, and the Irish absorbed it all (Ó Croínín, *Early Medieval Ireland* 184). Yet in addition to learning written Latin at the religious schools, they also began to write down and teach the Irish language, forming the beginning of Western Europe's first written vernacular language (Ó Croínín, *Early Medieval Ireland* 110, 194).

Although native Irish writing in the form of the previously discussed ogam script dates well before the arrival of widespread Latin written literacy, historians suggest that Irish was being written in Latin letters by the very beginnings of the seventh century (Ó Croínín, *Early Medieval Ireland* 189). It is very likely that the written form of Irish was taught in the same schools as Latin, and indeed much of the extant vernacular writing is found alongside Latin (Ó Croínín, *Early Medieval Ireland* 189, 194; Ó Croínín, "Hiberno-Latin Literature" 379). Written Irish was "subject to grammatical analysis in the manner of Latin" and also received "some of the cultural values" that the Irish attached to written Latin (Charles-Edwards, "Conclusion" 265). One seventh century text attributed to Cennfaeladh goes so far as to break down the alphabets of Latin and Irish as well as exploring the grammatical differences between the two languages (Hughes, *The Church* 97-98).

Despite this focus on the written language, one method of dating the early vernacular written texts is to look for certain features that betray their oral environment (Stevenson, "The Beginnings of Literacy" 159). Early Irish texts tend to be "balanced, rhythmical, and alliterative" (Kenney 254). Religious texts were not the only

compositions being committed to writing, and the early vernacular writings are comprised of “the earliest stratum of the native Irish legal corpus, a substantial body of genealogical poetry, [and] some lyric, panegyric and praise poetry” (Stevenson, “The Beginnings of Literacy” 158). This hybridization of native material with an acculturated, largely Christian Linguistic Design mode demonstrates that the Irish Church was significantly more than just tolerant of Irish oral and written texts (Ó Cathasaigh 296). This unique attitude allowed for pagan and Christian material alike to be studied and transmitted through Irish writings, and is clearly seen in the large number of bilingual written texts from the early medieval period.

Written Linguistic Design in the vernacular was in place by approximately 600 AD, and “[t]he earliest extensive appearance of Latin and Irish side-by-side...is in the myriad glosses added by Irish scribes to their Latin manuscripts” (Ó Croínín, *Early Medieval Ireland* 203). Around this time Latin words also made their way into native written texts, and Irish words can be found in written Latin texts (Herren 198). The use of “vernacular technical terms” was important in writing Latin descriptions of native institutions such as the law, and their use again demonstrates hybridization between Irish and Latin written literature (Herren 198). Early Irish writers also used “Latinized Irish words for which there exist perfectly normal Latin equivalents” (Herren 198). This may demonstrate the rather patriotic nature of even the earliest Irish compositions, and serves as a reminder to any reader that the written text was Irish despite the Latin language. It also demonstrates the intertextuality of early Irish writings by assuming that the reader would be familiar with the written forms of both languages.

The best example of an early bilingual written text is the Cambrai Homily. Dated to the seventh or eighth century AD, this text presents a religious homily composed in both Latin and Irish (Ó Néill, “The Background” 146). Broken down by language:

“[t]he Latin parts of the homily...enshrine the scriptural quotations and the patristic authority; the [Irish] parts paraphrase them with a view to making them clear and relevant to an Irish audience” (Ó Néill, “The Background” 144).

Not only does this text represent collaboration between Latin and Irish religious teaching, it also presents the possibility that Irish was used to instruct a popular, Irish audience in Latin theology (Ó Néill, “The Background” 145). Latin was probably not a large part of popular literacy, but by using it in conjunction with spoken Irish at least parts of the Latin language became part of the population’s Available Designs.

Bilingual writings are part of the Linguistic Design that the Multiliteracy theory can address, but early medieval Irish Multiliteracy goes far beyond combining written languages. The use of different modes to convey hybridized texts reached its pinnacle when the Irish combined the oral texts of their learned professions with the written texts of the classical and later Christian tradition. We now turn, therefore, to the essence of early medieval Irish Multiliteracy.

As Clanchy discussed in his examination of medieval literacy, even when texts were written they were still intended to be experienced through oral performance (Clanchy 266-267). Texts in early medieval Ireland, whether carved in ogam script on standing stones or recited in a hall by a *fili*, were inextricably linked to the oral mode of Linguistic Design (Chapman Stacey 257). Oral performance was the means of transmitting texts and formed the basis of popular literacy. Thus, “publishing” a text involved finding an audience to listen to and possibly even comment upon the text, regardless of whether the text had been composed in written or oral Linguistic Design

(Crosby 94). Yet written Linguistic Design in Ireland by the seventh century was deeply interwoven with the native oral traditions, and it is often impossible to determine if a text was originally an oral Linguistic Design or whether it was composed while being written (Ó Cathasaigh 293). The Irish brehons and their law tracts provide an excellent example of the blending of oral and written, and native and foreign in their creation of texts that span Design modes to become true Multimodal texts. The law texts still extant will therefore provide us with the material to examine one instance of early medieval Irish Multiliteracy. These texts in particular embody the combination of both Linguistic Design modes while revealing much about the result of Irish traditions and classical and later Christian influences.

Early medieval Irish law is a particularly rich source for the history of Ireland. Many texts from the earliest years of Latin and vernacular Irish written Linguistic Design survive to provide a glimpse of the institutions and society of Ireland in this period. They also provide an important resource for studying early Irish Multiliteracy:

...the extant legal tracts represent a coming together of two great legal traditions: one a native, essentially oral and performative tradition thought to have originated as a branch of poetry, and the other a literate, book-centred tradition with ties to the ancient world (Chapman Stacey 252).

The evidence of the oral law system and its administration by the brehons can only be viewed through the law tracts that were later written down around the mid-seventh century (Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish* 6). The form of parts of the extant written law material indicates that it belongs to an older oral tradition, for rather than prose we find “verse...maxims...[and] instructions given by a master to his pupil” (Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish* 6). Brehons were instructed in the large corpus of Irish legal material by oral method, and they memorized the many law tracts that existed well before the spread of

written composition (Charles-Edwards, “Early Irish Law” 369; Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish* 7-8). The later written material, however, is recorded in prose, some of which bears the hallmarks of influence by “the style of Latin grammars” (Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish* 6). Yet the later materials also contain a group of texts that combine the later prose tradition with earlier, oral based formats, and these are the product of hybridizing a new written format with the native oral tradition into a new Redesigned law text (Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish* 6).

The appeal to oral formats was particularly important for the brehons. In the ecclesiastical law tracts, the written word was the supreme authority, but despite the adaptation of written Linguistic Design and Latin grammar, the brehons who recorded Irish law continued to place the ultimate authority with the native oral tradition (Charles-Edwards, “Early Irish Law” 369). Here we can glimpse the impressive education of the Irish brehons; not only were they educated in the lengthy oral tradition of Irish law, but they also knew enough about Latin and possibly even canon law to compose texts in the written Linguistic Design form (Charles-Edwards, “Early Irish Law” 366). Indeed, scholars of canon law and the brehons borrowed ideas from each other in the Irish context, and the influence of the *filid* and the Latin grammarians were also used in terms of the style and form of the written secular law texts (Charles-Edwards, “Early Irish Law” 366). The hybrid form of the Irish written law texts reflects the growth of the Available Design resources that brehons commanded in both the oral and written Linguistic Design modes. It also demonstrates the intertextuality of Irish law, for it indirectly alludes to native oral texts as well as Latin grammars and religious materials.

As we have discussed earlier, the oral form of Linguistic Design existed alongside written Linguistic Design, and early medieval Irish law is no exception. Yet for the law texts and perhaps for other texts as well, the oral form retained a higher status (Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish* 8). This may be one of the reasons that many of the law tracts that are recorded are essentially “locked” to the untrained lawyer through the use of complicated language and form (Stevenson, “The Beginnings of Literacy” 162; Chapman Stacey 253). Those who had been educated according to the oral grammar of Irish law would have a difficult time deciphering the laws without the aid of a trained brehon. Thus, the brehons may have effectively enabled the oral tradition to continue as the highest authority by forcing all but the most learned of men to turn to them for aid in the realm of Irish law.

Despite the brehons use of writing in response to a rival law system that relied upon written texts, the oral tradition was still the primary law Design form during the early medieval period (Charles-Edwards, “Early Irish Law” 369). The texts they did compose in writing reflect the balance between respect for the old traditions and appreciation for the technology of the new law system.

The brehons utilized all of the Available Design resources of early medieval Ireland to effectively preserve their positions in society while adapting to the rise of Christianity. Their continued recourse to oral Linguistic Design can be used to argue for popular literacy familiar with the texts of both Christian and native traditions, since the performance of Irish law, whether written or oral, required an audience “well-read” in oral texts. Both the oral and written texts composed by Irish brehons after the arrival of Christianity can be classified as Multimodal, for they each use aspects of the other form

to achieve their purpose. The brehons hybridized classical and Christian culture with the native tradition, resulting in texts that clearly reflect the learning of both traditions.

These texts also reached a level of intertextuality, referring to other texts in both the oral and the written Linguistic Design mode. This example enables us to see clearly the way that the Multiliteracy theory can aid in our analysis and understanding of early medieval Irish texts. It is only one example, however, and there are many more areas of early medieval Irish Multiliteracy left to be explored.

Chapter Four: Conclusions and the Lasting Importance of Early Medieval Irish Multiliteracy

Early medieval Irish Multiliteracy is a crucial link between the classical tradition and the High Middle Ages. The Irish historical context from the first to the seventh centuries is also one of the most important developmental periods in the history of Western European literature, language, and literacy in both the oral and the written form. Once acquainted with written Linguistic Design, the Irish copied the numerous texts that reached their shores. Such written texts originated from as close as Britain and Gaul and possibly as far as the Mediterranean. This assimilation of foreign material is especially remarkable given the strength of the native learned traditions. Ó Croínín puts it best:

The distinctiveness of Hiberno-Latin literature lies in the extent to which it flourished in times and in circumstances that must often have seemed inimical, and in the remarkable way in which it acquired and passed on to later generations ancient texts and fragments otherwise unknown or lost (“Hiberno-Latin Literature” 371-372).

The Irish transmission of classical materials further supports the evidence that the connections between Ireland and the Roman world were deeper than previously thought. These connections left a lasting impact on the Irish written and oral texts, and they form part of the reason for the success of Irish compositions abroad.

These compositions from the Irish Multiliteracy tradition were largely Christian writings that were spread when Irish missionaries carried their religion to northern

England and the continent in the sixth and seventh centuries (Hughes, *The Church* 99-102). Not long after being converted to Christianity the Irish were one of the religion's most devoted followers in terms of missionary activity and scholarship. This is demonstrated by the fact that "between 650 and 850 more than half of the biblical commentaries in the West were by Irishmen or their pupils" (Ó Laoghaire 78). Other Irish religious works such as penitentials were well-received by the larger Christian community, and eventually they were re-copied and adapted so many times that they form the basis for a vast quantity of religious material (Kenney 236-237).

The classical and Christian materials that the Irish brought to the post-Roman world were interwoven with Irish Multiliteracy. The largely peaceful coexistence of native and foreign texts in terms of both form and content allowed for the classical pre-Christian texts to survive and to be transmitted. This is a unique case of toleration from the period of early Christianity, when the works of the ancient pagans were often summarily destroyed. The similar harmony between oral and written texts allowed for the recording and spread of knowledge that had long been confined to only the written *or* the oral Linguistic Design mode. In the context of early medieval Irish Multiliteracy, information from both Linguistic Design modes as well as from the Latin and Irish languages could be transmitted and used by large numbers of people. Such Multimodal texts enriched the Multiliteracy of not only Ireland but also of those places who received such texts in either the oral or written form. Places like Gaul that originally brought and spread written Linguistic Design in Ireland later received in return advanced scholarship in a variety of fields. They also received the crucial precedent of a written vernacular language in cooperation with the native spoken tongue. Thus not only Gaul but much of

the West received its foundation for the literary developments of the subsequent centuries in the materials and the content of the Irish Multiliteracy texts.

This paper only begins to scratch the surface of the potential for examining the history of literacy in early medieval Ireland. Those of the Irish literate in both the oral and the written forms of Linguistic Design, and probably in more than language, were probably not indicative of the populace as a whole. Yet frequent mention of “popular literacy” was made in this paper. The people of Ireland who were fluent in their native language were indeed literate in the oral sense, perhaps even more than we imagine. Oral performance of texts in Latin, at Mass for example, and in Irish, such as at the performance of a *fili*, must have acquainted many people with the basics of Latin as well as enhancing their extensive knowledge of Irish language and literature. The public conversations that must have accompanied the arrival and spread of Christianity may have introduced various amounts of theology into the population’s pool of Available Designs. Even more so, we may speculate that the recitation of a *fili* or the debate of two brehons may have provided the Irish with an oral culture based on a rich tradition of their native learning and method of transmission.

Another area of early medieval Irish Multiliteracy that remains to be explored will shed further light on the idea of popular literacy. Visual Design, with its grammar of symbols and attendant meanings, describes the use of images to convey ideas. Symbols were used widely throughout Ireland during this period to instruct both the learned and the general population, a trend which grew as the medieval period progressed. The intricately carved high crosses of the later Middle Ages in Ireland portray biblical scenes

in conjunction with distinctly Celtic artistic motifs. Future studies of Multiliteracy in medieval Ireland may illuminate the grammar behind these religious carvings. Such studies may also examine the potential for meanings long forgotten in the abstract motifs by using the principles of Multiliteracy. This is just one small example of the myriad avenues for further use of the Multiliteracy theory to examine Ireland's Visual Design traditions.

Ireland is only part of the larger view of the Middle Ages in Western Europe, although as demonstrated above it is a very crucial part indeed. The application of the Multiliteracy theory holds great promise for exploring the idea of literacy in all its forms throughout Western Europe. By providing a foundation for theoretically breaking down and examining the extant evidence from a culture, the Multiliteracy theory will allow for new insights into medieval history. Scholars have been calling for a system that will enable them to more closely explore literacy in the Middle Ages by expanding the traditional definitions of literacy and text, and the Multiliteracy theory answers this call.

Returning to early medieval Ireland, we have questioned many long standing beliefs about the island's isolation and limited experience with written literacy. A new paradigm for studying Irish history has begun to emerge, one that places Ireland firmly within the sphere of classical influence. This same paradigm must include a full appreciation of Ireland's Multiliteracy, especially in terms of the union of native and foreign, oral and written. After all, it was this Multimodal literacy that spread throughout Europe and inspired much of the scholarship and literature that emerged during the later Middle Ages. Early medieval Ireland presents quite a challenge for historians with its complex fabric of influences and methods of recalling and transmitting knowledge. Yet

this challenge is also what makes it exciting, and there is much to discover about the history of Ireland and all of Western Europe by examining the phenomenon of Irish Multiliteracy.

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