

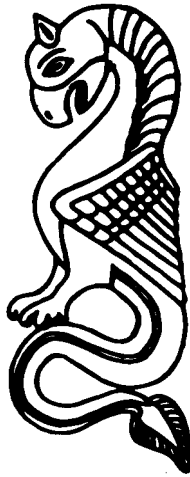
Leeds Studies in English

New Series XLII

2011

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Leeds Studies in English

<www.leeds.ac.uk/lse>

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2011

Dinah Hazell, *Poverty in Late Middle English Literature: The 'Meene' and the 'Riche'*. Dublin Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature, 2. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009. 234 pp. ISBN 978-1-84682-1155-4. £50.00.

Dinah Hazell's book provides a wide-ranging survey of representations of poverty in late fourteenth-century literature. It is structured by four topics or categories: 'Aristocratic', 'Urban', 'Rural', and 'Apostolic' poverty. Each section provides the reader with a brief 'socioeconomic overview' and a selection of descriptions of the place of poverty in a variety of texts. The breadth of texts discussed is unusual and interesting, and includes work on diverse genres.

The section on 'Aristocratic' Poverty includes discussions of five Middle English romances: *Ywain and Gawain*; *Sir Amadace*; *Sir Cleges*; *Sir Launfal*; and *Sir Orfeo*. The chapter on 'Urban' poverty contains some brief discussion of *Havelok*; 'London Lickpenny'; Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes*; Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*; and *The Simonie*. The section on 'Rural' poverty is dedicated to more substantial discussions of Chaucer (again), in the form of the *Clerk's* and *Nun's Priest's Tales*, and of the various Shepherds' Plays in the York, Chester, Coventry and Towneley cycles (with a natural emphasis on the Towneley *Prima* and *Secunda Pastorum*). The chapter on 'Apostolic' poverty is largely focused on anticlerical and antifraternal themes, such as those in Gower's *Vox Clamantis*, *The Land of Cockaygne*, and *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*. An interesting inclusion here, though, is Richard FitzRalph's Latin antifraternal text *Defensio Curatorum*. The 'positive' representation of clerical poverty is then detailed in texts such as the *South English Legendary*, Capgrave's *Life of Gilbert* and (interestingly) the romance *Sir Gowther*. A final chapter, 'solutions and attitudes', describes some of the different forms of relief that were afforded to the poor in the Middle Ages, from individual alms-giving to institutional charitable programs originating in monastic houses or hospitals.

From the list of works cited in the last paragraph alone, it should be clear that this is a very wide survey of the subject across a very broad (even eccentrically broad) sample of texts. Despite this breadth, there are particular strong points. The material on *The Simonie* in chapter two is substantial, and that on the *Clerk's Tale* in chapter three — concerning the psychological effects of poverty on Griselda — is interesting. The regular appearance of sections dedicated to socio-economic history provides a census of useful starting points, though sometimes at the risk of appearing to breeze through an awful lot of different topics rather briefly.

In the main, though, this is a book which may be most useful for scholars new to the material. As a compilation or anthology of texts on the representation of poverty, it may find use as a teaching aid for, particularly, the development of dissertations or theses on the subject of poverty and its literary representation in the later medieval period. As a book, though, it has some serious problems.

Hazell tends to try to cover a huge amount of material and the cost is a scattershot approach which often tends towards superficiality. While a quotation from Michel Mollat's classic *The Poor in the Middle Ages* (1986) begins the book, the equally important work of Bronislaw Geremek in *Poverty: A History* (1994) is strangely lacking from the intellectual framework of the book. Also, for example, while the 'socioeconomic overview' for the chapter on Apostolic Poverty does mention the importance of mendicantism (pp. 134–37), it does not mention some of the best scholarship on it, such as the historical work found in K. B. Wolf's *The Poverty of Riches: St Francis of Assisi Reconsidered* (2003), or the work (albeit not on later fourteenth

century English writing) in Nick Havely's *Dante and the Franciscans: Poverty and the Papacy in the 'Commedia'* (2004).

Moreover, while the extensive selection of texts is a good thing, the selection of the overarching, organizational categories seems rather misjudged. The entire first chapter on Aristocratic poverty is strikingly out of place. As Hazell herself writes, poverty frequently appears in these texts as 'transitory and transitional and serves as a basis for the examination of moral and social concerns' (p. 16). Poverty here is a kind of narrative topos, a way of plunging the protagonist into a situation of trial. That such representations of poverty might be interesting in themselves is fair — one might think of the suggestions of penitential activity in, for example, Malory's *Morte Darthur* — but to place them in such a formative position in a survey (and thereby suggest that they are central to the subject as a whole) seems ill-conceived.

The discussion of poverty in the texts also sometimes seems to lose focus. Phenomena such as particular literary themes or historical contexts appear for a paragraph and then disappear again, leaving the reader with an odd sense of having read a sequence of hazily-related abstracts rather than a sustained argument or exploration of a topic. For example, in the first chapter, we move from land economy to definitions of romance as a genre, to a survey of arguments about audience, within six pages, without any sense of how these different things are relevant to a wider intellectual argument about the material. Similarly, the textual discussions themselves sometimes seem to disintegrate into shorter discussions of distinct things. It is not clearly articulated, for example, how the issue of poverty in *Ywain and Gawain* relates to the discussion of 'trouthe' in Arthurian romance (pp. 26–30).

One also wonders if the book is meant to be read in tandem with Anne M. Scott's *Piers Plowman and the Poor* (2004, also from Four Courts Press), as the appearances made by Langland's poem here are rather brief and sporadic. While Hazell does suggest in the introduction (p. 11) that *Piers Plowman* has often been the focus of work on representations of poverty in medieval literature, its absence from sustained discussion in the book is something of a drawback. Few other texts in this period — perhaps none — are so deeply concerned with the issue of poverty, in terms which are at once both economic and spiritual. It might be that Langland's explorations of poverty do not really fit into the rather static categories that Hazell imposes on the material here. Langland is deeply interested in the idealization of poverty, for example in the shape of Christ who, Langland writes, in 'pouere mannes apparaille pursueþ vs eure' (B 11.185). As some scholars — Lawrence M. Clopper particularly — have argued, it may be that Langland has a particular interest in the charismatic form of voluntary poverty offered by Franciscanism. At the same time, Langland shows a detailed and sharply contemporary concern for the failings of clerical poverty, and in the problems of social categorization and spiritual worth that accompany such figures as 'able-bodied' beggars and itinerant ecclesiastics. These multifarious intersections between Langland and Hazell's subject should have made *Piers Plowman* central, rather than peripheral, to the book.

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Dana M. Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality. Gender in the Middle Ages, 5*. Cambridge: Brewer, 2010. viii + 227 pp. ISBN 978-1-8438-4232-3. £50.00.

This book represents an ambitious project: to interrogate medieval notions of the body and the boundaries of identity as they played out within a range of medieval literary contexts and

Start by marking "Poverty in Late Middle English Literature: The Meene and the Riche" as Want to Read: Want to Read saving...
Want to Read. Let us know what's wrong with this preview of Poverty in Late Middle English Literature by Dinah Hazell. Problem:
It's the wrong book It's the wrong edition Other. Details (if other): Cancel. Thanks for telling us about the problem. Return to
Book Page. Not the book you're looking for? Studies of medieval poverty tend to focus on a few works, particularly Piers Plowman
and related texts, and on the indigent and rural poor. This book presents a comprehensive view of poverty at different social levels, from
aristocrat to pauper, and the way in which poverty is employed as a topos to reflect social and moral concerns. (Dublin Studies in
Medieval and Renaissance Literature, 2.) Dublin and Portland, Oreg.: Four Courts Press, 2009. Pp. 233. \$65. Kate Crassons. Kate
Crassons. Lehigh University. Search for more articles by this author. Medieval literature begins in 476 A.D. and ends with the
Renaissance at the end of the 15th century. Medieval history can be divided into three stages, in which literature took part. These are:
The High Middle Ages: In this period, literature is written in Latin. The Late Middle Ages or Pre-Renaissance: It developed between
the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. During this period, great social changes took place. In the field of literature, the knightly novel and
profane theatre were born. Topics. The literary genres used in medieval literature were epics, lyrics, narrative and theatre. The epic
could be popular, represented by the songs of deeds or cults related to epopee. The lyric could be cultured or popular. Mike Rodman
Jones, pp. 119-20: Dinah Hazell, Poverty in Late Middle English Literature: The "Meene" and the "Riche", Dublin Studies in
Medieval and Renaissance Literature, 2 (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009). Olga Timofeeva, pp. 122-24: Kiriko Sato, The Development
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41, 2010 Essays in Honour of Oliver Pickering. articles. Janet Burton, William Marx, and Veronica O'Mara, Editorial Introduction, pp. x-
xvi. Katja Airaksinen, The Bouer Hours in Leeds University Library, Brotherton Collection, MS 8: New Evidence for Manuscript
Illumination from Bourges, pp. 1-24. Catherine Batt, Sloth and To calculate the overall star rating and percentage breakdown by star, we
don't use a simple average. Instead, our system considers things like how recent a review is and if the reviewer bought the item on
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