

Jordan Sharpe

Medieval Studies: DuPont Library

8/28/2010

I was given funding by the Fund for Innovative Teaching and Learning (FITL) to work with English professor and head of the Medieval Department, Dr. Irvin, on his research with the inspirations of feminine pity on the works of Geoffrey Chaucer. As part of the research, I also worked on an independent project, which will last longer than the internship, on the mid-15th century text, *Prose Merlin*. The majority of my work occurred on the ground floor of the DuPont Library researching through many 14th century Middle English texts.

My internship began on August 1st and would continue for three weeks, until classes began. During the first meeting in August, I was given my first assignment as part of the internship was to gain a background on Chaucer's view of feminine pity in his long poem, *The Legend of Good Women*. The purpose of this reading was to gain information on Chaucer's usage of pity in context to heroines in history and literature, outside of his most popular work *The Canterbury Tales*. Being his third longest poem, *The Legend of Good Women*, was not a very difficult read but was necessary for the continuation of my three week research into the possible inspirations and sources for Chaucer's works on feminine pity. The reading only took about two hours outside of the library at the house I was house-sitting, with about another hour of personal analysis afterwards to help form me opinions on the text.

Other than just working with Professor Irvin on this project, I also worked alongside another student, Sarah Owens, on the research project. My job was to research the uses of pity and its synonyms in 14th century Middle English texts, while Sarah's job was to research the uses of the Latin equivalent, pudor, in possible Latin sources for Chaucer. Though we did not do much work together, we gave our results to Irvin for his use in a publication he is currently

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working on about Chaucer's use of feminine pity. The three week research project is the longest I have spent on academic research on a single topic to date, though gives a good example of how long term research projects are done by people in academic fields.

The first research assignment that I was given to do was to accumulate an annotated bibliography of possible texts to research more in depth so that Dr. Irvin could give direction to begin the more in-depth research. The first few days of research was devoted to this assignment and I was able to accumulate about six or seven possible sources, though I would come to use many more later, as my research continued. The texts consisted of mostly theological writings and confessional manuals, though there were also a few romances which are crucial to the topic I was researching. Eventually, romances would become what the majority of my search would consist of.

The most usefully and important tool during my work was the Middle English Dictionary, provided by the University of Michigan. Using this tool I was able to look up key words such as "pite" and "reuthe" and their various spellings. The dictionary entries would also provide information on texts that contain these words and are relevant to their overall definitions. I only focused on texts during the 14th century and slightly earlier which cut quite a few of the sources provided by the dictionary, but overall it was able to provide me with information needed to begin the first steps of my research in the uses of feminine pity in pre-Chaucerian English literature.

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After the work on the annotated bibliography, I began to do more in-depth research on individual texts. Using the Middle English Dictionary I was able to compile a list of texts that used the words I was looking for, and compare those works with what is available in the Sewanee library. The first text that I started to look through was Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, though I spent only a short time on it because Dr. Irvin was already very familiar with the works of Gower in regard to pity. His texts had a few writings in specific chapters about pity, though a good portion focused more on the male or on pity in relationship with God. I spent about two days on that piece before being told to look through other sources.

Some of the other texts I started to use included a confession manual called *Handling Sin* which dated to about the mid-14th century. Each of the seven cardinal sins had a large section to itself, and pity was talked deeply about in pride. I quote the particular uses in the text and turned them into Dr. Irvin so that he could possibly explore that work in more depth while working on the more specific parts of his own research, as my job was to give him a general overview of things he should look into on his own later. Another large work that I used was a collection of religious writings on family. The family aspect was a perfect example of finding uses of pity among wives and children in relation to husband, father, and God in 14th century England. I spent about a week on these texts going through all uses of the words I was looking for and providing quotes and information for Dr. Irvin. Other texts that I looked through were various romances that used pity in regards to a more secular love than that provided by the various confession manuals and the religious writings that were just as common. The most notable of the romances that I looked into were the Arthurian stories.

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While doing all of this research for Professor Irvin, he also began to guide me on my own personal research. I selected the mid-15th century Middle English text of *Prose Merlin* as my main text of study. *Prose Merlin* is a Middle English rewrite of multiple 13th century French texts from a variety of sources to give a full account of the life of the Arthurian character Merlin from his birth to his death and legacy. As I read the text I also took notes on the usage of the word pity in order to further explore Merlin's relationship with the witch Nimue, whom he loved but she ended up murdering him for his magic. The older sources that I found were translations of the French Lancelot-Grail cycle and an account of Merlin's early life in Middle French. While doing so, I also cross referenced various secondary texts in the library and through the MLA website to find books and articles that could be used as secondary sources.

For three weeks I spent about six hours a day in the library in front of my laptop or reading a Middle English text that was in the library's general collection in order to further my own knowledge of advanced research techniques. This internship was designed to help me learn the more in-depth aspects of personal research that professors have to go through, other than just teaching classes. This information will prove valuable as I plan to attend graduate school and also begin to do scholarly research on Middle English texts afterwards. The methods and research tools I have learned to use during this internship will prove to be an important aspect of my future career goals as I begin to do research at a higher level than my current classes call for.