

The Medieval English Begging Poem

Dissertation Abstract

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Completed April, 2008

Since the only consistent feature of medieval English begging poems is the fact that they beg, usually for funds due, the form cannot quite be considered a genre. However, the relationships between poets and patrons that provide motivation for the poems' composition have a variety of things in common, primary among them being the social disparity between poet and patron and the overall nature of the social structure that defines that disparity. In the case of the Old English poems, the social structure is termed the *comitatus*; in the Middle English poems, it is the affinity, the medieval Church, and the workplace. By taking note of poets, patrons, and the transactional nature of poetry that begs, narratives can be constructed that illuminate how begging poems came to be written, as well as the success or failure of their object. Each chapter constructs one or more such narratives.