

Claire M. Waters, *Translating Clergie: Status, Education, and Salvation in Thirteenth-Century Vernacular Texts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). Print, 312 pp., £45.50, ISBN: 978081227725.



Review

In this volume that is part of The Middle Ages Series, Claire Waters focuses on the relationship between student and teacher in French vernacular didactic texts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, giving attention to a great many texts that have been largely ignored, and opening a very important avenue of research.

In her preface, Waters touches on a point underscoring the importance of the texts she treats, and of their role in the development of informal, mass education: that French texts were an important step in the transition from Latin to English religious texts. Waters sees the Anglo-French, often in verse, read by a developing, literate middle class, as part of a transnational French tradition that ‘laid the foundations [...] for later challenges to clerical dominance and monopoly’ in educating its audiences. (p. xii) Because these texts were circulated widely and served as bases for later English translations, they played an essential role in expanding the accessibility of religious knowledge to the lay-clergy and to the public.

Although, Waters points out, these Anglo-French texts have been studied in the context of the later Church controversy over how accessible the ‘Scriptures’ should be, she looks at these texts in their contemporary *milieu*, before the greater access to religious instruction was a charged political issue. Throughout the book, Waters provides close readings and criticism of a sizeable corpus of texts, including Gospels, handbooks of doctrine and theology, versified sermons, Marian miracles, hagiographies and fabliaux, as well as biblical and apocryphal narratives. Thus, she

convincingly argues that these texts should be seen as part of a shared culture encompassing varied social classes and statuses.

Central to Waters' volume is the cooperation of teacher and student in the act of educating towards the salvation of both, impressed by a translation of St. Augustine into French by William of Waddington, telling of God's requirement for human assistance in saving mankind. Maurice de Sully's vernacular sermons and Pierre d'Albernon's *Lumiere as lais* show the focus of didactic between master and student. The focus on death, judgement and salvation in these texts shows the desire for greater access to religious knowledge, as well as the movement towards greater lay literacy, underscoring the importance of the interaction between student and teacher, both participants in gaining knowledge that will help them in their collective fate of soul.

From the first chapter, Waters invites close readings of passages that exemplify the importance of exchange in learning, showing a dialogic status between master and student, and highlighting Robert de Grosseteste's *Chateau d'amour* and Honorius' *Speculum ecclesiastae*, as well as a satirical estates sermon by Barthélemy, *Romans de carité*, among other texts. The variety of texts and genres that Waters studies attest to the appeal to audiences across a wide range of clergy and laity, not just the wealthy. Among her examples are also illuminations, notably of the *Dialogue du père et du fils* and its different versions, as well as that of the knight who returns from the dead to visit his friend in the *Manuel des pechiez*. Notable also is the example of the Bodleian Library's *Lumiere as lais* manuscript that has the *Kalendar* of Ralph of Lenham and the *Chateau d'amour* of Grosseteste written alongside in a different hand, demonstrating the collaborative role of education.

In the next chapters, Waters discusses the role of these texts in a universal education in terms of death and individual judgement, and looks at the Gospels, stories of the sinner-saint, Christ's descent into Hell to rescue the just, and *L'Évangelie de Nicodème*, showing how audiences could relate biblical stories to their

own education. Waters also treats the comic, popular narratives that disseminated religious teaching to non-clerical audiences, and showed the moment of judgement and salvation of low-status and despised people, providing analyses of texts such as *Aucassin et Nicolette*, *Des putains et des lecheors*, and *St. Pierre et le jongleur*. Marian literature also receives a much-needed investigation from this fresh perspective.

Waters shows how, together, these works created 'a common ground of knowledge and practice between the devout audience, the saved sinners in the miracles, and the teacher who brings them together and in doing so, he hopes, saves himself' (p. 207). In a masterful conclusion, Waters draws together her study of this corpus of didactic literature, confirming the idea inherent in them all: the enduring link between love and knowledge that is present in the story of salvation and the way in which it was taught in these twelfth-century texts, both teacher and student equal participants.

Featuring extensive notes and bibliography that complement the whole, this is a work that is welcome in the field of medieval studies, bringing a much-needed new perspective to the religious didactic texts, as well as the more popular literature that circulated among the learned and learning of the twelfth century. It opens up new approaches to the lives and status of clergy and laity, as well as to the interpretation of a corpus of largely ignored texts and their role in the history of medieval education. Scholars of medieval literature, history and religion will appreciate this work, and it will greatly further research of similar texts in other languages, as well as the corpus of medieval texts accounting journeys into the netherworld, and their relation to their audiences.

Stephanie L. Hathaway

University of Oxford