

Announcements:

For next week, we're entering the Reformation for real: make sure you review the handout I circulated in week 1 before attempting the readings.

Key questions for this week:

What is the relationship between image and text in the various examples cited by our authors?

What is the relationship between reading and knowing—or between seeing and knowing—in various meditational practices?

Timeline review:

Where are we? Freedberg, as usual, is all over the place, but dealing both with the advent of print in the 15th century and with counter-reformation materials in the 17th. He's also interested in the shift from expensive books of hours to the circulation of cheap icons in the 15th c.

Duffy is pretty squarely in the medieval period, mostly the late medieval, 14th and 15th, focusing on the flourishing of individual devotion and the widespread circulation of prayer manuals.

Julian's visions take place in 1373, and her writings were dictated after that (the long text was 20 to 30 years later, after she'd become an anchoress).

What are the texts telling us:

Duffy

* Focuses on the independent status of images in Books of Hours, which we might think of as mere illustrations:

“Such pictures [in books of hours] were designed not merely to ornament the books into which they were tipped or bound, but to serve as an additional devotional resource, providing material for devout meditation.” (211)

* Focuses on the shift to printed primers, and the use of primers as tools for literacy, but also on the relatively limited understanding of the words themselves among most prayer book users.

* Talks about the complex interplay between text and image in the prayer books (juxtaposition of images of David and Bathsheba with the penitential psalms (226). [SLIDE]

* And also about the way that oral and visual literacy could substitute for actual literacy:

“The image of Veronica holding in outstretched arms the vernicle or veil on which Christ’s face was imprinted always preceded the indulgenced devotion ‘Salve Sancta Facies nostri Redemptoris’. But the accompanying rubric, offering 5,000 days of pardon to those reciting the prayer, ‘beholding the glorious image or vernicle of our Lord’ offers the same indulgence to anyone who ‘cannot say this prayer’ provided they say five Paters, five Aves, and a Creed. What mattered was ‘beholding the glorious visage or vernicle’, not the words. The picture here has broken free of the constraints of the text, and is an icon, not an illustration.” (227) [SLIDE]

* Here is where we officially add the problem of the indulgence to the problem of sacred images and objects, generally. If, as one scholar puts it “Images became visible proofs of an inner devotional life” (owning one implies that you use it which implies that you meditate piously and successfully), how do we know that’s the case, and how can we trust the church to provide the benefits it promises through the system of prayer and indulgence?

“There is no easy resolution of this contradiction between devout interiority of devotion on the one hand, and an apparently crudely mechanical view of the power of ‘good words’ on the other.” (256)

He also introduces some theological ideas about the devotion to the crucifix:

“Emphasis on the suffering humanity of Jesus gave medieval men and women the confidence to see in him a loving brother.” (236)

“The crucifixion is now something which happens to Christ, rather than his triumphal act: he does not ascend the cross, but hangs upon it.” (241 – cf. Lisa’s lecture on the two reliquary images]

With some of this in mind, let’s look briefly at some of the other ways that images in prayer books model or direct devotional behaviors [SLIDES]

Freedberg

* Focuses on—surprise!—the prominence of visuality to the meditative tradition. Specifically, argues that there’s a structural analogy between meditation and making art:

“From the earliest Christian writing on meditation to the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius Loyola, the act of meditating is conceived of (and publicized) in terms of a specific parallel with actual image making. He who meditates must depict mental scenes in the same way the painter depicts real ones.” (162)

An even more striking formulation of this is on p. 184, from the discussion of David):

“Imagine that you see many painters all sitting at work, casting their eyes on Christ as the model, and painting him, praying in the garden, tormented. And in this representation of Christ, everything that helps us to lead a Christian and virtuous life likewise helps us to

represent in ourselves Christ as the prototype, as if copying and portraying him on a painting.”

[question for seminar: what is the relationship between word and image in the Suchet and David engravings? Review Freedberg p. 188]

So, not only are images the means by which our “sense oriented minds” (Bonaventure) can reach God, they are also the means by which we express our own understanding, such as it is. Of course, the point is that we make **mental** images, not **material** images, which raise further problems, as we’ve learned.

Related idea “God’s creating can only be grasped in terms of the simile of the creative activity of the artist.” (166)

* But how do we get pictures in our heads in the first place?

“The picture thus restrains the imagination, or allows it to be further constructive. . . It was, one might say, a public trained to respond in particular ways to particular scenes.” (169)

Even texts work like pictures, providing instruction for “the inward construction of appropriate mental images.” (179 – see figure on p. 176)

On p. 174, Freedberg draws a fascinating distinction between **real images** and the **reality of vision** that I want you to keep in mind as we proceed.

Julian

Ok, how does all this help us understand Julian?

Well, in relation to all the material in Duffy and especially Freedberg, we can say the following about Julian:

- 1) that her visions are inspired, in part, by the contemplation of a small crucifix (real image)
- 2) that her visions provide remarkable visual detail (affirming the reality of the vision)

Mystics, as Freedberg says on p. 173, were those capable of achieving vision without the aid of images. But they, too, probably had some real images in mind.

So, her experience is simply a more extreme version of the one each believer is intended to have while contemplating the suffering of Christ, either in images or in words, and like any good believer/artist she communicates that experience through visual imagery (albeit, imagery that’s translated into language).

Just for the sake of contrast, there were other methods of meditation, some of which Sumption talks about in “origins and ideals,” during his discussion of pilgrims who made their way to Jerusalem and carried out the highest form of direct imitation of Christ by reliving the stages of his passion as they walked around the city.

One of the most extraordinary examples of this is related in another medieval woman's autobiographical account of her mystical experiences. I'm going to tell you a bit about her since she comes up pretty regularly in our readings.

Margery Kempe, c. 1373 – after 1438, was by birth and marriage a member of the mercantile urban elite of Bishop's (now King's) Lynn, Norfolk, at that date a busy and prosperous trading centre with connections to mainland Europe. She was the daughter of John Brunham, five times mayor of Lynn and the wife of John Kempe, a burgess of Lynn, to whom she bore fourteen children. Evidently unsatisfied by domestic life, she made her mark first as a businesswoman, then as a mystic, Bride of Christ, prophet, pilgrim and autobiographer.

One of Margery's signal traits was her insistence that she was better than anyone at feeling empathy for Jesus: (read Duffy, p. 261) – but again, this is merely an exaggeration of what all good Christians are supposed to be doing.

Ok, now, some thoughts about Julian (and note that I'm modeling the kind of work you should be doing in seminar, paying attention not just to what she says but how she says it):

I want to draw your attention to some things that you can chew on later in seminar:

1: this is about being comfortable with Christ. Note how often she talks about what Germans refers to as the "heimlich" – the comfortable or familiar. This is very much a courtly or courteous Jesus.

- p. 6 "household light"
- p. 7 "so familiar", his "familiar love"

God, in Julian's words, "wishes to be known" which is as intimate and human a wish as one could possibly imagine (31). This is, after all, why we fall in love.

2: note the language she uses to describe her visions, their sensory qualities, and the way in which those sensory perceptions give way to spiritual understanding.

- p. 6 "I never asked for bodily showings" (and the vision following)
- p. 7 "the answer in my mind was"

How does she actually achieve greater empathy through these visions?

How does she differentiate bodily sight from spiritual sight? (36)

3: notice the strange and wonderful ways she concretizes complicated theological ideas
- p. 7: "a little thing the size of the hazel nut" / p. 8 "they love and seek their rest"

4: finally, note her admonition to readers to focus not on her unworthiness but on Jesus himself [this works two ways – to deflect potential criticism and to call attention to the fact that she is calling for people to do more or less exactly what she did – to contemplate the crucifix and with it the mystery of Christ's suffering]

- p. 11: "you must not let me hinder you"

[the wound in Christ's side is a real place, "large enough for all mankind that shall be saved and rest in peace and in love."]

[SLIDE] Here, just for kicks, is an illustration of a mystical experience. How does this differ from the narrative we read?

Ok, finally, I want to go back to Freedberg (191) in order to talk in some more depth about why the humanity of Christ is so important.

Review p. 191 (everyone read one sentence).