

PART II, PAPER 9
A subject in Insular Latin literature: Writing Women

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

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 Reginae*, 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
Virginité 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)

C.A. Lees and G.R. Overing, *Double Agents. Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Philadelphia, PA, 2001)

M. Lapidge and R.C. Love, 'The Latin Hagiography of England and Wales (600-1550)', in *Hagiographies: histoire internationale de la littérature hagiographique latine et vernaculaire, en Occident, des origines à 1500*, ed. G. Philippart (Brepols, 2001), vol. III, pp. 1-120

PRESCRIBED TEXTS

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

Aldhelm, Prose *De uirginitate* and *Carmen de uirginitate*, ed. R. Ehwald, *Aldhelmi Opera Omnia*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi 15 (Berlin, 1919)

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

Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* on Æthelthryth and Seaxburh (IV.19-20 [17-18]), the Barking ladies (IV.6-10), and Hild (IV.23 [21]), ed. and trans. B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969; reprinted 1991)

Bede, *In Cantica Habacuc Allegorica Expositio*, ed. J.E. Hudson, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 119B (Turnhout, 1983), 381-409

Goscelin, *Liber confortatorius*, ed. C.H. Talbot, 'The *Liber Confortatorius* of Goscelin of Saint Bertin,

Analecta Monastica 37 (1955) 1-117

Goscelin, *Vita s. Edithe*, ed. A. Wilmart, 'La légende de Ste Édith en prose et vers par le moine Goscelin', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 56 (1938), 5-101, 265-307

Goscelin, *Vita s. Mildrethe*, ed. D.W. Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend. A Study in Early Medieval Hagiography in England* (Leicester, 1982), pp. 108-43

Goscelin, *Vita s. Wulfilde*, ed. M. Colker, 'Texts of Jocelyn of Canterbury which relate to the history of Barking Abbey', *Studia Monastica* 7 (1965), 383-460

Goscelin, *Vitae ss. Werburge, Sexburge and Eormenhilde*, ed. and trans., R.C. Love, *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin. The Lives of the Female Saints of Ely*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 2004)

Anon., *Vita s. Cuthburge*, ed. R. Rushforth, 'The medieval hagiography of St Cuthburg', *Analecta Bollandiana* 118 (2000), 291-324

Anon., *Vita s. Fritheswithe*, ed. W.J. Blair, *Saint Frideswide Patron of Oxford* (Oxford, 1988)

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

Conchubranus, *Vita s. Monennae*, ed. M. Esposito, 'Conchubrani Vita Sanctae Monennae', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 28C (1910), 202-38; Ulster Society of Mediaeval Latin Studies, 'The Life of St Monenna by Conchubranus', *Seanchas Ardmhacha* 9 (1978-9), 250-73 and 10 (1980-2), 117-41

Anon., *Vita s. Wenefredae* (ed. A.W. Wade-Evans, *Vitae Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae* (Cardiff, 1944), pp. 288-308

Anon., *Vita S. Osmannae*, ed. *Acta Sanctorum*, Sept. III.417-25

Turgot, *Vita S. Margaretae reginae Scotiae*, ed. *Acta Sanctorum*, Iun., II.328-35; J.H. Hinde, *Symeonis Dunelmensis Opera*, Surtees Society 51 (Durham, 1868), pp. 234-54

Anon., *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, ed. A. Campbell, Camden Society, 3rd series 72 (London, 1949), reprinted with a supplementary introduction by S. Keynes, Camden Classic Reprints 4 (Cambridge, 1998)

Anon., *Vita Eadwardi Confessoris*, ed. and trans. F. Barlow, *The Life of King Edward who rests at Westminster*, Oxford Medieval Texts, 2nd edition (Oxford 1992)

SPECIMEN EXAM PAPER

Answer one question from Section A, and two questions from Section B.

SECTION A

1 *Translate the following passage into English and answer the accompanying questions.*

Domino reuerentissimo et summe dignitatis infula predito Bonifatio atque in Christo carissimo et mihi adfinitatis propinquitate conexo Leobgyda ultima leue iugum Christi portantium famula perennem sospitatis salutem. Rogo tuam clementiam, ut memorare digneris prioris amicitiae, quam iamdudum cum patre meo copulasti, cuius uocabulum est Dynne, in occiduis regionibus, qui nunc ante .viii. annorum curriculum ab hac luce subtractus est, ut pro anima illius preces offerre Deo non rennues. Necnon et matris mee memoriam commendo tibi, quae cognominatur Aebbe que tibi, ut melius nosti, consanguinitatis nexibus copulatur et adhuc laboriose uiuit et diu ualide ab infirmitate obpressa est. Ergo unica filia sum ambobus parentibus meis; et utinam, licet sim indigna, ut merear te in fratris locum accipere, quia in nullo hominum generis mei tanta fiducia spei posita est mihi quanta in te. Hoc paruulum munusculum mittere curauit, non ut dignum esset tue almitatis aspectui, sed ut memoriam paruitatis meae retines, ne longa locorum intercapidine obliuione tradas, quin immo uere dilectionis ligatura reliquum nodetur in eum. Hoc, frater amande, enixius efflagito, ut tuarum orationum pelta muniar contra hostis occulti uenenata iacula. Illud etiam peto, ut rusticitatem huius epistole digneris emendare et mihi aliqua uerba tuae affabilitatis exempli gratia transmittere non recusses, quae inhianter audire satago. Istos autem subter scriptos uersiculos componere nitebar secundum poetice traditionis disciplinam, non audacia confidens, sed gracilis ingenioli rudimenta exercitare cupiens et tuo auxilio indigens. Istam artem ab Eadburge magisterio didici, quae indesinenter legem diuinam rimare non cessat. Vale, uiuens aeuo longiore, uita feliciore, interpellans pro me.

(a) What light does this passage from her letter shed on Leofgyth's education?

(b) Comment on the literary aspirations of this passage.

2 *Translate the following passage (apart from the concluding section in square brackets) into English and answer the accompanying questions.*

Me cogitis, Fratres, ut sanctae ac beatae memoriae Brigidae Virginis uirtutes et opera, more doctorum, memoriae litterisque tradere aggrediar. Quod opus impositum, et delicatae materiae arduum, paruitati et ignorantiae meae et linguae minime conuenit: sed potens est Deus de minimis magna facere, ut de exiguo olei et farinae pugillo domum impleuit pauperulae uiduae. Itaque iussionibus uestris coactus, satis habeo meam non defuisse obedientiam. Et ideo pauca de pluribus, a maioribus ac peritissimis tradita, sine ulla ambiguitatis caligine, ne inobedientie crimen incurram, patefacere censeo: ex quibus quanta qualisque Virgo uirtutum bonarum florida, cunctorum oculis innotescat: non quod memoria et mediocritas, et rusticus sermo ingenioli mei, tanti muneris officium explicare ualeret; sed fidei uestre beatitudo, et orationum uestrarum diurnitas meretur accipere, quod non ualet ingenium ferre dictantis. Haec ergo egregiis crescens uirtutibus et fama bonarum rerum, ad eam de omnibus prouinciis totius Hiberniae innumerabiles populi de utroque sexu confluentes, et uota sibi uouentes uoluntarie, suum monasterium (caput pene omnium Hibernensium Ecclesiarum, et culmen praecellens omnia monasteria Scottorum, cuius parochia per totam Hibernensem terram diffusa, a mari usque ad mare extensa est) in campestribus campi Liffi supra fundamentum fidei firmum construxit: [et prudenti dispensatione de animabus eorum regulariter in omnibus procurans, et de ecclesiis multarum prouinciarum sibi adherentibus sollicitans, et secum reuoluens quod sine summo sacerdote, qui ecclesias consecraret, et ecclesiasticos in eis gradus subrogaret, esse non posset; illustrem uirum et solitarium, et omnibus moribus bonis ornatum, per quem Deus uirtutes operatus est plurimas, conuocans eum de eremo et de sua uita

solitaria, et ipsi obuiam pergens, ut ecclesiam in episcopali dignitate cum ea gubernaret, atque ut nihil de ordine sacerdotali in suis deesset ecclesiis, arcessiuit.]

(a) What propagandist aims does Cogitosus betray in this preface to his *Vita S. Brigittae*?

(b) Comment on the prose style of this preface.

3 Translate the following passage into English and answer the accompanying questions.

Sic quoque Iustinam modulabor carmina castam,
 Aurea virgineo lucrantem regna pudore,
 Quae terrena tori dirupit vincla iugalis,
 Florida mundanae calcans commercia vitae.
 Huic procus illustris pravo succensus amore 5
 Nectere non cessat verborum retia frustra,
 Ut sibi forte foret dotalis virgo per aevum,
 De qua posteritas esset ventura nepotum.
 Sed cum tale nefas gestaret mente malignus,
 Nec tamen insontem posset pervertere fallax, 10
 Virginis aut fibras caecis incendere flammis,
 Nititur egregiam magicis maculare venenis.
 Tunc famosus erat Cyprianus fraude nugaci,
 Doctus in horrenda sceleratorum arte magorum;
 Qui tunc auxilium spondebat ferre petenti 15
 Plurima schematizans sacrae molimina menti
 In tantum, ut diris certaret demonis armis.
 Quos magus assidue strophosus misit ad almam,
 Vt pia pulsarent stimulis praecordia stupri.
 Sed cum virgo Dei sprevisset frivola carnis, 20
 Lurida tetrorum confringens tela latronum,
 Credidit altithronum salvantem saecula Christum,
 Ad Dominum tota conversus mente fidelis:
 Poenituit tandem magus idola spurca relinquens,
 Expertus, virgo quid posset ferre pericli, 25
 Quae nunquam valuit superari mille nocendi
 Artibus, incerti sed fugit crimen iniquum.
 Post haec imperio regeret cum Claudius orbem,
 Impius edictis sanctos crudelibus urgens, –
 Heu scelus! – ut Christum damnati voce negarent, 30
 (Nolentes autem sectari scita tyranni
 O quam dura necis graviter tormenta luebant!)
 Tunc, Justina, suum ferro supponere collum,
 Sanguinis aut rivus non horret fundere fibris.
 Sic geminis felix ornatur virgo triumphis: 35
 Martira cum roseis rubuit veneranda coronis.

(a) How far is this depiction of Justina typical of the ‘darker tone’ identifiable in Aldhelm’s *Carmen de Virginitate*?

(b) Highlight features of these lines that are characteristic of Aldhelm’s poetic style.

SECTION B

- 1 What was Aldhelm's message for the female dedicatees of his twinned work, *De uirginitate*?
- 2 'Hild deserves to be rescued from Bede and afforded her own place in history' [LEES & OVERING]. How well do you feel this statement characterises Bede's treatment of women in the *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*?
- 3 'Boniface seems at his most relaxed in his letters to various religious women' [ORCHARD]. Discuss.
- 4 'The bridal-chamber was the only battle-field in which women saints could gain their crown.' Discuss with reference to any **two or more** saints' Lives you have studied.
- 5 'Sublimely unaware of convention'. To what extent does this description of Cogitosus's *Vita s. Brigitae* conform to your understanding of the text?
- 6 Demonstrate how Goscelin sets the tone for the rest of his *Vita sancte Edithe* with this poem, the first metrical section to occur in the *Vita*.

Centena uos hinc paruulorum milia,
Herodiana mactat quos uesania,
Dulces amici sponsi collactanei,
Fouete: lactens sponsam duxit lacteam.
Vallate cunis florecentem floridis,
Quem foeta patre uirgo lactat celibe,
Reges adorant, angeli pronunciant,
Cantant superna, stella signat pronuba,
Quin angelorum pastorem bos collocat.
Presepe regi celi thalamus ponitur.
Maria castra ducens uirginalia
Et florulenta castitatis agmina,
Dignata nurum formosam, dat filium.
Edytha nubit paruo regi paruula.
Crocis, ligustris, narcissis, uacciniis
Et cinnamomis thalamus uernet floridus.
Fauete puris puritate nuptiis,
Et uirginales ferte tedas, uirgines,
Agnum sequentes candidati candidum,
Qui pascit inter celibatus lilia,
Inter canentes in sublimi gloriam
Et festa celo discumbentum cantica.
Carmen nouum pro Fescenninis edite
Paruamque Christo ferte Editham paruulo.

- 7 How did the author of the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* achieve the 'triumph of literary artifice over historical truth'?
- 8 'Placing woman in the middle of a text ... is an effective strategy for upsetting an audience's expectations, forestalling their primary reactions and creating a space of cultural critique' [KLEIN]. Discuss with reference to any **two or three** texts which you have studied.

END OF PAPER