Project: A Literary History of the English Book of Hours

Time frame: October 2012-September 2014

Lead Investigator: Jessica Brantley, Associate Professor of English

Summary: Professor Brantley is working with a list of 800 Books of Hours to determine their suitability for her study. She will require digital images of approximately thirty of the earliest and most important manuscripts, tools for annotating the images and for comparing key visual elements of the page layout, and assistance in database management of a large number of files.

More Books of Hours remain in modern libraries than any other kind of book from late medieval England: almost eight hundred manuscript volumes, and many thousands of printed ones. Their survival rate suggests that they were very widely read; a recent exhibition at the J. Paul Getty Center has described the Book of Hours as a "medieval bestseller." Because Books of Hours were the main textual object used by medieval laypeople, so often read by women, and even the basic book of children's learning (the name *primer* perhaps derives from the hour of *Prime*), they were fundamental to the reading practices of a variety of audiences. Yet critics have failed to ask how the popularity of the Book of Hours both emerged from and shaped the literate culture within which it grew up. Because the constitutive text of the Book of Hours—the Little Office of the Virgin—is an unvarying set of Latin prayers, modern readers have deemed the volumes verbally uninteresting. But the Book of Hours comprises more than this text alone: as a compendium of multiple texts and systems of images, the genre depends upon a rich hybridity of representation. These manuscripts, which provided the most common experience of books in the late medieval period, informed literate culture at large with their complex understanding of what it means to read. The Book of Hours, then, offers exciting opportunities for thinking anew about some of the most important innovations of late medieval literary culture.

Professor Brantley is exploring the importance of the Book of Hours for literary history. Rather than offering a history of art or a history of prayer—the more common rubrics for approaching these volumes—her study excavates the histories of reading that are manifest in this uniquely large textual archive. She is examining the nearly 800 Books of Hours extant that were made in England or for the English market: a copious archive that allows for investigation of connections both broad and specific between the culture of reading shaped by these books and vernacular literature in the later Middle Ages. Perhaps surprisingly, English literary culture is visible within the manuscripts of the Hours, and traces of hourly prayers and their books also appear within vernacular texts.

Goals and Methodology:

With a preliminary list of 800 Books of Hours, Professor Brantley will have a great deal of flexibility in identifying repositories for approximately 30 manuscripts for digitization. The project will develop a way to organize all of a scholar's notes associated with the digitized

manuscripts and provide links to the manuscript(s) related to the notes. In some cases it will be desirable to publish annotations in the public repository for the reference of other scholars. For the most part, however, Professor Brantley will focus on creating a work environment that will enable an individual scholar to make notes and easily recall and relate them to one another as a larger work is being prepared.

Professor Brantley envisions using moderate to heavy levels of annotation to describe all the visual imagery that relates to understanding Books of Hours produced in England or for the English market; in addition, she will be transcribing all instances of vernacular texts whether in French or Middle English. In many cases she will be identifying the source and/or iconography of the images and the nature of the non-standard texts; she will also be compiling and commenting upon textual anomalies such as additions that were made to Calendars and Litanies. Images and texts added to pastedowns and flyleaves (both contemporary and later) are of particular significance to the project. Brantley envisions moderate to heavy annotation of unusual texts in each manuscript with several hundred transcriptions overall.

Professor Brantley's project will use image analysis functionality developed at Yale (see Rushmeier project) to facilitate the gathering of visual information that will indicate what portions of the text and decoration may be non-standard in Books of Hours. Within the text block Brantley will be looking for line-fillers that might indicate verses; interlinear glosses in the vernacular; letter combinations that will point to non-Latin texts; Saints and obituaries that were added in calendars. Outside the text block the visual information to be captured would include marginal glosses, captions and inscriptions, the shapes of borders and the variety of images within them. The tool would survey the approximately thirty manuscripts, each calculated with approximately 150 folios, and two images per leaf, for a total of 9,000 pages to be viewed with the image analysis tool and also annotated where appropriate. When the multi-up viewer tool is ready for testing, Brantley would then be able to compare and contrast all relevant leaves that appear to manifest unusual texts and illustrations. The ability to use both a multi-up viewer and an image analysis tool is at the heart of this research project.

Members of the Advisory Committee:

Kathleen L. Scott, Independent Scholar; Kathryn A. Smith, Associate Professor of Art History, and Chair, New York University; Roger Wieck, Curator of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts at the Morgan Library & Museum.

Deliverables:

Professor Brantley will be presenting a paper on digital aspects of her work at the International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo in May 2014. She is currently under contract for a book-length manuscript entitled *The Medieval Imagetext: A Literary History of the Book of Hours* with the University of Chicago Press.

An image analysis tool will be developed by Professor Rushmeier based on Professor Brantley's requirements to segment the manuscript images into areas of text, both within the text block and in the margins, and into areas of illustration, both within the text block and in the margins; the tool will enable scholars to compare the paleographical, art historical, and codicological features of what may initially appear to be a standard repertory of prayers and images in Books of Hours. The tool may be used in a multi-up viewer so that comparisons can be made on screen and annotations recorded of the various relevant manuscript features.

<u>Project Personnel:</u>

Jessica Brantley, Associate Professor of English

Joseph Stadolnik, Assistant for Digital Humanities