

Medieval Literature

Introduction

Ancrene Wisse

Friars, who are referred to, first reached England in 1224.

The text was written for three noble women but became relevant to a wider audience. It later circulated to the wider country. The text was translated into French and then back out of French into the English of the era; Ancrene Wisse became a text that everyone should have read. The dialect of the text traces it back to Worcestershire, where Old English was being celebrated as the optimum language for religious texts.

Anchorism, meant being enclosed and studying/celebrating the 'creator' which apparently required a list of rules. People were almost buried in their church and the ceremony prior to this was much like a burial and thus lived in a confined space. Anchorites remained enclosed for anything up to 40 years. Medical treatment was allowed.

Owl and the Nightingale

Animals are used as a figurative metaphors for people. It is by no means unique in its approach, it owes the themes to the bestiary genre. Debate genre is also drawn upon here and is a combination of the two genres. It massive draws upon the classical works of Plato, Boethius, Lucian and Alcuin.

There are types of debates, the comic, the moral and political debates.

Wynnere and Wastoure

An allegorical debate, the manuscript now rests in the British library. It is widely regarded as being written in the Midlands, due to its alliterative stresses. It contains 4 feet with the normal caesura and pauses. The text is linked to the alliterative revival which is often heavily debated as many view it as more of an alliterative tradition that continues. The problem lies with the fact that after the Anglo Saxons there were very few alliterative poems found until the 14th century. If it did 'die out' then the revival is a conscious revival, perhaps politically motivated? The prestigious language was French which in poetry was written in rhyming couplets; this shifted to English in the medieval period. The resurgence perhaps represents the poetic desire to separate themselves from London. This means that alliterative verse gave other types of poetry a competition of dominance, other types being Chaucer, Gower etc.

'Honi soit qui mal y pense' - Motto of the Order of the Garter

1351 - The Statute of Labourers was passed - every able bodied person should take a certain salary due to the food shortage. This kept the labourer's 'in their place' and so forced them to work the land.

1352 - The Treason Act was passed - worked out what was actually treason, one of the oldest laws that still stands today. This aided in maintaining social order.

These provide context to the arguments of Wynnere and Waster lines 206 and 317 reference this directly.

- Begins with a prologue discussing how entertainers were given little respect.
- He then discusses a time he lays on the grass (dream vision) and saw a giant flag with the image of the Order of the Garter.
- The King is inside the pavilion, we then get a description of each army.