The Emotional Intent Behind Rubbing, Touching and Kissing Medieval Manuscripts

Manuscripts from the late middle ages were not merely for reading, but often became a medium onto which a reader projected their emotions. For instance, most of the full-page miniatures in the Gough Psalter were heavily and repeatedly handled, as if the reader were physically responding to events being depicted. In the scene of the Baptism of Jesus, the faces of John the Baptist and the angel appear to have been touched and the face and torso of Jesus’ skin wet-touched, as if to bathe it. Likewise, in the scene at the garden of Gethsemane, the exposed skin of the hands and face of Christ were severely rubbed, as if in an attempt to destroy his enemies. The only untouched image was Doubting Thomas’.

While most scholarship has focused on the conditions of production of this and related manuscripts, this talk will investigate their piecemeal destruction, questioning how and why this book mattered to its owner, how patterns of wear in the manuscript reveal the rituals to which it was subjected, and what emotions lay behind these vigorous acts of handling.

Tuesday, 30 April 2019
7.00 pm – 8.00 pm
Level 5, Possibility and Imagination Room
National Library Building

Free admission. Please register via www.nlb.gov.sg/golibrary

Speaker
Kathryn M. Rudy (Professor of Art History, St Andrews) is the author of five books, including Rubrics, Images and Indulgences in Late Medieval Netherlandish Manuscripts (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Piety in Pieces: How Medieval Readers Customised Their Manuscripts (Open Book Publishers, 2016); and Postcards on Parchment: The Social Lives of Medieval Books (Yale University Press, 2015). She is currently a fellow at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in Amsterdam. From 2019 to 2022 she will hold a Leverhulme Fellowship to develop tools for the technical analysis of medieval manuscripts. She developed this talk during a Paul Mellon Senior Fellowship.

Chair
Katherine Hindley is an Assistant Professor of Medieval English Literature at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Her research explores beliefs about the magical and medical power of written and spoken words.

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