

Cover Image

A man ploughing with a yoke of oxen, while a second man plies the goad. The inscription reads, 'God spede þe plou' and sende us korne I now.'

CAMBRIDGE, TRINITY COLLEGE, MS R.3.14, f.1^v

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Editorial

The sixteenth volume of MARGINALIA is the Yearbook for 2011–12. As is customary, the Yearbook presents two student essays from last year’s MPhil course. For the Cambridge MPhil in Medieval and Renaissance Literature students receive training in palaeography and codicology, as well as in the literary analysis of early English texts. They are required to write two essays as well as a more substantial dissertation. Annually, the convenors of the course select two essays from the best student work of that year for publication in MARGINALIA. This year’s contributors are Naomi Geraghty and Hetta Howes.

In “‘A Record of Treuthe’: Redeeming Words in Langland’s *Piers Plowman*’, Naomi Geraghty explores Langland’s always searching use of the vernacular for the pursuit of a perplexing and elusive theological truth. In an essay that is in thoughtful dialogue with the work of Mary Carruthers and Maureen Quilligan, among others, Geraghty examines the C-text’s grammatical metaphors to argue that for Langland it is the very ‘limitations’ of human language that ‘provide a productive way of imagining God’. Far from seeking to transcend the intractable materiality of written expression, Geraghty argues, Langland insistently exploits it. ‘It is precisely when we are most conscious of his words as words that they seem most capable of revealing the divine’.

The volume’s second essay nicely complements the first, in so far as it is focused on a nearly contemporary poem from a similar alliterative tradition. In “‘Sowrede” eyes and obscured meaning: *Wynnere and Wastoure* as spiritual challenge’ Hetta Howes explores *Wynnere*’s visual metaphors to argue for a reading that does justice to the poem’s soteriological concerns. She also considers the poem’s inconclusive nature, its demand for ‘moral attentiveness’ from its reader, and the implications of its manuscript context in Robert Thornton’s ‘London’ miscellany. Her essay seeks to move beyond the political and economic contexts in which the poem is often understood in order to read it not only as ‘a spiritual challenge to which the reader must rise’ but as a work that to some extent ‘shares the same anxieties’ as the better-known *Piers Plowman*.

As usual, this issue also contains reviews of some recent publications in the field of medieval studies. These include a new translation of Augustine’s *City of God*, a book on the origins of Tolkien’s *Hobbit*, and a study of sanctity and pornography in medieval culture.

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Thanks are owed to the authors, reviewers and editors who have contributed to this issue of MARGINALIA, and to all those others who have given help and advice over the past year. These include not only members of the advisory board and the journal committee but also the English Faculty in Cambridge, which has always generously supported MARGINALIA and the Medieval Reading Group. We would also like to thank all the members of the Reading Group itself, and especially its visiting speakers, for their stimulating papers and lively participation throughout the year.

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