Debates about the use and abuse of images raise many questions about the role of mediatory objects within Christian worship. Images and sculptures, famously described by Gregory the Great as the ‘books of the laity’, provided imaginative access to and information about God; they were also a means of encouraging devotion and exciting desire for him. But the more effective they were, the more they also risked drawing attention to themselves and becoming an object of devotion or fetishisation in their own right – ‘idolatry’.

Underlying the problem of images is ultimately a problem about the right and wrong uses of the material world and all its objects, bodies, texts, institutions, practices and appearances. For this reason, the problem of images even has implications for certain ‘apophatic’ forms of contemplation, which emphasise the need for the subject to strip away earthly phenomena in order to open her/himself up to the divinity. It also has implications for thinking about the institution and phenomenology of the church. Debates about images become very intense in late medieval England due to the emergence of the English heresy of Lollardy, which attacked images as part of a larger critique of the church, one that focused on shrines, pilgrimages and incense, as well as many other ritual practices and priestly interventions. In response to this, the fifteenth century was witness to a sustained backlash against Lollardy and a renewed espousal of many image-using and related practices. However, Christian theories and anxiety about the image and the idol also find expression throughout the later Middle Ages in an obsessive interest in the devotional practices of other cultures – both in the gods of classical antiquity and its literature, and in the imagined idols of contemporary Muslim culture (especially self-revealing in this last case, as contemporary Islam was a non image-using religion). Equally interesting, these religious theories also permeate secular medieval culture and find expression in the courtly art, literature and psychology of love.

General Introductory Reading (please read at least one or two of these before the course begins; sections of some of them will be recommended for particular classes). Essential reading for each class appears first (there is more secondary reading for the first class than for subsequent ones). All of the required primary and secondary texts will be scanned and provided on the Faculty Moodle internet site. I can provide references for original-language editions for texts cited here in translation.

Finally, please bring to each seminar photocopies of one image that you have found in your reading or elsewhere that we might discuss!


Amy Knight Powell, *Depositions. Scenes from the Late Medieval Church and the Modern Museum* (New York: Zone Books, 2012)


**Class 1: Images (and Relics)**


Images provided by you!

*Secondary Literature:*

Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol*, Introduction and chapters 1, 4 and 5
Shannon Gayk, *Image, Text* (above), Introduction, chapters 1 and 3
Sarah Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire* (above), Introduction and chapter 6

Selected Further Materials to follow up if you are interested:
Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Oure Lorde Jesus Christ*, ed. Michael J. Sargent (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), see, for example, pp.9-41, 163-98
Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality* (above), chapter 1

Class 2: Iconoclasm, Anti-materialism and Apophaticism
*The Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. Patrick J. Gallacher, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), prologue and chapters 1-16 (pp.21-48); online at http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/cloufrm.htm; older edition by Phillis Hodgson, EETS, os 218 (London: OUP, 1943)
[Marguerite Porete, *Mirouer des simples ames* translated into Middle English with commentary insertions by ‘MN’:] ‘Margaret Porete: *The Mirror of Simple Souls, A Middle English translation*, *Archivio Italiano per la Storia della Pietà* 5 (1968), 241-355 (pp.247-68)
Images provided by you!

Secondary Literature:
Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers* (above), chapter 5; the same essay appears as chapter 4 in her *England’s Iconoclasts* (above).
Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol* (above), chapter 4
Shannon Gayk, *Image, Text* (above), chapter 1

Selected Further Materials to follow up:
Sarah Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire* (above), chapter 1
D. Vance Smith, ‘Negative Langland’, *YLS* 23 (2009), 33-59

Class 3: The Idols of the Pagans

Images provided by you!

**Secondary Literature:**


Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol* (above), Introduction and chapter 2

Further Materials to follow up:


Compare the Knight’s Tale with Boccaccio’s description of the three temples in the *Teseida*, in *Chaucer’s Boccaccio. Sources for Troilus and the Knight’s and Franklin’s tales. Translations from the Filostrato, Teseida and Filocolo*, trans. N.R. Havely (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1980; repr. 1992), pp.00-00.

Chaucer, Franklin’s Tale, in *The Riverside Chaucer* (above)


Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (London: Routledge, 1991), chapters 1 and 3


**Class 4: Either Christian and ‘Saracen’ Gods, Images and Relics**


Chaucer, Second Nun’s Tale, in *The Riverside Chaucer* (above)


*Images provided by you!*

**Secondary Literature:**

Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol* (above), chapter 3


Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality* (above), chapters 2 and 3

**Further Sources to follow up:**


F.E. Peters, *Jerusalem. The Holy City in the Eyes of Chroniclers, Visitors, Pilgrims,*
Class 4: Or Love’s Idolatry
Selected Occitan, French and English Lyrics

Images provided by you (you might check out Robertson below)!

Secondary Literature:
Michael Camille, The Gothic Idol (above), pp.298-37
Nicolette Zeeman, ‘The Idol of the Text’ in Images, Idolatry and Iconoclasm, ed. Dimmick (above), pp.43-62
Sarah Stanbury, The Visual Object of Desire (above), chapter 3

Selected Further Materials to follow up:
Guillaume de Machaut, Le livre dou voir dit (The Book of the True Poem), ed. Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, trans. R. Barton Palmer (New York: Garland, 1998), lines 1-1715, 7305-8261 (pp.4-123, 503-63)
Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, Knight’s Tale in The Riverside Chaucer (above).

D.W. Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer. Studies in Medieval Perspectives (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962), figs 8, 9, 15-20, 23-7 etc; in chapter 5 Robertson focuses on ‘love idolatry’ in a very vivid way, though with a now discredited negative slant