Marginalia and Annotation in Victoria, McPherson Library, MS.Eng.1

Types of Marginalia

- **Manicules**
- **Doodles**
- **Owner Signature?**

Overview

Victoria, McPherson Library, MS.Eng.1, a late fifteenth-century copy of John Lydgate’s The Fall of Princes, is one of few complete medieval manuscripts housed at UVic; it is our only Middle English manuscript. In 1978, Anthony Edwards assessed it in the journal Manuscripta, and claimed, “the Victoria [Lydgate] manuscript is unlikely to be a text of great significance to students.” This project opens up Edwards’ appraisal through study of the manuscript and its poem, with special focus on its marginalia. The Victoria Lydgate is a valuable resource, and its marginalia in particular opens multiple avenues of research on medieval and early modern readership and book ownership. Although the main text is Middle English, the marginalia is trilingual—Middle English, Latin, and French—and it consists of structural markings (e.g., section labels or titles not introduced by the original scribe), scribal notations and corrections, an early modern signature (“Wyllum Fermer”), and commentary on the text.

Types of Annotation

- **Dots and Shanks**
- **Bracketing and Braces**
- **Corrections**

Findings

Victoria, McPherson Library, MS.Eng.1 houses a variety of marginalia and annotation, but it is, perhaps, most interesting to note notation that is specific to women. There are multiple notes of envoi throughout the whole of the manuscript, but there is one instance where the envoi indicates that it is a “l’envoi pl[a]ur les femmes” (fol.7v). This is not the only occurrence in which a marginal note in The Fall of Princes has been specifically directed towards or about women. The Longeat MS (a comparable MS housed in Somerset, UK) also contains a “nota for women” (fol.159.15r) directly opposite a passage that discusses the Lombard princess Romilda, who is rejected by Cacanus after spending the night with him and later dies impaled on a stake. Another item of interest regarding women and readership can be found in the bracketing and braces that annotate our manuscript throughout. The annotator has explicitly singled out passages which address women or their character. This is, potentially, indicative of either a female reader or a special interest in female characters in the context of The Fall of Princes.

Women and Readership

Victoria, McPherson Library, MS.Eng.1 is not the most attractive manuscript in the world, but what it lacks in style it makes up for in content. The differing hands and scripts in the annotations and marginalia denote multiple users of the manuscript over time, all of whom appear to engage with the manuscript in different ways. The level of engagement with McPherson MS.Eng.1 varies depending on the user of the text. The interaction between the main script and the text depicts a user mined, on multiple levels, in the content of the manuscript and likely more than one exemplar. This scribe adds some notes of envoi, brackets and braces, corrections, and annotations of content, frequently noted misplaced lines with dots and shanks. Other, later, users are demarcated by the changes in the style of the marginal script, as evidenced by letter practice and a possible owner signature. It is also interesting to note that certain figures, often historical or mythological, are tracked throughout with the use of brackets. Another point of interest is rhyming braces, which periodically, but only intermittently, keep track of rhyme scheme. Contrary to Edward’s previous claim, Victoria, McPherson Library, MS.Eng.1 is a manuscript that is ripe with possibilities for future inquiry about medieval and early modern readership and book ownership.

Bibliography


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