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Divided by Flesh and Pens: Teaching Medieval Manuscripts Through Virginia Woolf

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Abstract

Despite the complexity of her written work, Virginia Woolf occasionally sought to "teach" the reader, as Sheila Heti's new edition of *How Should One Read A Book?* reveals. Moreover, Woolf was keenly interested in the Middle Ages. This essay uses an unpublished story of Woolf's to explore new possibilities in the teaching of medieval English literature. A syllabus, outlined at the center of this essay, details assignments that invite students to read and write across genres, disciplines, and time periods, taking up Woolf's notion of what this author calls the "mystical manuscript," or the text that comes alive in the mind. Through the fictional diary of Joan Martyn, Woolf explores the limits of the archive when it comes to access and representation. She guides both instructor and student through vivid scenes of public reading and domestic storytelling, suggesting that the keepers of manuscripts are often located far from the locked library.

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> It never occurred to her when she wrote her autobiography, or scribbled page after page to Bernard Shaw late at night, dead tired after a rehearsal, that she was 'writing.' … But whatever she took up became in her warm, sensitive grasp a tool.
>
> "Ellen Terry" by Virginia Woolf (1948)[1]

Public outcry about the exclusive nature of the field of Medieval Studies has recently been issued in similar statements against the Classics.[2] The 2020-2021 lectures hosted by the Center for Hellenic Studies at UC San Diego have taken up these questions, asking how the Humanities, and Classics in particular, can survive.[3] The question of accessing the texts of the past, if not the bodies that produced them, has plagued authors/writers such as Virginia Woolf (1882-1941). Woolf's writings on the (European) Middle Ages, which have not received much scholarly attention, are valuable resources to educators who seek to provide access to the medieval past while acknowledging that such access is never complete.

As I made my rounds in Connecticut from 2012-2016, taking medieval literature courses in New Haven by day and teaching community college courses in Bridgeport by night, I was thrilled to share with my students autobiographical texts like Augustine's *Confessions* and *The Book of Margery Kempe*. We often started the semester by reading the introduction to *Grammar by Diagram*, going over the difference between descriptive and prescriptive grammar. In our sessions, I insisted that English is a product of social and historical processes in which they, as today's readers and writers, all played a part.[4] Before the class commenced, I had worked with Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (namely Elizabeth Frengel and Ingrid Lennon-Pressey) to plan class visits. These excursions were the times when I saw some of the quieter students pipe up. One who had rarely spoken in the classroom

[1] I thank the editors of the journal for their thoughtful feedback throughout the course of writing this essay. I received two very insightful reader's reports, one of which was from Alex Mueller, the other of which was anonymous. An early version of this essay was first presented for the Dark Archives conference held virtually through Oxford University from September 8-10, 2020. I want to thank the Enclosure reading group (especially Lakshmi Luthra, Kristina Kite, Clementine Keith-Roach, Anna-Nadine Pike, Laura Lasworth, Patricia Wickman, Leah Marie Buturain, Godelinde Perk, and Laura Schawelka) for their incisive comments during a discussion of the texts. Carolyn Funk has been a vital reader and interlocutor of Woolf's writings; Jonathan Goldberg has also, both in correspondence and in his published work, offered unique insight into the transhistorical value of Woolf's work. I would also like to thank Sal Nicolazzo for introducing me to this little-known story by Woolf. My references throughout the article assume that this article might be read by medievalists and by instructors of other periods.

[2] Most notably, Rachel Poser's recent article on Dan-el Padilla Peralta has rekindled a lively debate about the Classics and whiteness.

[3] Recent events have included a lecture by Edith Hall entitled "Negotiating Class and Gender in Classics and the Real World" and another by Sarah Nooter, "Classics, Creativity, and Survival."

[4] See Vitto. I discovered this textbook in 2014 when Candace Barrington shared with me her syllabus for the course "Close Reading the Sentence."

was completely taken with the Book of Hours as an object; international students from Spain worked through Mary Shelley's handwriting (the course started in the Middle Ages but went up to Nella Larsen's 1929 novella *Passing*). What I began to see as I taught these medieval works, and manuscripts from both medieval and modern time periods, is that what are often perceived as elite areas of study—Middle English Literature and Book History (of any period)—possess within them the very tools that can inspire students from any background to see their own response to literary history as *vital*.[5] One of these tools is the very foreignness of medieval manuscripts and the hands they record. In classrooms with various language competencies, the study of Middle English can produce a surprising equalizing effect in which all students are learning something new.

It is from this perspective that I share the following essay, which outlines a course in medieval literature that is grounded in the thought of Virginia Woolf, especially her story "The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn" (1906). How can we become critics ourselves and work to sustain educational and archival institutions precisely by acknowledging their limits and exclusions? This class would invite students to consider the mediated nature of humanistic study—from the primary text to secondary scholarship and even the syllabus itself. The course begins with medieval manuscripts, moving ahead to the early days of modern scholarship on medieval women. Students in this course will explore medieval culture and some of its canonical texts while also researching the lives of ordinary people of the time by reading late medieval letters, biographical portraits drawn from Caroline M. Barron and Anne F. Sutton's *Medieval London Widows 1300-1500*, and other sources professors choose to include.[6] At the same time that students will read medieval scholarship and learn how to begin working in the archive themselves, they will also consider what is missing from the written record, namely those who were too poor to be remembered. Assignments will allow students to use their research to write traditional essays, fictional accounts, or a combination of the two, following the example of Woolf's speculative writing of the medieval past.

One potential response to the current crises in the field is to consider how courses can remain steeped in the Middle Ages while looking at what the period teaches students and scholars about broader theoretical questions. For instance, Julie Orlemanski's essay title "Who Has Fiction?" might be applied to the course I outline:[7] Why not let students incorporate modes of fiction writing in their research on medieval literature? Working from the premise that the historical record is necessarily incomplete, the course invites students to emulate the forms of medieval fiction and modern history writing in the contemporary era, producing creative pieces of writing that are based in research on medieval culture as well as careful readings of Woolf's essays. For instance, in "The Pastons and Chaucer," Woolf refers to the archival letters by Margaret Paston, but she also speculates as to why

[5] As Carolyn Dinshaw tells us in her essay for the inaugural issue of this journal, medieval studies is one of the first multidisciplinary fields. Medieval studies, seen in this light, ought to lend itself to an inclusive curriculum.

[6] The course, with its emphasis on devotional and material cultures, follows the suggestions of those who contributed to the recent colloquium (edited by Watt and Miles) for the *P & P* sister journal. In particular, Laura Miles's essay anticipates the pedagogical claims I make here. For useful material, I recommend selections from Eamon Duffy's *Stripping of the Altars*, especially the commonplace books he discusses from 68-77.

[7] Orlemanski asks in the first section of the essay, "To whom does fiction-making belong, as capacity and practice?" (148). I am also inspired by Natalie Zemon Davis's reflections on the importance of fiction for historians, as she notes in her conclusion to *Fiction in the Archives* that her study of remission tales shows that "… the 'stuff of invention' was widely distributed throughout society…" (111).

the family neglected to find a tombstone for John Senior. The result is a vivid and somewhat humorous essay including lines like this: "For sometimes, instead of riding off on his horse to inspect his crops or bargain with his tenant, Sir John would sit, in broad daylight, reading" (11).[8] This essay, like many by Woolf, marries the written record to that which it leaves to the imagination.

The chief aims of the course arise from Woolf's story on Joan Martyn, and consist of the following:

(1) to explore accounts of the Middle Ages, both in primary works of literature and secondary works of medieval history, especially those based upon the often overlooked narratives of women and the poor

(2) to help students appreciate the materiality of writing and bookmaking, especially in the medieval period

(3) to provide students an opportunity to think critically about questions of access and mediation as they relate to the pre-modern archive

(4) to invite students to respond to all of the above topics with written assignments that demonstrate their understanding of the Middle Ages through the incorporation of period-specific fictional elements

As one student put it in a recent reflection linking *Mrs Dalloway* to medieval manuscripts, a course drawing such connections will also allow students to develop close reading skills, both of texts and images.[9] In the words of that student, they will be able to investigate the 'hidden meaning' of a manuscript illumination at the same time that they consider Woolf's careful choice of a particular word or phrase.

Like Woolf, moreover, students would use the existing records to develop their own medieval characters. Before she could read of Margery Kempe, Woolf wrote of Joan Martyn. She did this by reading medieval literature and, at the same time, imagining what one obscure family might have read, written, owned and felt in the fifteenth century.

Fiction and the Medieval Syllabus

In 1906, Virginia Woolf wrote a story about a female historian who discovered the diary of a young woman from the fifteenth century, Joan Martyn.[10] Writing from East Anglia, not far from the setting of the story, Woolf makes an implicit claim for a transhistorical domestic archive. Such an archive, following the commitments of Woolf's narrative, would take seriously the household knowledge of family members, domestic workers, and even the objects within the home. This *domestic* archive includes more than written texts. Joan Martyn's fictional diary refers to this alternative record: "Old

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[8] *The Common Reader*, 1948.

[9] I thank Sonja Drimmer and Elaine Treharne for sharing sample syllabi. Another pedagogical journal to consult on teaching manuscripts is *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Teaching (SMART)*, hosted by Wichita State University and edited by Kristie A. Bixby.

[10] The story was never published during Woolf's life, but the manuscript is held at the New York Public Library and has been edited twice now. The title "The Journal of the Mistress Joan Martyn" was not Woolf's. My citations are from the edition by Squier et al. Marea Mitchell and Heidi Stalla have both reflected on Woolf's approach to history, time, and the reader in this story. See also Kore-Schröder and Lojo-Rodriguez.

Anne was my mothers [sic] nurse; she was mine; & still she mends our clothes, & knows more about household things than any, save my mother. She will tell you, too, the history of each chair & table or piece of tapestry in the house…" (20: 253). 'Old Anne,' whose expression is tied to her voice and her manual labor, is presented here as a multi-generational record of the family home. The owner of none of the objects, she is the sole proprietor of the continuous history found in material objects—chair, table, tapestry.

Woolf's story, written less than thirty years before *The Book of Margery Kempe* would be discovered, highlights the arbitrariness of the archive. It urges us to ask, what if the Butler-Bowdon family had never opened the cabinet in search of a ping-pong ball, and we had only the printed extracts of the *Book* to read? Woolf's narrative of storytelling that is experienced by all, once the gates to the estate have been opened, is a powerful message today as universities consider how to make higher education more accessible. I envision this course as one that could be structured in such a way that it appeals both to students of medieval literature and to students taking general education, writing, or Humanities courses during their undergraduate careers.[11]

In both the *Book* and Woolf's "Journal," the reader is forced to consider the limits of the archive. Whose life was never recorded? Texts such as Woolf's fiction and the *Book* allow no straightforward reading on the part of students. Instead, they invite them to question how the text came to be, how it got to them, and where they can take it. The course would follow Woolf's sources by introducing medieval manuscripts while also raising questions about what remains absent from archival records: lost household objects, the voices of the land-tillers, and the religious visions of young women like the fictional Joan Martyn. Fundamental to the "Journal" itself are questions of which texts are worth studying, which human subjects are best at telling stories, and how books preserve narratives both textually and visually.

Course Outline

The 1880s gave birth to literary scholar Hope Emily Allen, historian Eileen Power, and novelist Virginia Woolf.[12] This course grows out of this fascinating convergence of the lives of three pioneering women writers in order to help students appreciate both the history of medieval studies and the diversity of approaches to archives of the distant past. Touching upon but moving away from canonical works, the course takes up the challenge posed by Power, which is to study the Middle Ages from the kitchen.[13] Power's subject matter deviates from standard histories by focusing on people she calls "quite ordinary": the peasant, prioress, housewife, merchant, and clothier (viii). Her approach differs, too, as she provides what she calls "reconstructions" and "personification" of the past (viii).

[11] If the course were to be offered to seniors or even graduate students, I would recommend assigning a few examples of critical writings on Margery Kempe, the Pastons, and other lesser-known women from the period; for instance, Carolyn Dinshaw's chapter on Hope Emily Allen, Carissa Harris's chapter on medieval women's songs, Rebecca Krug's chapter on Margaret Paston's letter-writing, and Marion Turner's biography of Chaucer, which briefly discusses the nunnery in Chapter Eight.

[12] These titles are somewhat reductive, as Woolf herself was a literary critic and historian, and Allen also wrote short stories.

[13] In the first chapter of *Medieval People*, Power writes, "This book is chiefly concerned with the kitchens of History," (2). Power's work has been described by Maxine L. Berg as a project of "social history"; Power was co-editor (with J. H. Clapham) of the first volume of *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*.

Power's description of her own research methods is yet another reminder of how historical and fictional writing is intertwined, as illustrated by her chapter title "Madame Eglentyne, Chaucer's Prioress in Real Life."

The course would draw from Power's study and from the primary texts Woolf uses both in the story and in another essay on late medieval England called "The Pastons and Chaucer."[14] A possible list of readings, using the "Journal" as an anchor for the course, is as follows:

(1) Selected illuminated manuscripts and scholarship on the medieval book

(2) Selected Middle English Lyrics[15]

(3) *The story of Tristan and Isolt*[16]

(4) Selections from Chaucer's *Dream Visions and Other Poems*[17]

(5) Lydgate, *The Temple of Glas*

(6) *The Book of Margery Kempe*

(7) Selections from the Paston Letters

(8) Selected printed editions by William Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde (ex. *Temple of Glas*)

(9) Selected lives from *Medieval London Widows: 1300-1500*[18]

(10) Eileen Power: selections from *Medieval People, Medieval Women* and *Medieval English Nunneries*

(11) Woolf: "The Pastons and Chaucer," "Lives of the Obscure," "The Elizabethan Lumber Room," and the unpublished "Anon"

(12) Woolf: "The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn"

This organization leads up to the story, but it may also prove instructive to ask the students to read the story twice, once at the beginning and again at the end of the course. This would be an interesting way for both students and instructor to see what they have learned about the Middle Ages, Woolf's writing, and their own reading habits.

The course would likely not require transcription, but should use a set of examples (selected by the instructor) to introduce students to the field of codicology so that they have the option to compare edited texts to original manuscripts.[19] The Auchinleck manuscript, which is digitized and thoroughly

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[14] The essay offers students a model of both literary interpretation and historical writing based on a pointed question. In this case, Woolf attempts to account for the reason why John Paston's son, John Paston II, never finished his tombstone. As Helen Castor notes, citing the letters, "…perennially short of money, he never completed his father's tomb at Bromholm Priory."

[15] See Luria and Hoffman.

[16] For a Middle English translation of the text, see Lupack.

[17] Edited by Lynch.

[18] Students should supplement these readings with use of the *DNB* and with the primary sources listed in Power's bibliography.

[19] A necessarily incomplete review of resources on medieval manuscripts, especially for readers outside of this particular field: Shailor; Clemens and Graham; Johnston, and Van Dussen; Drimmer; Wakelin; Da Rold and Treharne; Sawyer; Rudy.

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edited, includes "Sir Tristrem" and thus would serve as a helpful introduction to the first text in the course (fol. 281ra). The Ellesmere manuscript (fully digitized by the Huntington Library) and *The Book of Margery Kempe*, which is the recent documentary edition by Joel W. Fredell and his team, are also excellent choices for this introductory portion of the course. The main purpose of this brief unit would be to familiarize students with how a medieval manuscript looks, and how books can record not only texts but also histories of their use, their readers, and their decay.

The discussion would then progress to the medieval works of literature to which Woolf refers in the "Journal" (and related writings, number 11 on the list of readings). Selections from Chaucer can follow the interests of the instructor, but I suggest here the collection edited by Lynch in an effort to link the genre of dream visions with the religious vision Woolf explores through the character of Joan Martyn.[20] The next dream vision students might read in the course is Lydgate's *Temple of Glas,* which Woolf may have chosen to include because she had found in John Paston's letters that he was reading the poem.[21] *The Book of Margery Kempe* will introduce the middle portion of the course, for which life writing becomes central.[22] Item eight on the list of texts suggests an optional session or more on early printed editions of the texts explored in the course, which might include Caxton's *Temple of Glas* and *Book of Fame*, de Worde's excerpts on Margery Kempe, or either printer's edition(s) of *The Canterbury Tales*.[23]

Historical readings from Woolf's contemporaries will provide students with the research material they need for their final writing assignments. I have selected female scholars in particular for these readings, so that students are not only reading about lesser known people in medieval history, but also lesser known scholars at a time when working as a female academic in medieval studies presented challenges that are easily overlooked given the high number of women attending college today.[24] The course would culminate in a close reading of a few of Woolf's essays on pre-modern England and the "Journal"; this might frame the story as an example of the newly discovered manuscript it explores.

Digital projects to share with students include Henrike Lähnemann's edition of *The Medingen Prayer-Book of 1478*, Katherine Hindley's website on rolls and fragments, and the *Old Books New Science* Lab led by Alexandra Gillespie at the University of Toronto.

[20] Recall, too, that Woolf wrote at the dawn of the field of psychoanalysis and thus modern concepts of the [Freudian] interpretation of dreams.

[21] As J. Allan Mitchell notes in his introduction to the text, marriage was a key theme found both within the work and in the reception history of the poem; this would fit well with Woolf's emphasis on Joan Martyn's impending marriage.

[22] See Davis for the edition and Watt for a translation. Students may wish to go beyond these by accessing the letters digitally (from the Oxford edition of 1971) on the University of Michigan website. Letters by Margaret Paston on her family and household governance, in addition to letters documenting John Paston Jr.'s reading habits, will find new expression in Woolf's work at the end of the course.

[23] In "Anon," Woolf criticizes the printing press for killing 'Anon,' the voice behind the medieval lyrics she cites at the beginning of the essay (384). The lyrics, as the footnotes tell us, are numbers IV and XXXIII in Chambers and Sidgwick.

[24] I base this statement on the United States. A 2011 study by Martha J. Bailey and Susan M Dynarski found that "the daughters of high-income parents" have driven up the numbers of educational attainment for women, who now outpace men in rates of college completion. The income gap in postsecondary education, Bailey and Dynarski note, has only continued to increase. See, "Inequality in Postsecondary Education," in *Whither Opportunity? Rising Inequality and the Uncertain Life Chances of Low-Income Children*, edited by Greg J. Duncan and Richard J. Murnane.

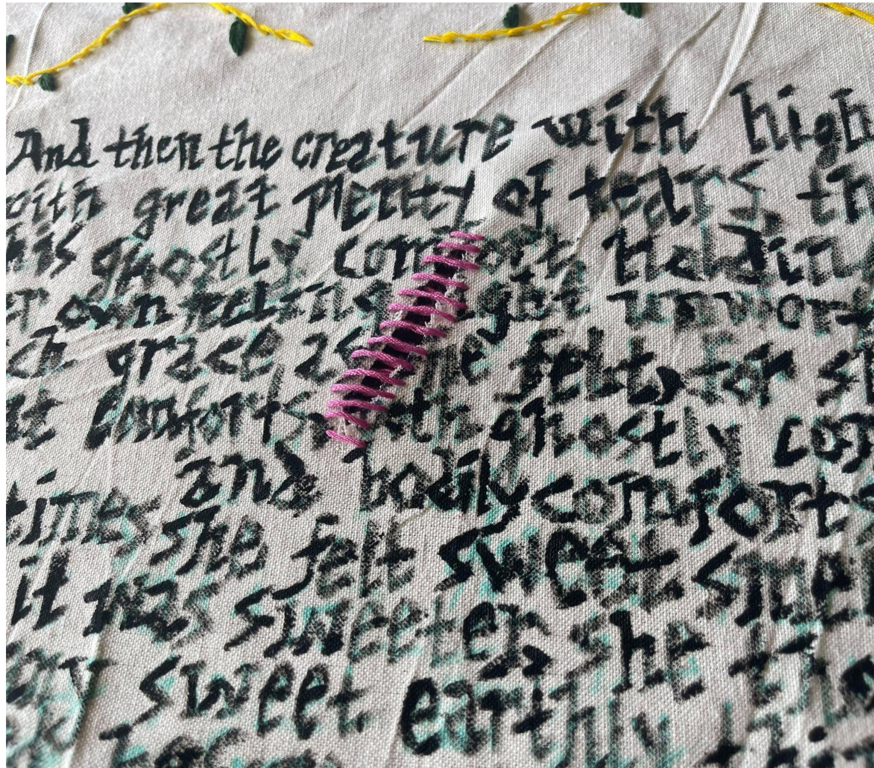
One option for introducing the question of women's access to higher education, especially during Woolf's lifetime, might be to include selections from *A Room of One's Own* on the syllabus. I have left this off for now in order to emphasize those writings by Woolf students are less likely to encounter. Hope Emily Allen's career exemplifies such challenges, as Deanne Williams, Dinshaw, John C. Hirsh and others have shown; see Hirsh.

As students will slowly see, they are encountering three dimensions at once: the narrative frames of historian Rosamond Merridew reading Joan Martyn, Woolf reading both of these, and their own reading of the story by Woolf. A single (geographical) region, as the editors note, unites young Joan, Rosamond, and Woolf, who wrote her story in a "moated Elizabethan manor house on the Norfolk-Suffolk border," a few miles from the setting of the story, Blo' Norton Hall (237). Woolf's physical connection to the sources she uses in the story helps to establish an underlying argument about the importance of household objects in Middle English writings.

By the end of the course, students would choose between two final writing projects:[25] For one, they would write their own version of a research-based imaginative essay modelled on "The Pastons and Chaucer." The other would ask them to create their own piece as a 'Rosamond Merridew' of today's time, writing about their research methods and a text they discover. This text could be an existing manuscript or one that is created anew while incorporating research on the Middle Ages. The second option would emulate the form of Woolf's short story on Joan Martyn. If the student selects the option to create a new manuscript based on his or her research, the professor might evaluate the fictional work by asking the student to submit a separate reflection and bibliography. Another option might be to offer a workshop for peer review, which would allow the instructor to assess other students' knowledge of course material as they relate it to the fictional piece of their classmate. The professor might also emphasize the research reflection preceding either manuscript (existing or created) when grading the second option.

Intervening assignments, in addition to weekly readings or online discussion posts, might include one that I have been assigning over the past year, which asks students to select a chapter from the *Book of Margery Kempe* and to create a mock medieval manuscript from it. They develop their own title, decide how to format and illustrate the text, and can consider including intertexts—mostly devotional works like those named in the *Book*, but these could also include the other medieval texts on the syllabus. The images below and on the next page show parts of mock manuscripts or 'pre-modern editions' of students' selected excerpts from the *Book of Margery Kempe*. In the next section of this essay, I offer a close reading of Woolf's story in order to develop the course's emphasis on the medieval manuscript as an object at once enchanted and limited in comparison to other aspects of medieval culture: the pilgrimage, the song, or the oral storytelling of the unlettered.

[25] These are assignments I will be teaching for the first time this summer, and I have only a sketch of them to offer at this stage.



Savannah Munoz's edition of a passage from I.35 (left) uses embroidery in order to recreate a repaired manuscript.

AS THE SAYD CREATUR
WAS IN A CHIRCH OF
SEYNT MARGARET TO SEY
HIR DEVOCYONS, THER CAM
A MAN KNELYNG AT HIR
BAK, WRYNGYNG HYS HAND-
-YS AND SCHEWYNG TOKENYS
OF GRET HEVYNES. SCHE,
PARCEYVYNG HYS HEVYNES,
ASKYD WHAT HYM EYLYD.
HE SEYD IT STOD RYTH HARD
WYTH HYM, FOR HYS WYFE
WAS NEWLY DELYVERYD OF
A CHILDE AND SCHE WAS
OWT HIR MENDE. "AND, DAME,"
HE SEYTH, "SCHE KNOWYTH
NOT ME NE NON OF HIR

Rachel Heinemann's edition of I.75 (right) emulates early print.

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"The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn" and the Mystical Manuscript

The keepers of manuscripts in Woolf's story are not librarians; rather, they are a farmer named John Martyn and a strange traveler known only as 'Richard.' The story opens with a comparison between manuscripts and people. Woolf's narrator, Rosamond, shares that she has won fame for her research into medieval land tenure. This fame has come at a social cost, however, as she reflects that she is a woman who has "exchanged a husband & a family & a house in which [she] may grow old for *certain fragments of yellow parchment*; which only a few people can read & still fewer would care to read if they could" (240, emphasis mine). Throughout the course of her conversation with John Martyn, Rosamond finds that he too has learned how to exchange people for manuscripts and to feel that the dead surround him simply because he holds their estate books. Here is where Woolf first refers to the "pen" that her diarist will later describe: "He unrolled a long strip of parchment, upon which an elaborate genealogical tree had been inscribed, with many faded flourishes & extravagances of some mediaeval pen. The boughs spread so widely by degrees, that they were lopped unmercifully by the limits of the sheet…" (249). The parchment does violence to the family, 'lopping' off any of those it cannot physically accommodate.

What brings the family back to life is the voice of the farmer. Here Woolf suggests not only that the manuscript is insufficient for recording family history, but so too is the written record: "No words of mine, or attempts at a report of his words, can give the curious impression which he produced, *as he spoke*, that all these 'relations' … were just, so to speak, brooding round the corner…" (250, emphasis mine). Rosamond is suddenly convinced that no antiquary is needed here, as the family remains real—as Woolf writes, "all flesh & blood like I am" (251)—despite having been dead for centuries. And yet she asks to borrow the papers of John's grandmother Joan, papers that did not impress John upon reading them; they offered nothing in the way of 'method' the way the account books of his forefathers did. Rosamond makes off with the papers, which she calls "Grandmother Joan" (251). Still alive in the 'flesh' of parchment, Joan is wrapped in brown paper and given to Rosamond, who walks away from Martyn Hall.[26] Just as Rosamond the historian finds her methods to be lacking, the journal of Joan Martyn weaves a narrative that places the voices of the poor above the pens of the propertied.

On the eighteenth page of Woolf's manuscript, the narrative shifts, suddenly, to the voice of Joan, whose narration begins with a description of her mother's embroidering in the light of day. This act, which cannot be done in darkness, is similar to the reading and writing of the text, and is yet an act that ties the mother to her servant, Anne, who sits with the family by the fire in the evenings. Joan's eagerness to listen to Anne about "household things" (253) stands in contrast to what she calls her "duty to read" (253). Having received the manuscript of Lydgate's "The Palace of Glass,"[27] she reads it to the family.

The next scene featuring a manuscript extends this subtle debate between Joan and her mother as one morning, Joan is called from her book to talk with her mother: "She had a sheet spread before her, covered with close writing. She bade me read it…" (255). Having consulted the family accounts

[26] The book covered in brown paper also appears in *Mrs. Dalloway*, when Sally gives Clarissa a copy of William Morris. My reading of "flesh" as text is informed by Bruce Holsinger's essay on manuscript production as cruelty to animals.

[27] The editors note that this should read *The Temple of Glas*.

and determined the state of the land, Joan's mother informs her that it is time she were married (256). In these first two scenes of reading we can begin to see why Joan will soon conclude that "flesh & pens divide us" (264).[28] Her mother's preference for Lydgate, whose work is preserved in the manuscript sent from London to Joan's father, over the stories of the Northmen, as sung by the servant (253), is directly related to her mother's willingness to marry Joan off for the financial well-being of the family.

The end of the journal introduces a symbolic manuscript, carried by one of the strange "pilgrims & pedlars" who have begun cropping up on the roads surrounding the Martyn estate:

> … one bright May morning, we saw the figure of a man striding along the road, walking fast & waving his arms as though he conversed with the air. He had a great wallet at his back & we saw that he held a stout book of parchment in one hand at which he glanced occasionally: & all the while he shouted words in a kind of measure with his feet, & his voice rose up & down, in menace or in plaint… (259-60)

This "figure of a man," as Woolf's fictional diarist describes him, ostensibly sells books, but this description makes clear that what he really offers is a performance of texts, the rhythm of which he marks with his feet and his voice. For him, the book is a companion, not unlike the relatives of John Martyn with whom Rosamond speaks during the first half of Woolf's story. The man, who says his name is Richard, explains that he has a book of the "stories of the Knights of the round Table; written out by the hand of Master Anthony himself, & painted by the Monks of Cam Brea" (260).

The climax of Woolf's story is the public reading of "Master Richard," who tells the story of Tristan and Isolt while standing on a mound of grass (261). The journal takes care to mention that for this reading the gates were open and all laborers on the estate were invited to listen. Richard's highly physical, melodic 'reading,' clearly done from memory, transports both him and the listeners, so that, at the end, Joan says she "had half a mind to stretch out a hand; & tell him he was safe" (262). After the reading and dinner with the Martyn family, Richard places his wares out on the table, various pieces of jewelry and sheets of parchment. Of all of these Joan wishes most to see Richard's book: "…he placed the precious volume in my hands & bade me look at its pictures… They were like little mirrors held up to those visions which I had seen passing in the air but here they *were caught & stayed for ever*" (262, emphasis mine). The book, Joan's entry continues, "was as yellow & gnarled outside as the missal of any pious priest; but inside the brilliant knights & ladies moved, undimmed, to the unceasing melody of beautiful words. *It was a fairy world that he shut inside his coat*" (262, emphasis mine).[29]

It is this world Joan envisions in the next entry as she takes a pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady at Walsingham. Here, *walking becomes a performance of reading*, and the manuscript she has just seen is now replayed as Joan has a vision of "men & women, & lame people & blind people & some were in rags, & some had ridden on horseback…" (264). It is here where she reflects, "I thought desperately for a moment that it was terrible that *flesh & pens should divide us*. They would have strange, merry stories to tell" (ibid., emphasis mine). Woolf's story presents multiple possibilities for lamenting loss, and

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[28] The inadequacy of pens is present here too, as another editor, Susan Dick, has "(fens?)" down instead of "pens" (59). This may offer a useful point to share with students on the paleographical challenges scholars face when editing both medieval and modern manuscripts.

[29] This is the scene I mention with regard to the illuminated manuscripts to be taught at the beginning of the course.

obstacles standing in the way of our direct access to the past, to the dead. The written text writes over the images of the past, but the images she sees in Richard's book give rise to a sense of absent voices, voices of people who might have once told "merry stories" (264).

Queer Volumes: Discovering Joan Martyn, Margery Kempe, and Hope Emily Allen

Writing about the discovery of the manuscript of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Deanne Williams offered this condensed observation: "If she had not been rediscovered, she would have had to be invented" (137). As my discussion of Woolf's fictional diary of Joan Martyn reveals, Woolf was already at work on such an invention when, in 1934, Hope Emily Allen identified British Library Additional MS 61823 as the *Book*. How could Woolf have known that the way in which her fictional historian Rosamond found Joan's diary would find itself so resemblant to the way in which the *Book* would be discovered?[30]

The course's chief aim—to bring historical and fictional writing together—stems from Woolf's approaches as a writer and researcher as well as from the work of her contemporaries.[31] This essay has suggested that medieval studies can benefit from the use of sources beyond the Middle Ages, including the modernist short story or essay on medieval subjects. Borrowing from both the structure and the sources of a single story by Woolf, I have presented a malleable course plan that allows students to consider both the thrill of discovering new strips of parchment, on one hand, and, on the other, the disappointment readers often face when looking for records of the lives of ordinary people of the past, especially women.

In addition to inviting students to think in new ways about the making of history and literature, a course such as the one I have proposed here will allow students to begin studying the medieval book as a material object. It might even lead students to imagine the medieval past so clearly that, like Joan on the way to Walsingham, they can recognize the people who never made it into the archives we know today. By focusing on the fiction and essays of Woolf, students are encouraged to locate the limits of archival knowledge while also considering their capacities as researchers and writers of both traditional and creative forms. The survival of medieval studies requires that we, together with our students, keep writing the field.

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[30] A classroom exercise in closely reading Rosamond Merridew's interaction with John the Norfolk farmer next to the historical account of the son of the Butler-Bowdoin family may prove to be quite fruitful. See Kelliher.

[31] As Mary Beard notes on classicist Jane Harrison, a friend of Woolf's, "It is only a hair's breadth, the arbitrariness of biographical boundaries, that keeps her from 'the Bloomsbury Group' or its close penumbra" (141). Similarly, Juliet Dusinberre writes that "Woolf's love of records, and the perception of the paucity of records relating to women, had led her to consider becoming a historian" (130).

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