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# Review of Scholarship



*Gloria Cigman*

## GLORIA CIGMAN ON MEDIEVAL SERMON STUDIES

*Gloria Cigman is a youthful, energetic, and quick-witted scholar, who nevertheless insists that she came into the academic world as a "mature student." Since completing her thesis at Oxford University in 1968, she has been a lecturer at the University of Warwick, Coventry, and has gradually focused her enthusiasm for literature on the little-studied field of medieval sermons. The effect of her spirit on this field is most apparent in her publication of Medieval Sermon Studies Newsletter (MSSN), which has grown rapidly during its first two years, and shows signs of providing the field with a coherency and direction lacking in most disciplines. Equally important, MSSN was instrumental in organizing a Medieval Sermon Studies Symposium at Oxford (18-20 July 1979), embracing scholars from all the far-flung disciplines which touch upon sermons. While Comitatus 10 has gone to press prior to this symposium, it is a fair guess that some important questions will have been discussed during its sessions—including the possibility of expanding MSSN to a full-size journal of medieval sermon studies. Clearly the sub-discipline of sermon studies is undergoing important and interesting changes, with Gloria Cigman among the chief participants in the discussion of where the field should go—and how to get there.*

*The Comitatus staff is privileged to hear Gloria Cigman's views, and is pleased to be able to convey some small portion of her remarks to the journal's readers. For those whose interest is aroused by this interview, Gloria Cigman may be contacted at the English Department, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL, England.*

**Rebecca Ziegler:** Why a sermon studies newsletter? Have many people specialized in sermon studies as a discipline—or have most looked at sermons from the viewpoint of some other discipline, such as literature or history?

**Gloria Cigman:** MSSN started because I thought I was working on sermons in absolute isolation. I worked on a portion of an unedited Lollard collection for my thesis, back in 1965 to 1968, and nobody at that time seemed to be interested in sermons. The only talk about sermons was in

the two books by Owst, who obviously had remained interested in sermons—but inconsiderately died so he wasn't around for me to talk to. I thought I was absolutely on an island. And then Elizabeth Salter from York got in touch with me, said she'd heard about my sermons, and asked if she could borrow my thesis. We talked at length, and she—who has done a lot of work on Middle English prose and is interested in alliterative prose—was very interested in my material. This really revived my interest in sermons, which had subsided for about five years. Then Elizabeth Salter and Derek Pearsall invited me up to the Center for Medieval Studies at York to give a paper. That was a tremendous breakthrough for me, because here were these people—about thirty, faculty and graduate students—with lots of interest in sermons, and the session went on all afternoon. And Elizabeth and Derek were putting their students on to unedited sermon material.

So I went back to Oxford all fired with enthusiasm, and put a formal proposal to the Early English Text Society, that the society publish my sermon collection. I then found that over the ten years or so that had passed since I started working on sermons, people who had said 'this is not interesting material' had been putting their own graduate students on to sermons.

Once I got back into my stride I thought, 'here are graduate students in Oxford and in York, and here are Elizabeth Salter and Derek Pearsall—who else is there anywhere else?' I thought there might be a couple of dozen of us across the universe who were working on sermons or interested in them. So that was how I hatched the idea of the newsletter, and the first one came about because a number of medievalists had said 'well, you're interested in sermons and want to know who else is, why don't you write to \_\_\_\_?' And they suggested names like Paul Meyvaert of *Speculum* and Dennis Dutschke of *Chronica*; quite a short list, but letters started coming back, and that's what put together the first issue of the newsletter. Since then it has just avalanched. Correspondence keeps coming at me from all directions. By the time I got to the fourth issue I reckon I'd got a mailing-list of about 250 paid-up subscribers!

**Gretchen Flesher:** Is the newsletter self-financing at this point?

**GC:** Well, yes. It's even got about 200 pounds in the bank. A number of Americans wrote to me incredulously when the original subscription was three dollars, saying 'you can't have meant three dollars, so I'm sending you ten dollars.'

**GF:** Are you really doing this single-handedly?

**GC:** Several scholars are now acting as coordinators, but I assemble material and handle letters. Professor Murphy, of UC Davis, organizes distribution in North America. Every now and again I put aside a whole day and deal with it, and I start arranging and scotch-taping material that will go to the typist. I can't cope with it getting any bigger, but there is a case for, if not long evaluative book reviews, at least descriptive book reviews;

which would mean writing out to people and chasing them. At the moment it's all on a small scale; but I clearly can't confine it to that scale—perforce, it's going to get larger and larger.

**Steve Halasey:** What direction will *MSSN* take as it grows?

**GC:** I hope that what we're seeing is the beginning of a recognition that there is indeed here a field of study; that this newsletter, which started off without any particularly lofty aspirations, is revealing how broad that field is. Where *MSSN* goes from here remains to be seen. I've set aside the final morning of the Oxford symposium to discuss what's going to happen to the newsletter, because readers are divided into some who say 'keep it as it is, it's cozy, it's chatty, it's friendly,' while others say 'no, there's scope here for a journal.' Certainly, looking at your journal—which I'm immensely impressed with, I must say—it seems to me that this is what we must do. Starting a sermons journal might not necessarily result in a very good journal at first, but it's up to the people involved in the work to make it better.

**RZ:** It would be a good idea to do both; the newsletter serves a separate function that a journal can't serve—being a forum for people to say what they're working on, and to ask for suggestions and so forth.

**GC:** But I don't see why a sermons journal couldn't have a section—maybe not in every issue, maybe just once a year—which summarizes what people are working on and has notes and queries as well as articles.

**Bill Creasy:** Could you afford to do that? The fourth issue of *MSSN* has twenty-three pages; an annual would have an awful lot of material.

**GC:** Well, I know; and there are no articles in the first four issues. At the moment I'm simply gathering ideas. And certainly some of the American medieval academic publications do the two things: *Speculum* has a newsletter as well, and the MLA has a series of newsletters. These are the sorts of things that will be discussed at Oxford in July. The people who've been writing to me have divided about fifty-fifty into the point of view that wants to continue the newsletter as it stands, and the idea of a journal.

**SH:** Beyond the newsletter, what of the organization of the field itself? Is there now—by contrast with the situation a decade ago—any definite sense of how sermon materials ought to be approached?

**GC:** I don't know. In a way I'm waiting for it to define itself—which it is gradually doing. When *MSSN* began, I assumed that when I said 'sermon studies' it meant something—and that I knew what it meant. But as correspondence started coming in, I had to ask the question you've asked: 'what does "sermon studies" mean?' Going through the newsletter you can see that lots of questions arise. One thing that appears to be the case is that sermon studies are 'multidisciplinary.' On the other hand, do I mean 'multidisciplinary' or 'interdisciplinary'—or both? Is it disciplines in collaboration, or is it that sermons have a different significance for people in different disciplines—people who don't necessarily talk to each other? I

think the answer is that it's both—that's what I'm moving towards—but I'm by no means certain.

When I came to look at the question 'what is/are sermon studies?' I thought, to start with, there *is* something called sermon studies: the study of sermons for their own sake, sermon studies as a primary discipline. It seems to me that what we then come up with is a whole field of people studying sermons in Latin and in the vernaculars—the whole Judeo-Christian culture produces sermons—and this, in turn, leads to the various categories I've got by the time we come to the third or fourth newsletter: Hebrew, Latin, Old English, Middle English, French, Spanish, Italian, Celtic, German, Dutch and Flemish. These are people who are interested in sermons as a mode of expression: sermons in terms of rhetoric, in terms of structures—the whole *ars praedicandi* tradition. Sermon studies for its own sake involves such activities as producing reliable texts, because until we've got texts we're nowhere—too many are still buried in manuscripts. This, in turn, gives rise to the whole business of defining and perfecting editorial methods, and questions like 'how do we know we're editing the best text when there are several manuscripts?' and 'by what criteria do we decide such-and-such a question?' And all of this, of course, brings us back to the notion that scholars have got to communicate with each other. Once we've got reliable texts, we see the people who are interested in sermons as ends in themselves becoming interested in preaching methods, preaching styles—they get very caught up in the analysis of rhetorical styles and structures, as I've said—and some people have suggested that there is an important relationship between sermon methods and teaching methods within the universities in the medieval period. Again, more strands to bring together.

**RZ:** How did the manuscripts originate? Are they sermons written down by the preacher before delivery, or by the audience which heard them, or is there a more complex process of revision involved?

**GC:** We simply don't know. But because the field hasn't yet been very much worked over, we're all free to speculate about a lot of things, including this. For the sort of question you've asked we have to go, I think, to the paleographers—which brings us to another of the categories of people I have in mind when I talk about sermon studies being multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary. Because whatever our angle, whatever our approach to sermon studies, we need the paleographers—and also, we need to become paleographers ourselves. In part there are certain levels or areas of expertise that the paleographers can offer because they have had their heads down, scrutinizing the shapes of letters and the way scribal hands are formed, and focusing on the physical anatomy of manuscripts. These scholars have a lot of information to offer us about *scriptoria*, about the circulation of manuscript material, about the ways in which manuscripts were used, about how we are to interpret those squiggles in the margins of the manuscripts.

There's a thesis for somebody just in the marginalia of the manuscripts I'm working on: things that look like three-leafed clovers which are obviously *nota* marks, Roman and Arabic numerals, short phrases indicating thematic sections within sermons.

**SH:** If we have that sort of information in a manuscript or a series of manuscripts, can we talk about establishing the text of the manuscript without having taken that information into account? It would seem to me that when one is dealing with the uses to which a manuscript was put—either as a guide to a preacher while he was itinerating, or as a book that a parish priest might have and use as an encyclopedic gathering of sermons for particular days—that those marks would be very important. In fact, that we can use them to determine something very important about the text before we ever come to the stage of printing an edition of it.

**GC:** Yes, that's absolutely true. But it seems to me that a text goes through various stages. I'm working on two manuscripts, which may or may not be close to the date and place of composition, but certainly in one of them there is clear evidence of a third hand that has intervened and added marginalia and corrections. Just a few alterations, like—well, you can't say that erasures are attributable to a hand (for obvious reasons)—but there are erasures of the word 'pope' or 'popes,' for example, which suggest the Lollard element of this material. Clearly this happened later on. So, the way a particular sermon was used in one decade may not be the way it was used a decade later. Again, in the area of speculation, I do think that we're able to say that when my particular sermons were written they were Lollard, in the sense of the infancy of Lollardy, but that later hands who got hold of the manuscripts tinkered with them, perhaps with the intention of emphasizing particular points.

**RZ:** So a lot of sermons were used and reused over a long period of time and, with a few revisions, might be delivered many times?

**GC:** I think so, yes. Certainly the collection I'm working on has a kind of unity about it, even though the sermons are very varied.

**RZ:** What about the question of audience? Sermons were directed to all classes of society, and one finds an incredible range of what were considered appropriate techniques for communication: instruction in the universities directed toward an educated elite, as well as sermons meant for the uneducated laity. Does this influence an editor's approach?

**GC:** I think so. You've got a wide spectrum. Father Bataillon, who is working on the Leonine edition of Aquinas, is interested in basic questions like this; the extent to which style varies according to the occasion and the audience. I think there was a very big educated clerical audience who were being preached to for their own instruction—scriptural instruction, moral instruction—and then being sent out to preach to the sort of lay audiences you have in mind. On the question of editing, there are two particular scholars whose work we ought to be aware of: again, Father Bataillon, who

is interested, for example, in comparing the preaching of Aquinas in Italy and France, and asking questions like 'would the styles be different because he's in different places?' Martyn Wakelin is the other person I have in mind; he's been working on Mirk's *Festial* for something like eighteen years, and is still asking basic questions like 'which is the best manuscript to use?' Because there's been so little communication between people in this field, he isn't sure; the criteria aren't always the same, and this is a topic for continued inquiry.

**Deborah Crawford:** When you speak of 'sermons for their own sake,' where do you believe the limits should be established? In *MSSN 1* someone asked 'can we include saints' lives?' and by the second issue they're already a category. How did this come about?

**GC:** Well, simply, because so many people wrote and said they felt that this material was relevant to sermons. Since the newsletter got going I have received many jubilant letters from people who had thought they were the only people doing this—just as I had thought. Now people are increasingly trying to define the limits, as you call them. They say things like 'I'm a bit uneasy about your subdivisions based on languages, because where do you put a Latin sermon written in France?' My personal interest, my commitment, remains a literary one. I want to see more people from literature turning to sermons, and applying to sermons the same criteria that they apply to literature. And one can formulate these criteria to include an assumption that the writer has some kind of aesthetic intentions as well as intellectual and ideological ones. He may not succeed very well, any more than all writers of literature do; after all, we have bad novels as well as good novels, bad poetry as well as good poetry. But I believe that it is valid, in our study of sermon writing, to regard the notion of authorial intention as a proper area of inquiry, just as a lot of us feel it is for literature with a capital L. And I think similarly that there is a role for art historians. Obviously sermons, literature, and the visual arts overlap at some point. Now, these are philosophical and aesthetic questions, really: where do they overlap? This seems to me another way of coming into sermon studies—or at least an interdisciplinary area of sermon studies—where sermons can shed light on the art of the period, and vice versa.

**RZ:** If there ever comes to be an index of sermon *topoi* and imagery and the like, it would be nice to coordinate it with the Princeton Index of Christian Art.

**GC:** Yes, I agree. When it becomes easier to feed texts into computers, it will be much easier to pull out themes and images and so on very rapidly. I would like very much to engage in a dialogue with someone like Martyn Wakelin, to explore the comparisons and resemblances between Mirk's *Festial* and the sermons I'm working on. In effect, to get two people who are absolutely soaked in a particular collection of material to talk spontaneously about what they're working on. The sort of thing which obviously goes on with established 'great works' of literature. I would also



like to see analytical comparisons of sermons with other literary modes: compare them with drama, with lyrics, with Langland, with Chaucer, and also with other devotional writings. See what they have in common, and where they're different. And then thematic explorations: compare the way certain themes are treated in different sermons and in different kinds of literature.

**GF:** How long will it be before these inquiries are possible?

**GC:** I don't know. First and foremost we must have texts. What I want to do is to get my text published. But it really takes a long time, transcribing, checking and rechecking, annotating, making a glossary. I do want to talk about the material itself, but I want to talk about it to people who have access to it, otherwise I'm talking to myself. That's why I want to see it published. I could have spent my time writing articles about BL Add. MS 41321, knowing that many people would not have read it. But there could have then been no discussion except among the people who were able to go to the library and look at it. As it is, I hope that before too long my collection will be accessible in libraries, and people will stop thinking that medieval sermons mean Mirk and Ross' *Middle English Sermons*, and nothing else. The final evening of the Oxford symposium will be an open discussion, when all the speakers will be there and all the ragged ends of questions will be discussed—not answered yet—but at last they are being discussed. I'm glad to find so many people agreeing that sermons are important and well worth studying. Owst said it first, but nobody took it up for a long time. I didn't start my work until twenty-two years after his second book. I don't know why it was so ignored. It's obvious though that there is several generations worth of research here. I am is certain that the older generation of scholars at places like Oxford will continue its systematic, precise, very competent, skillful tasks of editing. That's the path they've chosen, those are the skills they have. The next generation of medievalists will have to turn their minds to the variety of ways of exploring and discussing the material that the earlier generations have retrieved, as well as continuing to edit further texts with the same thoroughness and reliability.

# Notes and Texts

**Column 1 (Main Text):**  
... hinc conp'm dicit ab mella  
... r. f. e. r. e. r. e. d. a. s. non.  
... Com illa q. conp'at  
... diffom no mutat qm.  
... eam coz no mutat s. e.  
... alia ab mella dicit  
... i. no uno no accibue  
... p. e. s. m. u. l. t. i. p. l. i. c. i. t. a. t. e.  
... i. e. m. a. t. e. r. s. i. n. e. q. u. i. d. e. a. t.  
... q. u. i. e. e. m. i. n. c. u. m. s. i. b. i. d. e. u. l. i.  
... n. e. c. e. b. u. i. t. d. e. t. o. n. e. s. u. m. p. t.  
... p. e. n. o. n. u. i. d. a. m. p. a. l. i. s. o.  
... i. n. e. t. o. m. p. a. r. i. b. i. s. a. n.  
... a. t. e. r. e. u. s. u. l. i. s. e. s. t. p. e. e. r. e.  
... h. i. i. a. m. u. e. p. e. e. t. f. o. n. d. a. t. o.  
... e. d. n. o. d. e. c. i. b. u. i. t. a. s. s. u. m. u. e.  
... i. n. o. n. i. n. m. o. u. s. u. m. p. r. a. c.  
... Com sup' r. m. e. t. o. r. i. c. a. t.  
... i. f. o. r. u. u. l. i. c. i. f. e. n. o. d. e. s. i. t. a. e. x. m. i. f. o. r. u. n. e. d. e. c. i. d. e. n. t.  
... e. s. i. n. p. o. s. s. i. b. i. l. i. t. e. s. e. t. s. q. u. o. s. p. o. n. d. a. t. e. s. q. u. o. d. o. s. s. e. e. s. t.  
... t. o. o. n. i. s. d. e. s. i. t. a. u. e. d. e. f. e. n. s. u. s. d. i. f. f. o. m. i. s. q. u. i. d. e. b. u. i. t. e. t.  
... f. o. r. u. i. f. u. e. i. a. m. p. o. s. s. i. b. i. l. i. t. e. s. i. m. o. d. e. p. l. u. c. i. a. n. t. p. e. d. i. f. f. o. m.  
... i. n. e. s. s. e. a. f. o. r. m. e. p. p. u. r. n. l. g. s. e. t. e. p. p. u. l. i. s. t. p. f. o. r. m.

**Column 2 (Main Text):**  
... i. o. c. e. i. p. s. i. f. m. u. l. t. i. p. l. i. c. i. t. a. t. e.  
... i. d. e. o. n. o. s. u. e. d. i. f. f. o. m. l. i. a.  
... i. n. m. o. r. m. p. e. r. e. n. o. c. o. g.  
... n. o. s. a. t. i. o. n. o. d. i. f. f. o. m. l. e.  
... q. u. i. s. u. p. p. l. e. p. o. e. c. o. r.

**Column 3 (Main Text):**  
... hinc item uo dicit q  
... p. l. e. n. i. g. n. o. l. a. t. l. e. d.  
... l. e. t. i. b. i. l. u. e. l. i. g. n. u. r.  
... g. i. b. i. l. i. t. e. s. t. i. d. q. u. o. d. n.  
... t. h. e. m. a. t. i. c. a. D. c.  
... n. a. t. u. r. e. u. e. r. e. s. p. o. s. i. o. l.  
... r. e. c. t. u. s. i. c. e. l. l. i. n. e. a. n.  
... r. e. a. t. i. s. i. m. p. l. i. a. n. i. m. i.  
... e. l. o. r. u. m. i. q. u. o. d. h. i. c. q. u.  
... i. n. a. q. u. e. r. e. t. u. r. Q. u. o. d.  
... i. l. l. a. q. u. a. s. u. n. t. i. n. d. i. s. t. i. c. t. e.  
... c. u. p. r. e. a. e. r. e. c. t. u. s. e. c. q. u.  
... e. p. p. a. r. e. t. q. u. a. s. u. n. t. i. n. d.  
... d. i. s. i. m. p. l. i. s. i. u. n. i. f. a. r.  
... s. e. d. i. g. n. i. h. u. m. c. m. o. d. i.  
... l. e. r. e. c. t. u. m. u. e. a. l. i. q. u.  
... p. r. e. c. t. u. s. i. s. a. g. g. a. t. i. l.  
... q. u. o. d. a. i. m. p. l. i. c. i. t. a. t. e. e. n. i.

**Marginal Glosses:**  
... i. n. f. o. r. m. e. t. m. e. d. i. c. a.  
... u. e. l. i. c. i. t. p. o. s. t. i. m. e. n. t. i. e.  
... q. u. i. m. e. d. i. c. o. p. m. u. l. t. i. p. l. i. c. i. t. a. t. e.  
... s. i. c. a. c. a. d. i. c. i. t. q. u. i.  
... i. n. a. c. c. i. b. u. i. t. p. e. o. m. e. d. i. c.  
... s. i. m. p. l. i. c. i. t. a. t. e.  
... i. n. s. u. p. e. c. o. s. i. t. e. u. s. q. u. o.  
... a. n. e. t. e. f. o. u. s. p. a. r. t. i. c. i. l. o. n. e.  
... e. p. o. s. t. a. n. t. i. s. t. i. m. p. e. u. i. l. o. m.  
... e. q. u. i. a. n. t. i. c. i. t. a. t. e. p. e. e. n. t.  
... e. t. m. e. d. i. c. o. p. l. i. c. u. e. p. l. q. u. i.  
... c. i. o. n. e. a. n. e. t. e. p. e. a. n. o. a.  
... a. u. e. n. i. p. o. s. t. i. u. r. p. e. t. t. e.  
... i. l. l. i. c. e. t. o. m. e. p. r. e. f. s. o. l. i. q.  
... i. n. l. i. c. e. t. e. a. c. p. m. e. c. o. m.  
... a. i. m. e. t. a. q. u. i. a. n. t. i. s. i. t.  
... i. n. e. s. s. e. s. i. c. u. e. b. i. d. i. f. f. e. r. i.  
... e. i. n. n. o. s. i. t. e. n. i. t. e. p. e. r. e. r. o.  
... a. l. i. q. u. i. d. e. i. c. a. t. c. o. n. l. i. d. e. t. o. n.  
... o. n. i. s. q. u. i. d. e. i. c. a. t. p. e. a. c. c. i. b. u. e. d.  
... i. n. q. u. o. d. q. u. i. d. e. i. c. a. t. f. e. i. t. i. f. o. r.  
... s. i. f. i. c. p. o. s. t. i. m. p. l. i. c. i. t. a. t. e. p.  
... e. n. i. s. d. e. p. t. e. n. i. c. i. t. a. t. e. a. l. i.

Los Angeles, UCLA, University Research Library, Special Collections, I/XIII/Ang/2, fol. 1v. Detail of outer margin, showing two of the three columns used for glosses on the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle.