



Women in the Liberal Arts Tradition

with Nicole Koopman

Lecture 4: Dhuoda

Outline:

Dhuoda

- Historical context for Dhuoda's Life and the *Handbook for William*
 - Her husband Bernard was a powerful noble in southern France.
 - March 22, 841, Dhuoda gave birth to a second son. Her son was sent to Bernard.
 - In light of separation from her husband and sons, she decided to offer spiritual and practical support for her son by writing a book, simply titled *Handbook for William*.
 - The *Handbook for William* was begun on November 30, 841, completed on February 2, 843 and sent to William that year.
 - Dhuoda's reason for writing was that she felt anxious and filled with longing to do something for William.
 - Dhuoda intends the book as a kind of guide for how a young Christian nobleman should behave.
 - For Dhuoda what is most important is that William fulfills his vocation on earth well and lives virtuously.
 - *Handbook for William* belongs to the genre of the *speculum*, or the mirror for princes – which he can use to contemplate the health of your soul.
 - Dhuoda's mirror is the only existing work by a 9th century woman. Dhuoda manages to insert herself into the text.
 - She also includes biographical details and a family genealogy.
 - The handbook highlights her intellectual qualities.
 - The power of books is a recurring theme in her handbook.
 - She considers reading to be an intentional pious deed just like Alcuin emphasizes.
 - *Handbook for William* offers insight for how Christian nobility raised their children.
 - Dhuoda anticipates that her handbook would have a wider audience than only her family.
 - Dhuoda's husband was captured and executed by Charles for rebellion in 844.
 - William joined a revolt against Charles that same summer. William took control of Barcelona in 848. By 850, William was dead.
 - Dhuoda's work centers on the practical rather than the theoretical. She is primarily concerned with ethical issues. The point of her books



is William's salvation. She wants to educate her sons while she is far away.

- *Handbook for William* and key themes
 - A discussion of vices and virtues
 - A reliance on Augustinian theology
 - The Christian warriors moral code
 - After the introductory material, in chapters one through three she writes about God, the Trinity, the theological virtues, and the importance of prayer.
 - She then outlines her son's duties to those above him and his subordinates. She sets forth a program in books four through six of moral development for William (gifts of the Holy Spirit as well as the beatitudes).
 - The story of salvation history is the central component of Dhuoda's practical advice to her sons.
 - Scripture forms the framework and the story for her own family's story.
 - Dhuoda relies heavily on Benedictine (Rule of St. Benedict thought and spirituality.)
 - One of the most interesting developments is Dhuoda's justification for her being a teacher. Christian women in the Middle Ages were not allowed to have any official teaching capacity.
 - Her task is to bring William to better comprehend God, and that she is the best instructor because she heard "burns for her son."
 - All mothers are teachers of the Christian faith.
 - Dhuoda firmly believes that her role as teacher is fitting for mothers, who can tailor spiritual lessons to the individual need of their child.
 - She bases much of her advice on the liturgical calendar of the Church.
 - She advises William to follow the liturgy of the hours.
 - Dhuoda advises William not to engage in conflicts unnecessarily.
 - Dhuoda advises that William needs to be a good steward.
 - Dhuoda discusses William's obligations and the hierarchy of obedience.
 - Dhuoda stresses obeying fathers above obeying kings.
 - Above all, for William to give good counsel he must have a rich spiritual life and pray to God unceasingly for wisdom.
 - Dhuoda ends her work by returning to scripture. She instructs William to pray the Psalms without ceasing. She urges him to recite them unceasingly.
 - Dhuoda asks William to pray the Psalms on her behalf.
- Lesson planning for *Handbook for William*
 - Introductory material should certainly be included.
 - Book ten is useful for understanding Dhuoda's interior life.



- Book three details William's duties as a ruler.
- Augustine's *Confessions* reveals the influence of Augustine's mother Monica had on her son's conversion (where the son acknowledges the role of his mother).
- In the mirror for prince's genre is the Letter from St. Louis the IX of France to his son Phillip. This is a source to pair with Dhuoda's handbook.
 - It is full of advice on how his son can rule effectively while remaining a virtuous Christian.
- Seminar discussion topics:
 - The impact of family in the Christian life and the development of virtues
 - Does gender make a difference in the advice given to a child?
 - How does historical context impact an author's guidance?
 - What instruction from the handbook might a student take to heart?
- Students have the potential to engage in self-reflection, with a writing about how their own parents or other leaders in their lives have trained them to grow in virtue.
- At a classical Christian school you could read Psalm 41 or Psalm 62 as a devotional text. Dhuoda cites many Psalms that could be used.
- Read the Rule of Saint Benedict.