General introduction: pedagogy and intellectuals

> For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.
>
> Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, 5

This epigraph, taken from Walter Benjamin, suggests the double responsibility of historiography to the present and the past. The main historical concerns of this book are the role of pedagogy and the role of intellectuals in a medieval dissenting movement. But the politics of teaching and the social functions of intellectuals are also crucial concerns of modern cultural reflection. Modernity hardly recognizes itself in the Middle Ages; on the other hand, medievalists have often argued the explanatory power of the Middle Ages for the conditions of modernity. What this book offers, however, is a study of issues that were of profound importance for the Middle Ages and that will disappear from our historiographical map if we do not recognize them as being important to ourselves. I do not offer this account of pedagogy and intellectuals in a medieval dissenting movement in order to explain modern conditions of teaching and intellectual labor. Rather, my interest here is to make visible certain forms of medieval cultural knowledge which historiography has suppressed because it has imagined that these could not be medieval forms of knowledge, because moderns (including modern medievalists) have not seen their own concerns in these images of the past.

The largest questions that this book asks are: what were the politics of teaching in antiquity and the Middle Ages, and how are these made visible in a dissenting movement; what were the politics of childhood; what was the role of intellectuals in facilitating not only habits of dissenting thought but oppositional pedagogies; what was the relationship of intellectual work to a community; and how does a dissenting community reinvent the function of intellectual labor? Because this book approaches the subject of learning and dissent from two different – but fundamentally connected – inquiries,

pedagogical discourse and intellectual labor, I will begin here by placing each in historical and theoretical perspective.

1 PEDAGOGY

In November 1406, the Lollard preacher William Taylor delivered an inflammatory sermon at St. Paul's Cross in London, in which he promulgated Wycliffite ideas about clerical disendowment. The sermon prompted an immediate response from the orthodox establishment. The following day an orthodox master preached a counter-sermon in the same place, and before long Archbishop Arundel had summoned Taylor to account for his beliefs. Taylor failed to answer the summons, and in the early months of 1407 was excommunicated by the archbishop's order.[1]

At the end of his sermon, Taylor puts forth another Wycliffite idea, that it is the duty of preachers to share the bread of Scripture among the people in their own vernacular language, a directive, he notes, that Lollard preachers can implement only under the pressure of prosecution. Taylor observes that a certain kind of literal reading of Scripture is an appropriate pedagogical tool:

> But now is ther a tribulacioun – was ther neuer noon sich – for he that pretendith himsilf moost parfiit cristen man, bothe because of staat and of ordre, pursueth anothir cristen man that to this eende comyneth in the lawe of God for to lerne it and enfourme, as he is holdun, his sogetis and for to be saued bi it. And certeyn to deuely a dede is it for to chace men fro knowyng of the lawe of God. For, though it be not spedy to boistous puple in manye sotiltees to curiously ocupie her wittis, in tokenynge wherof Crist in the gospel of this day comaundide not the puple but his disciplis to gadere the relifs of the feste, yit for to werne the puple the greete and historial mater of the gospel were noon othir but to kille hem.[2]

There is a sense of shock that Taylor registers here, where he speaks of persecution that is unprecedented in its vehemence ("now is ther a tribulacion – was ther neuer noon sich"), and perhaps incomprehensible because Lollard preachers feel that they are just continuing an old way of going about things.

[1] The excommunication was probably an indirect response to the sermon: more likely it was issued for Taylor's failure to answer Arundel's summons. For nearly two more decades, Taylor continued his career as a heretical preacher. After years of fitful investigations leading to an abjuration in 1420, he was tried in February 1423 before Archbishop Chichele as a relapsed heretic, and in March handed over to the secular arm and burnt at Smithfield in London. See Wilkins, ed., *Concilia* 3: 404–13, for the proceedings against Taylor, detailing years 1419–22; and see biography in Hudson, ed., *Two Wycliffite Texts*, xiii–xxv, and Emden, *An Oxford Hall in Medieval Times*, 125–33.

[2] Text in Hudson, ed., *Two Wycliffite Texts*, 22–3. Here and in all following Middle English quotations, the Middle English character "thorn" has been modernized to "th," and the character "yogh" has been modernized to "g," "y," or "gh."

What is new is not what they are actually doing, but rather this state-sponsored persecution. What is that "old way" of going about things? That is what I want to explore in this book by investigating the pedagogical paradigms and traditions that lie behind Taylor's directives and the objections of his adversaries.

On the terms of Taylor's argument, what really kills is not the letter, but the clergy's withholding from the people of the authentic matter of gospel, those truths contained in the letter. For the "literal sense" of Scripture is the implied opposite of the exegetical subtleties that would "too curiously occupy the wits" of popular audiences. It is Scripture unclouded by "manye sotiltees" that offers life; and in the passage just quoted there is perhaps an echo of 2 Corinthians 3.6, inverted so that what kills is not the "letter," but rather refusing the people's desire for the letter of Scripture. The question of just what the literal sense, or reading according to the letter, means in Wycliffite hermeneutics is a complex one; but as Taylor's sermon suggests, Lollard arguments for vernacular preaching and study of Scripture can take a practical, pedagogical, view of literalism without explicitly attaching it to theological or hermeneutical questions about divine language. In this reasoning, the hermeneutical appropriation of the letter is identical with a rhetorical sense of the capacity of an audience. Taylor's view recognizes (or concedes) the limitations of non-literate or at least unlearned laity for whose "wits" the subtleties of exegetical scholarship, especially perhaps allegorical exegesis, are a too curious distraction. A Latin Wycliffite sermon makes a more detailed rhetorical case for aiming at the specific capacities of audiences:

> Preachers must preach to their audience such truths as they can readily convey, informing the laity in a way that is appropriate to their condition and judgment, and clerics in a way that is appropriate to their station and capacity . . . Preachers ought to preach to the local people and expound the word of God openly and clearly, and not obscure the truth from them under scholastic subtleties.[3]

But what is the context for such affirmations of a certain literalism, here meaning a clear and open reading of Scripture unclouded by scholastic subtleties, in relation to a practical assessment of audience capacities? In terms of its place within the wider framework of Lollard textual communities, the concession to the capacities of an audience signifies more than simply a common pastoral stance: as I will suggest here, it must be understood in terms of its application to the dynamics of "classroom" as well as pulpit. Moreover,

[3] Quoted from Bodleian MS Laud Misc. 200 in Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 273. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. On the Latin sermons in this manuscript, see von Nolcken, "An Unremarked Group of Wycliffite Sermons in Latin."

this valuation of literal reading is not the same as the hermeneutical model of the literal sense that Wyclif articulates in the *De veritate sacrae scripturae*, nor that adumbrated by Nicholas of Lyre before him, nor that amplified or contested by such figures as Jean Gerson and Thomas Netter in the early fifteenth century. Yet in Lollard polemic, as well as in anti-Lollard (and in general anti-heretical) polemic, this practical model of the literal sense comes to be tangled up with ancient and contemporary hermeneutics of the literal sense.

In other words, the literal sense is not one thing, and to approach it as if it were is both to occlude the cultural complexity of its history and to reproduce some of the very confusions under which some of the actors in this historical drama labored. Among modern historians the literal sense has been seen primarily as a hermeneutical issue, especially in studies of heresy polemic. But as I will show here, it must also be seen as a pedagogical issue, specifically a problem associated with elementary pedagogy. The identification of the literal sense with childhood has an ancient lineage in discourses of elementary pedagogy. This long-established association between childhood and the literal sense informs the role that the literal sense plays in later heresy polemics; but this role is often confused with, and beclouded by, the simultaneous presence of academic hermeneutical attitudes to the literal sense. It is important, therefore, to tease out the particular force of pedagogical traditions in late-medieval conflicts over heresy and heretical reading communities.

In outline, the problem explored in the first part of this book is what it meant for non-clerical adults to be willingly identified with reading according to the literal sense. To be seen to be reading for the letter, or for the mere surface (including the "story" or fable), was to risk being identified with the cognitive conditions of childhood. What might this mean for a new class of adult, non-academic readers, that is, lay Lollards, who claimed that the literal sense is adequate to a complete understanding of Scripture? Through what ingrained assumptions about childhood and the literal sense did their orthodox adversaries receive Lollard claims about the adequacy of the literal sense? And why could academic readers enjoy the pleasures of a literalist hermeneutic when they pronounced the literalism of lay readers a scandal?

There are three interlinked themes that I will trace here in order to recover what lies behind the convictions, expressed in the sermons by Taylor and the anonymous Lollard quoted above, as well as in other Lollard writings, about lay access to Scripture through its literal sense: pedagogy, childhood, and the bearing that these two categories have on inherited ideas of the literal sense. The picture that I present here of lay textuality in the Lollard movement is not framed primarily in terms of Latin and vernacular, but in terms of a structure of dissenting pedagogy. What was Lollard pedagogy dissenting from? I

suggest here that it was responding to a tradition much older than the conflict between the authority of Latin and the *arriviste* claims of vernacular textuality, a conflict that could not be said to have come into existence before the twelfth century.[4] Lollard pedagogy was dissenting from ancient traditions of intellectual hierarchy, and especially representations of elementary teaching, traditions that carried with them deeply engrained assumptions about the borders between childhood and adulthood, as these conditions stand for states of political disenfranchisement and political agency.

To explore Lollard pedagogy and the traditions against which it dissents requires a long view of intellectual and institutional history, a perspective that must begin with antiquity and its production of discourses about learning. Since much of the tradition that I explore here as the historical precondition of Lollard attitudes to teaching is in fact classical, my approach may certainly raise the question: what has Quintilian or Plutarch, Macrobius or Proclus, to do with a heretical religious movement of late-medieval England? The ideologies and practices associated with Wycliffism and Lollardy have been mainly the possession, historiographically speaking, of synchronic regimes of social and literary historicisms. For the most part, and for reasons that are obvious, the textual effects of the Lollard movement have been read as products of, or factors in, historically localized intersections of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: theology and ecclesiology; English sacramental and devotional practices; social and political ruptures of Ricardian and Lancastrian England; and literary and intellectual relations in late-medieval English culture. The very topicality and self-conscious political urgency of Lollard writing invites such materialist analysis. In many respects such horizontal cultural historicism has been the dominant model in English medieval literary studies in general, both in more traditional forms of literary history which work within standard terms of periodization, and in the more recent historiographical moves in the direction of Foucauldian archaeologies (however broadly construed) which explicitly resist the explanatory teleologies of "grands récits" in favor of closely synchronic focuses.[5]

The most general critique that can be made of the dominance of the synchronic model, whether in its broadly historicist or more technically materialist focus, is that it exerts a certain pressure to forget or simply to

[4] On vernacular bibles in twelfth-century France, for example, see Hamilton, "Wisdom of the East: the Reception by the Cathars of Eastern Dualist Texts," 40–1 (and on Occitan in the thirteenth century, 58); Biller, "The Cathars of Languedoc and Written Materials," 66; Robson, "Vernacular Scriptures in France."

[5] See, for example, the discussion in Scanlon, "Unmanned Men and Eunuchs of God: Peter Damian's *Liber Gomorrhianus* and the Sexual Politics of Papal Reform," 41–3. See also the important critique of periodization and synchronic historicization in Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, xiii–xvii, 54–64.

ignore the force of long-established orders of discourse, especially those that have been naturalized in local cultural relations. Synchronic analysis of culture cannot, by itself, account for points of intersection, on the horizontal field, with discourses of ancient intellectual and political lineage that leave their imprint on the most sharply politicized categories of late-medieval culture. In recent years the study of sexuality has most prominently exemplified a turn from a synchronic focus or from conventional norms of periodization towards a vigorous reinstatement of the other "half" of the Foucauldian analytical paradigm, diachronic genealogies, a kind of analysis "which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework . . . that is, a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of object . . . without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendent in relation to the field of events or runs its empty sameness throughout the course of history."[6]

A diachronic approach to the Lollard movement does change our perspective on the issues that inform and shape its own polemics and those of its adversaries. Within the immediate temporal terms of fourteenth-century history, the analysis of the fundamental notions of orthodoxy and heterodoxy proceeds along a strictly religious axis that brings the Lollard movement into necessary historical relations with earlier and later controversies over theological and ecclesiological precepts. But Lollardy is also radical, or indeed heterodox, in its educational ideologies. The constitution of a discourse about pedagogy from antiquity onwards represents a kind of institutional orthodoxy that is distinct from theological rules, although it can at times complement and support, at other times intersect with, religious orthodoxies. Pedagogical orthodoxies, whose filiations need to be traced through their own long history, were thoroughly naturalized in the environment of late-medieval culture and politics, so much so that they were virtually homologous with religious orthodoxies. In other words, I am suggesting that there are several axes of orthodoxy and heterodoxy that meet in the Lollard movement. A diachronic perspective requires that we sometimes shift attention from those issues that have occupied center stage in synchronic analyses of late-medieval dissent, notably ecclesiology and sacramentality and their literary effects, for some of Lollardy's most radical moves cannot be assimilated to its contemporary literary or devotional environment. The Lollards and their opponents

[6] Foucault, "Truth and Power," 117. On the diachronic in the history of sexuality, see Scanlon, "Unmanned Men and Eunuchs of God"; and for a view on the relation between the modern and the premodern in the history of sexuality, see Fradenburg and Freccero, "Caxton, Foucault, and the Pleasures of History," xiii–xxiv. Foucault's own *History of Sexuality* is his finest exemplification of the principle of diachronic history as genealogy; and volume 3, *The Care of the Self*, is the most concentrated illustration of writing the history of a "field of discourse."

are also playing out the logic of educational discourses that were already in circulation in the late-classical period.

Synchronic analysis of the Lollard movement has also placed tremendous emphasis upon the opposition between Latin and vernacular as the principal theme devolving from the governing social categories of *clerici* and *laici*. This certainly takes its cue from polemic within Lollardy and against Lollardy, since vernacular translation of Scripture, and arguments for and against translation culminating in Arundel's statute against translation, were perhaps Lollardy's most defining (and self-defining) historical expressions. But such an emphasis in modern scholarship also reproduces the very terms of Lollard and anti-Lollard polemic. I would offer here that there are other strong currents, of much older lineage than Latin–vernacular, also at work in the opposition between *clerici* and *laici*. The difference between clergy and laity may have expressed itself in the terms that were of the greatest contemporary urgency. But what also informs the binarism clergy–laity is a long tradition within pedagogical and philosophical discourse about the uses of the literal sense for certain audiences, and allegorical or spiritual senses for other audiences. Significantly, neither the English sermon by Taylor nor the anonymous Wycliffite sermon, both quoted at the beginning of this introduction, mention the vernacular as the defining issue in presenting Scripture to lay people. Rather, they focus on presenting what Taylor calls the "historial mater" of Scripture, that is, the matter of Scripture on its own terms, unclouded by subtleties. These two examples can remind us that there are issues beyond the binarism of Latin–vernacular that inform Lollard polemic about access to Scripture. The injunction to teach laity through the literal sense can take us back to the earliest pastoral directives, such as the three-fold structure of Scripture found in Origen's *De principiis* which, says Origen, exists "ut simpliciores quique aedificentur ab ipso, ut ita dixerim, corpore scripturarum (sic enim appelamus communem istum et historialem intellectum)" ("that the simple may be edified by what I might have called the 'body' of Scripture, for so do we call the common and literal narrative meaning").[7] But behind this association of laity with the literal sense lies another domain of discourse, the identification of literal reading with the cognitive limitations of childhood. In antiquity, the identification is cast in pejorative terms; and in Christian ecclesiastical discourse, the association of laity with unlearned simplicity could be conflated with the intellectual limitations of childhood.[8] In order to understand what kind of valuation the Lollard writers place on the association of laity with the literal sense ("historial mater") it is necessary to

[7] Origen, *De principiis*, book 4, ch. 2. 4 (p. 312).
[8] Cf. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 226–7, on the *laici–clerici* binarism.

trace the lineages of both pastoral and pedagogical discourses. Thus the antithesis between Latin and vernacular was one manifestation of the primary social distinction between clergy and laity. These political categories also bear the impress of long traditions of pedagogical discourse. In an important sense, therefore, this book uses Lollardy and its textual and social effects to explain certain powerful currents in the history of European thought about teaching and learning.

I turn now to the historical and theoretical problems of pedagogy and childhood, which lie behind the questions about the literal sense to be studied in part 1 of this book.

Pedagogy, in Emile Durkheim's terms, is a "practical theory" of education.[9] In considering pedagogy here, we are tracing out both a set of historical practices and the ideological systems in which those practices take place, or to put it with a slightly different emphasis, the "domains of discourse" to which the processes of education belong and through which these processes are represented. As much as there are sciences of teaching, there are also "imaginaries" of teaching, the ways in which teaching, like other political relations, is figured in cultural imaginations and reproduced as an explanatory mechanism for other political relations. Chapter 1 of this book traces a particular field of application, the pedagogical principle of using the literal sense to teach younger students, so that we see how the literal sense not only was a hermeneutical question, but also was fixed as a category of pedagogical thought. Chapter 2 then considers how the conflict between domains of discourse about the literal sense – as a hermeneutical category and as an elementary pedagogical category – informed and structured polemic against heresy in late-medieval England, and how Lollardy negotiated between these fields.

My assumption here is that Lollardy had a pedagogy: a systematic approach to learning and an understanding of the conditions of learning. Behind Lollardy stretches a domain of discourse about pedagogy that goes back to antiquity. That discourse was deployed in debates about heresy; and the Lollards, in turn, practiced a pedagogy that dissented from, that opposed, prevailing pedagogical discourses which were naturalized in and distributed throughout its contemporary cultural environment. But the assumption that Lollardy had a pedagogy, in the sense both of practice and theory, brings with it certain problems of evidence and of definition.

The problem of evidence largely concerns what we know of pedagogical practices among the Lollards. We have considerable evidence about the

[9] Durkheim, *The Evolution of Educational Thought*, xix. See also Lukes, *Emile Durkheim: His Life and Work*, 111.

existence of teaching in Lollard communities. Anne Hudson's account of Lollard education uses the evidence of Lollard books and attitudes to books, as well as the evidence of adversarial polemics and records, legal injunctions, depositions at heresy trials, and abjurations of those condemned of heresy, to build a powerful case for an extensive and systematic, not simply occasional, practice of teaching.[10] The basic devices of Lollard teaching were in some ways consonant with orthodox methods, but also, it seems, highly evolved in terms of their particular and defining roles within Lollard culture. Vernacular reading was the central component of Lollard learning, with and also without teachers.[11] The borderline between teachers and missionary preachers was often blurred, as in the cases of prominent Lollard pastoral figures like William Swinderby of Leicester, active in the 1380s and early 1390s, and William White and Hugh Pye who, along with a number of missionaries and teachers, were the leaders of the Norwich Lollard community of the 1420s.[12] But there are also examples, among the later Lollards, of "reading communities" without a prominent teacher from outside the group, in which local people carry on or possibly imitate the reading sessions: these range from small collaborations, as in the case of two London Lollards who, in 1511, were said to spend many hours together reading the Apocalypse, to the extensive networks of readers and reading groups among the Lollards of Coventry prosecuted in 1486 and again in 1511–12.[13]

Memorizing also constituted an important component of Lollard learning, either for its own sake or perhaps to compensate for non-literacy among sect members.[14] While memorization is a learning technique that closely corresponds with orthodox educational traditions, it was particularly suitable to the non-traditional students of Lollard communities, especially as some scholars have noted, to female participants who were less likely to have acquired the skills of literacy.[15] Among these, there is the often-cited case of Alice Colins of the Lincoln diocese in the early sixteenth century, whom John Foxe describes as being able to recite much of the Scriptures, and whose husband was an owner of many books.[16] Reginald Pecock's report on Lollard memorization castigates them for evangelical arrogance: those "whiche nevere

[10] Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, 174–227. [11] Ibid., 187–90.

[12] On Swinderby, see McFarlane, *John Wycliffe and the Beginnings of English Nonconformity*, 91–111, 113–21; on White and Pye and other teachers of the Norwich Lollards, see Aston, "William White's Lollard Followers," and see the comments in Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, 182.

[13] Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, 187 and n. 77, and see also 183 for other examples; McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy*, 25–46; for other "self-led" communities see also Fines, "Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Coventry and Lichfield, 1511–1512."

[14] I take this category from Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, 190.

[15] McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy*, 60–1; Cross, "'Great Reasoners in Scripture,'" 370–1.

[16] Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* 4: 222, 234–6. See McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy*, 60; Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, 191; Cross, "'Great Reasoners in Scripture,'" 371; Aston, "Lollardy and Literacy," 201.

leerned ferther in scolis than her grammer, kunnen suche textis bi herte and bi mouth," and reciting the texts before their audiences, "semen therfore and therbi ful wise."[17] But even Pecock's attack notes the effectiveness of memorization in the absence of formal education beyond the most elementary level.

Discussion also seems to have played an important role in Lollard education.[18] Of all the Lollard teaching devices, discussion is the one perhaps least consonant with methods used in traditional schools, at lower as well as advanced levels. Discussion (in the sense of the relatively unstructured give and take of the modern North American seminar) is not one of the methods of teaching that is pictured in most accounts of the lower schools or even advanced grammar schools of the Middle Ages, which stress instead recitation and question-and-answer techniques. Even in the medieval university, what we would think of as "discussion" between teachers and students seems to have been regulated through the highly formalized structures of question and answer, disputational exercises, or structured public events like the theological *quodlibetales* (in which a master would answer questions "on any topic whatsoever"). Thus established schools seem to offer little precedent for Lollard teaching through discussion. Evidence in depositions points to casual (unstructured) conversations among friends, neighbors, and families outside the sphere of the conventicles. We have, for example, the accounts of conversations in the Norwich community in the 1420s among Lollards or between Lollards and their neighbors, best known through the deposition of Joan Cliffland recounting how her neighbor Margery Baxter evangelized to her on a range of subjects, such as household economy and fastdays, the eucharist, and worshipping images.[19] Among the many suspects proscuted in East Anglia in 1428–31, for which the trial records are quite detailed, the variation of views on subjects like keeping the Sabbath can suggest the results of discussion within (and beyond) conventicles based on the books possessed (and read) by the community and on the tenets proffered by teacher–missionary figures.[20] There is also the example of the Coventry Lollards prosecuted in 1486, about whose beliefs and practices the trial records provide enough information for us to see that the suspects had been holding discussions not simply about texts that they had been reading but about the general theological questions of purgatory and the efficacy of prayers for the dead.[21] Certainly the orthodox authorities believed that part of the threat of

[17] Pecock, *The Repressor of over much blaming of the Clergy*, 89.
[18] On this third category of teaching technique, see Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, 192–5; McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy*, 66–9.
[19] Tanner, ed., *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428–31*, 43–51.
[20] Aston, "William White's Lollard Followers," 93–7.
[21] Cited in Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, 193–4, from the Lichfield register of Bishop John Hales (1459–1490).