This course focuses on Insular Latin texts written by, for, and about women, to be studied for their own sake as literature, as well as for the cultural and historical interest of their content. Although there survive very few texts confidently attributable to female authors, what we have forms a coherent group (the letters connected with the eighth-century missions to Germany, and Hugeburc’s *Vitae* of Willibald and Wynnebald from the same milieu) that is of considerable interest and value, as a record of women’s education and status at the time. These authoresses can then be contrasted with the silent women who were the intended recipients of Aldhelm’s slightly earlier treatise on virginity, as well as those of an earlier age who populate its pages as exemplary virgins. Our insight into their interests can also be complemented in a fascinating way by the only biblical commentary by Bede that was commissioned by a nun, namely his mystical exposition of Habakkuk. Hagiography offers the chance to scrutinise male authorial attitudes to the depiction of women across a remarkable range, from one of the earliest surviving Insular Latin saints’ Lives, Cogitosus’ seventh-century *Vita Brigidae*, to the immediately post-Conquest *Vitae* written by Goscelin of Saint-Bertin to commemorate the Anglo-Saxon female saints of a much earlier period. Just as Aldhelm offered guidance for his seventh-century female audience regarding chastity, humility, and appropriate garb, so also Goscelin’s *Liber confortatorius*, composed for his former pupil, the anchoress Eve, can be read as a handbook for a would-be saint. Works commissioned by prominent women, while also describing those very women (the *Encomium Emmae Regnae*, and the *Vita Eadwardi confessoris*), written for Edward’s wife, Queen Eadgyth), are fertile ground for an examination of the meeting (or not) of reader expectation and authorial preconception. By offering the opportunity to study a selection of these texts, this course seeks to set the careful reading of primary sources against the background of current scholarship’s lively debate and sometimes controversial theoretical readings, in order to allow students to engage with such debate in an informed way.

The course builds on skills acquired in Part I, paper 9, by offering the chance of a progression to more challenging Latin texts, such as Aldhelm’s *De uirginitate* and some of the eleventh-century hagiographies, in order to consolidate and improve linguistic competence and to foster confidence in facing a variety of styles of Latin. It will enable students to move from the general overview of the development of Insular Latin literature gained in Part I, to a more intimate familiarity with two particular genres, epistolography and hagiography, the latter spanning the fullest chronological and geographical range of Insular Latin. There will also be the opportunity to look at literary genres not represented in the Part I curriculum, namely biblical exegesis and works of spiritual instruction. Study of the primary sources will combine literary analysis with attention to historical context. The course will also introduce students to some modern literary theories which they can begin to weigh against their own first-hand view of the textual realities, so as to sharpen critical judgement.

**ORGANISATION OF TEACHING**

The course will be taught in a series of 8 weekly seminars in Michaelmas term and 8 in Lent term, dedicated to discussion of selected topics or specific authors and their works, with some time set aside to translating or analysing relevant Latin texts. Students will be expected to study the prescribed texts independently, as well as preparing to give short presentations at the seminars, based on reading guided by a bibliography distributed at the start of the year.
EXAMINATION

A three-hour examination, consisting of one compulsory translation and analysis question (from a choice of three) [worth 40% of total mark], and two essays from a choice of about 8 [worth 30% each].

SEMINAR TOPICS

Feminist theory and medieval literature: an introduction.
Bede the misogynist and the suppression of female agency
The audience of Aldhelm’s *De uirginitate*
Aldhelm’s virgins – models for whom?
Women’s status and education as reflected by the Bonifatian correspondence
Hygeburc: women’s self-image; scholarly attitudes towards women writers
Bede’s commentary on Habakkuk – exegesis specially for women?
Cogitosus’s *Life of Brigit*
Virginity pursued and preserved
Female sanctity: other models of sanctity
The *Encomium Emmae*: a woman’s self-justification?
The *Vita Ædwardi regis*: the Lady Edith’s book.
Goscelin’s *Book of Comforting*

PRELIMINARY BACKGROUND READING

P. Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1984), chapter 1
S. Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: Sharing a Common Fate* (Woodbridge, 1992)

PRESCRIBED TEXTS

A selection from the following (all texts will be provided):


The letters written by, and addressed to, women in the Bonifatian correspondence, ed. M. Tangl, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae Selectae I (Berlin, 1916)

Hygeburc’s *Vita s. Willibaldi episcopi* and *Vita s. Wynnebaldi abbatis*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, Monumenta Germaniae Scriptores 15 (1887-8), 86-106 and 106-117


Analecta Monastica 37 (1955) 1-117


Cogitosus, Vita s. Brigitae, ed. Patrologia Latina 72, cols. 775-90, and Acta Sanctorum, Feb. I.135-41


