

## **Durham University Institute of Medieval and Early Modern Studies Library Fellowship**

Dr Sarah McKeon: Report June 2015

### **Instructing the Senses**

#### **Introduction:**

This library fellowship was governed by two of my key research interests:

- a) the importance of the external senses to the aesthetics of the page according to the medieval theories of cognition;
- b) my developing interest in texts of religious instruction from the late medieval and early modern period.

#### **Purpose:**

There were two main objectives for my library fellowship:

- 1) to consult materials that I hope to use in future publications and grant applications, including manuscripts that would be relevant to my forthcoming monograph currently under consideration with the University of Liverpool Press and provisionally entitled: *Reading, Remembering and Reforming: the Boethian literary aesthetic in the late medieval period*;
- 2) to work with materials that would be relevant to my collaboration with Professor Elisabeth Salter (University of Hull) on a project exploring texts of religious instruction from the late medieval period and into the early modern era. Of particular interest were manuscripts held in Durham and listed by Raymo's, 'Works of Religious and Philosophical Instruction' [*A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 100-1500*, Yale University Press, 1986].

#### **Analysis:**

Over the course of my month in Durham, working mainly in Palace Green Library but with manuscripts from both Palace Green Library and Cathedral Library. I have selected a few manuscripts to note in this report.

Durham University Library, MS Cosin V. II. 13 [Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*]

I spent some time working on this manuscript in order to determine whether or not there were any marks that would indicate how the Boethian stanzas in text were received. I did not find that there were any suggestions that early readers of the text took note of the Boethian aspects of the Troilus soliloquy crafted by Chaucer. Indeed, this manuscript showed very few signs of usage.

Durham, Chapter Library Inc. 59 [*The rote or myroure of consolacyon & conforte*]

I made use of this incunabulum as a means of researching the development and migration of the *Consolatio* tradition into the Early Modern period. This was particularly useful as a contrast to two manuscripts containing texts designed for devotional and instructive use that I consulted: Durham Cathedral Library MS A. iv. 22 [*a prologue to a devotional anthology, 'the Xii Lettynges'*] and Durham Cathedral Library, MS Hunter 15 [particularly the *Clensyng of Mannes Sowle*]. The latter manuscript proved to be especially interesting and relevant to my interest in 'reformation of the self' realised through religious and spiritual guidance. I

used MS Hunter 15 in conjunction with Chaucer's *Retraction* in order to consider the sacrament of confession and its relevance as a framework for literary reformations and process of reformation of the spiritual self for in texts in the vernacular that were used by lay readers. I presented a paper on this manuscript as an example of a penitential text aimed at lay readers in a session on the theme of 'The Reformatory Power of Religious Literature'. My paper was entitled: 'Religion, Reading and Reformation of the Self: Chaucer's *Retraction*, and the *Clensyng of Mannes Sowle*' [Leeds IMC 9 July, 2015].

Durham Cathedral Library, MS Hunter 15 [advice on the order to be taken in Eating, Drinking, and Sleeping].

I hope to use this manuscript and in particular this text for a paper in a session at Leeds IMC 2016. The theme of the IMC next year will be: 'Food, Feast, and Famine'. I wish to use this text as an example of the type of regimen discourse that borrows from, or indeed, has echoes of the types of formulaic instruction that was present in texts intended for lay religious instruction. My aim will be to demonstrate how these texts dealing with bodily matters respond to texts that warn against the sin of gluttony etc., and therefore, which demonstrate a particular attitude towards the body as a vessel for the soul.

Durham University Library, Cosin V. IV. 6 [Contemplations of the dread and love of God]

This rather esoteric text was of interest to me in terms of the history of ideas and where this form of philosophical discourse met affective expressions of piety and meditation. *Meditations on the Life of Christ and on his deity* follows *Contemplations*. I would like to return to study this manuscript together with Durham University Library, MS Cosin V. III. 8 [*Pseudo-Bonaventure* in English] which includes *The Privity of the Passion* and *The Pricking of Love*. My plan is to read the editions of this text, to then trace the history of ideas that are contained therein, and then to return to the manuscripts in order to assess how these ideas are presented and aesthetics of the page that the scribe used.

Durham University Library MS Cosin V. iii. 24 [Doctrine of the Hert, Tree, & Fruits of the Holy Ghost]

Although this manuscript text is not cited by Raymo as a text of religious and philosophical instruction I believe that this would make a useful text for consideration of the migration of ideas out of texts designed to instruct religious and texts intended for the instruction of lay readers.

Durham University Library MS Cosin V. iii. 6 [Lollard dialogue]

The manuscript as it appears is a very useful example of dialogic within the main text, the main text and its relationship with the transcription of it, and between the *Lollard dialogue* and the prefacing letter/dedication by William Crashawe (1572-1625/6) who appears to have commissioned a scribe to transcribe the 'Lollard text'. It would appear that Crashawe mistook the Lollard dialogue for a far more ancient example of an anti-papal writing. The transcription of the original text functions as a reiteration of the beliefs set down in the original text, where the words of the knight appear to come out on top of those of the clerk in terms of providing a reasonable argument. I intend to address these layers of dialogic in an article.

Two manuscripts that are relevant to my interest in the Boethian tradition came to light: Durham University Library MS Cosin V. II. 15 [Boethius, trans. by John Walton, *De consolatio philosophiae*] and Durham University Library MS Cosin V. II. 11 [*Boethius cum comment. by Nicholas Trevet*]. Both of these manuscripts will be of use to my collaborative project with Professor Agnieszka Kijewska of Poland. We intend to carry out an interdisciplinary project on the literary and philosophical evolution of the Boethian tradition over the course of the Late Middle Ages and into the early modern period with a special focus on the persona of Lady Philosophy. This planned project builds on our initial work on dialogic in the Boethian tradition for which we prepared and presented two collaborative papers [COST Action IS1301 ‘New Communities of Interpretation’, Hull 20-22 May 2015].

### **Conclusion:**

My analysis of Durham University Library, MS Cosin V. II. 13 [*Troilus and Criseyde*] led me to conclude that it would be unnecessary to compare this manuscript with Cambridge University Library Ms Gg. 4. 27 since there are very few marks of reception or of an intention to draw attention to the Boethian sections of the text by the scribe. However, I had far more positive findings in my analysis of manuscripts including texts of religious and philosophical instruction. In our Leverhulme application Professor Elisabeth Salter and I have highlighted our interest in investigating the pathways of transmission between texts designed for instructing religious readers, such as nuns, and texts that were meant specifically for lay readers. Often these texts were adapted from texts originally intended for those living out religious lives. By assessing the differences between texts there were ultimately used by lay readers and those that stayed with more specialist readers we hope to be able to draw some conclusions about particular ways of reading during the late medieval and into the early modern period. Of particular interest is the codicological evidence of works of religious instruction, for, when these works are compiled together with other devotional, instructive, or indeed, more worldly texts, we can learn a great deal about who was using the manuscripts – whether they were intended for lay or ecclesiastical use – and of course we can draw some conclusions about the values and interests of the manuscript readers.

I am extremely grateful to IMEMS and to the staff at the Cathedral Library and Palace Green Library for their help, guidance, and assistance during the period of my library fellowship. I was able to carry out some very instructive research, especially in relation to my research into works of religious and philosophical instruction and I believe that I have the basis for at least two articles, some information towards my first monograph, and essential material for the writing of the Leverhulme bid that I am writing with Professor Salter.

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