

EN32120 (In the Olde Dayes: Medieval Texts and Their World
2017/18

Section I: Traditions and Interpretations

Seminar 3: The 'Prologue' to *The Legend of Good Women* and
'Prologue' to *Confessio amantis*



Structure:

1. Quick bout of housekeeping
2. Medieval rewritings and revisions
3. Royal authority and literary practice
4. Books and the 'Key to Remembrance'
5. Preparing for the next seminar

1. Quick bout of housekeeping

2. Medieval rewritings and revisions

Both prologues show signs of rewriting and revision, something that is not altogether uncommon in the Middle Ages.

- Apart from any political or conceptual significance of the actual revisions, what does the *existence* of revisions tell us about the nature of medieval literary culture?
- On a, possibly, more basic level: Which way of representing revisions on the page do you prefer (*The Riverside* or Peck's)?

3. Royal authority and literary practice

Lynn Staley provides a fairly comprehensive overview of the various political tensions at play during the 1380s and '90s.

- What information can we glean from the final paragraph?
- Beyond the final paragraph, what are *your* takeaway points from Staley's article?
- In what ways can we see the issues of royal authority and literary practice, as outlined by Staley, at play in 'our' texts for this week?

4. Books and the 'Key to Remembrance'

In week 3, we had a look at the sense of subjectivity of the Wife of Bath and her approach to interpretation. Both the *LGW* and *CA* prologues are also concerned with textuality, memory, and interpretation.

- In order to avoid excessive page-turning, I have selected a few passages from both texts below. In light of these passages, as well as your general reading of these two texts, how would you describe the interplay between books, memory, and interpretation?

- Than mote we to bokes that we finde,
Through which that olde thinges been in minde.
And to the doctrine of these olde wyse,
Yeve credence, in every skilful wyse,
That tellen of these olde apprevd stories,
Of holinesse, or regnes, of victories,
Of love, of hate, of other sundry thinges,
Of whiche I may not maken rehearsinges.
And if that olde bokes were a-weye,
Y-loren were of remembraunce the keye.
Wel oghte us than honouren and beleve
These bokes, ther we han non other preve.

And as for me, thogh that I can but lyte,
On bokes for to rede I me delyte,
And to hem yeve I feyth and ful credence,
And in myn herte have hem in reverence
So hertely, that ther is game noon
That fro my bokes maketh me to goon,
But hit be seldom, on the holyday;
Save, certeynly, whan that the month of May
Is comen, and that I here the foules singe,
And that the floures ginnen for to springe,
Farwel my book and my devocioun! (*LGW*,
G.prol. 17-39)

- I roos, and doun I sette me on my knee,
And seyde thus: "madame, the god above
Foryelde yow, that ye the god of love
Han maked me his wrathe to foryive;
And yeve me grace so long for to live,
That I may knowe soothly what ye be
That han me holpe and put in this degree.
But truly I wende, as in this cas,
Naught have agilt, ne doon to love trespas.
Forwhy a trewe man, with-ouren drede,
Hath not to parten with a theves dede;
Ne a trewe lover oghte me nat blame,
Thogh that I speke a fals lover som shame.
They oghte rather with me for to holde,
For that I of Creseyde wroot or tolde,
Or of the Rose; what-so myn auctour mente,
Algate, god wot, hit was myn entente
To forthren trouthe in love and hit cheryce;
And to be war fro falsnesse and fro vyce
By swich ensample; this was my meninge."

And she answerde, "lat be thyn arguinge;
For Love ne wol nat countrepleted be
In right ne wrong; and lerne that of me!
Thou hast thy grace, and hold thee right ther-to.

Now wol I seyn what penance thou shald do
For thy trespas, and understond hit here:
Thou shalt, whyl that thou livest, yeer by yeer,
The moste party of thy tyme spende
In making of a glorious Legende
Of Gode Wommen, maidenens and wyves,
That weren trewe in lovinge al hir lyves;
And telle of false men that hem bitrayen,
That al hir lyf ne doon nat but assayen
How many wommen they may doon a shame;
For in your world that is now holde a game.
And thogh thee lyke nat a lover be,
Spek wel of love; this penance yive I thee.
And to the god of love I shal so preye,
That he shal charge his servants, by any weye,
To forthren thee, and wel thy labour quyte;
Go now thy wey, this penance is but lyte."
(*LGW*, G.prol. 455-85)

- Of hem that wryten ous tofore
The bokes duelle, and we therefore
Ben tawht of that was write tho:
Forthi good is that we also
In oure tyme among ous hier
Do wryte of newe som matiere,
Essampled of these olde wyse,
So that it myhte in such a wyse,
Whan we ben dede and elleswhere,
Beleve to the worldes eere
In tyme comende after this.
Bot for men sein, and soth it is,
That who that al of wisdom writ
It dulleth ofte a mannes wit
To him that schal it aldai rede,
For thilke cause, if that ye rede,
I wolde go the middel weie
And wryte a bok between the tweie,
Somwhat of lust, somewhat of lore,
That of the lasse or of the more
Som man mai lyke of that I wryte. (*CA*, prol. 1-
21)

5. Preparing for the next seminar

Our texts for **week 4** are Chaucer's 'Prioress's Prologue' and 'Tale'. In addition, there are two articles for session 4 on the module's Aspire Reading list.

- Read both 'Prologue' and 'Tale'. The 'Tale' will be our priority, but it helps to read the 'Prologue', too.

- Both of the Aspire articles will form part of the backbone of our discussion. This means that, as in previous weeks, you do not remember every single detail, but should get at least a general overview and understanding of what the respective arguments are.

- This is the first seminar in the second section of the module ('Experiencing religion'), so it will, at least partly, prepare the ground for weeks 6 and 7. Our focus in the seminar will be twofold:
 - There is no denying that the 'Prioress's Tale' is anti-Semitic in tone and content. How are we, in a post-Holocaust world, to engage with such a text?
 - Beyond anti-Semitism, what do the Prioress and her tale tell us about religion in the late Middle Ages?