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**Marginalizing Mendicancy in the Fourteenth Century:
 On a Telling Interpolation in the *Romaunt of the Rose*
 and Its Contexts**

“But I trowe that the book seith wel,
 Who that takith almessis that be
 Dewe to folk that men may se
 Lame, feble, wery, and bare,
 Pore, or in such maner care—
 That konne wynne hem never mo,
 For they have no power therto—
 He etith his owne dampnyng,
 But if he lye, that made al thing.
**And if ye such a truaunt fynde,
 Chastise hym wel, if ye be kynde,
 But they wolde hate you, percas,
 And, if ye fillen in her laas,
 They wolde eftsoonys do you scathe,
 If that they myghte, late or rathe;
 For they be not full pacient
 That han the world thus foule blent.”¹**
 (6636-52, interpolation emphasized)

The first nine lines of this quotation are a fairly literal translation of a nine-line passage from Jean de Meun’s portion of the *Roman de la Rose* which is nearly the same in all manuscripts. These lines threaten able-bodied beggars with damnation for eating the bread of the deserving poor. The next eight lines translate, although not as literally, an interpolated passage that appears only in a certain family

¹ All quotations from the *Romaunt of the Rose* will be taken from the edition published in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition, ed. Larry D. Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

of *Rose* manuscripts dating from the fourteenth century.¹ The wariness of beggars as criminals manifested in these lines is, as I will demonstrate, a fourteenth-century development. The speaking persona remains the same in the interpolation as in the preceding passages: False Seeming (or *Fals-Semblant*), an able-bodied Mendicant who tells the truth about his own hypocrisy and those of his kind. Here he urges the listener who encounters a “truaunt” (a sturdy beggar) to “chastise” him well as an act of benevolent humanity (*if ye be kynde*). Is there irony intended in this use of *kynde*? One wonders also whether the chastisement recommended is verbal or physical, for Fals-Semblant goes on to imagine the possibility that sturdy beggars, who are not patient people, might hate their chastiser and revenge themselves by harming him if he ever fell into their snare. This suggests the dangerousness of sturdy beggars as criminal gangs.

¹ Ronald Sutherland, “*The Romaunt of the Rose*” and “*Le Roman de la Rose*,” *A Parallel-Text Edition* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), p. 132, provides the closest French versions of these lines, the first nine from the Ri manuscript (Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana 2775) and the second eight lines from the Bu manuscript (Brussels, Bibliothèque royale Albert 1^{er}, 11019):

“Mès ie croi que, selonc la lettre,
 Les aumosnes qui sont deües
 Auz povres gens lasses e nues,
 Foibles e viex e mehainiés,
 Par cui pain n’iert ia gaaigniés
 Pour ce qu’il n’en ont la puissance,
 Qui les mangue en lor grevance,
 Il mangue son dampnement,
 Se cil qui fist Adam ne ment.
**(Se nul tel truant troviez,
 De li chastier bien feriez
 Se chastoir croire ne voloient,
 Mès espoir il vous en harroient,
 E vous en porroit mechoer
 Si pooient lor point voer,
 Que ge cuide au mien escient
 Qu’il ne sunt pas mout pacient.)**” (11366-82, interpolation emphasized)

The manuscript designations Ri and Bu come from Ernest Langlois, *Les manuscrits du Roman de la rose, description et classement* (Paris: Champion, 1910). Langlois dated one B manuscript late thirteenth century (all others fourteenth), but this dating for the Turin manuscript may well be too early, and the manuscript is no longer legible due to fire damage.

Through the unreliable fictive persona of *Faux Semblant* in the *Roman de la rose*, Jean de Meun not only participated in the thirteenth-century Parisian controversy over the legitimacy of mendicancy practiced by able-bodied friars, but he extended the controversy to all begging, even by laymen, although this generalization is partly due to later readers' interpretations of his text. The Middle English translation of this section of *Faux Semblant's* discourse on mendicancy, probably done by a contemporary of Chaucer,¹ illustrates this extension of the debate.

Fals-Semblant appears in the guise of a begging friar and is, by his own admission, a hypocrite: he knows and expounds what is right – the traditions of the Christian church, but also of secular law concerning begging – yet deliberately chooses to do what is wrong. With his paunch full of good food and wine, Fals-Semblant feigns poverty and distances himself from the real poverty of truly hungry beggars:

For how that I me pover feyne,
 Yit alle pore folk I disdeyne.
 I love bettir th'acqueyntaunce,
 Ten tyme, of the kyng of Fraunce
 Than of a pore man of mylde mod,
 Though that his soule be also god.
 For whanne I see beggers quakyng,
 Naked on myxnes al stynkyng,
 For hungre crie, and eke for care,
 I entremete not of her fare.
 They ben so pore and ful of pyne.
 They myght not oonys yeve me dyne,
 For they have nothing but her lyf.
 What shulde he yeve that likketh his knyf? (6489-502)

Fals-Semblant, the able-bodied Mendicant, goes on to argue that, according to the naked (or literal) text of the Bible, Christ and his

¹ In his introduction, Sutherland gives a résumé of earlier critical opinion and argues that the first (A) fragment of the *Romaunt* is based on a French manuscript of the H family, while both B and C fragments are based on an R version, with some additions from a B version (p. XXXIV). This suggests a change of translator and corroborates earlier arguments that Chaucer translated only the A fragment.

apostles were never seen her bred beggyng, / For they nolden beggen for nothing (6550-51). This argument is that of the thirteenth-century secular clergy (men like Guillaume de Saint Amour), and not of the friars, who justified their able-bodied begging by Christ's example. To the authority of the Gospels (without any Mendicant glossing), Fals-Semblant adds that of Saint Augustine, who expected the religious to work for their living (6583-6614).

When Fals-Semblant appeals to the ancient authority of secular law – the Justinian Code – he seems to broaden his argument to the legitimacy of all begging (not just by friars). He points out that Justinian prohibited the able-bodied from begging on pain of death and called for maiming, beating, or other public justice to dissuade sturdy beggars:

Justinian eke, that made lawes,
 Hath thus forboden, by olde dawes:
 'No man, up peyne to be ded,
 Mighty of body, to begge his bred,
 If he may swynke it for to gete;
 Men shulde hym rather mayme or bete,
 Or don of hym apert justice,
 Than suffren hym in such malice.' (6615-22)

Immediately following this passage, which is a close translation of Jean de Meun's French, comes the passage cited at the beginning of this essay, where Fals-Semblant agrees with "the book" (in French, the literal sense or "lettre") that able-bodied beggars, when they eat the bread of the deserving poor, "eat their own damnation." (This is exactly what the hypocritical Fals-Semblant does when, by his own admission, he avoids hungry beggars on their dung heaps and cultivates rich alms-givers instead). The "book" Fals-Semblant alludes to is the Bible (I Corinthians 11: 29: *qui enim manducat et bibit indigne iudicium sibi manducat et bibit*), however the sense of the cited words has been changed by their use in a different context. Jean de Meun's immediate source is a passage from Guillaume de Saint Amour's *De periculis*, where Paul's phrase concerning those who take the Eucharist (not the bread of the poor) in an unworthy

manner is used to condemn the Mendicants.¹ In the *Roman* and the *Romaunt*, the context of the previous allusion to the Justinian Code makes the condemnation of able-bodied begging seem to be much broader.

The interpolation in the B family of *Roman de la rose* manuscripts goes on to urge the correction of able-bodied beggars, but it also suggests that they may not want to accept correction and will perhaps come to hate their critic, who could come to misfortune (*porroit mechoer*) if they find an occasion (*Si pooient lor point voer*). The warning is vaguely stated in the French version, and it might even apply to verbal vengeance taken by the friars on their critics.² The English translator who went to the trouble of adding this interpolated passage³ seemed to be thinking of a physical, criminal revenge more appropriate to robbers or thugs when he used the active form *do you scathe* (do you harm) and the image of capture *if ye fillen in her laas* (if you fell into their snare). Furthermore, he wrapped up the interpolation with a line that was not in the French in order to emphasize the foul deception practiced by these able-bodied beggars: *That han the world thus foule blent*.

¹ Faux Semblant's speech in the *Roman de la rose* is frequently drawn from the Latin prose of Guillaume de Saint Amour's anti-Mendicant *Tractatus de periculis novissimorum temporum* (*Treatise on the perils of the most recent times*). For this particular borrowing, see the notes to lines 11336-44 in the critical edition of *Le roman de la rose* by Félix Lecoy (Paris: Champion, 1966), vol. 2, p. 284.

² For example, later in his monologue (in both French and English texts), False Seeming explains how friars connive to bring about the downfall of the enemy of any one of them (*Roman* 11607-12; *Romaunt* 6923-29). Still later Fals-Semblant admits that he cannot bear criticism:

But whoso wole chastise me,
 Anoon my love lost hath he;
 For I love no man, in no gise,
 That wole me repreve or chastise. (6987-90)

According to Lecoy (p. 287), the corresponding lines from the *Roman de la rose* (11663-66) translate a passage criticizing the Mendicants in *De periculis*.

³ It is of course possible that the English translator did not choose to incorporate a B manuscript interpolation here, but instead used a French exemplar of the R family that already contained these additions, a manuscript now lost.

Fals-Semblant continues his long argument against sturdy begging by quoting and expounding Saint Paul's commandment to the Apostles to work with their hands:

Seynt Poul, that loved al hooly chirche,
 He bad th'appostles for to wirche,
 And wynnyn her lyflode in that wise,
 And hem defended truandise,
 And seide, 'Wirketh with youre honden.'
 Thus shulde the thing be undirstonden. (6661-66)

This admonition seems to apply particularly to the clergy or to Mendicants. Nevertheless, because of the great controversy over the *estat of mendience* (6707), Fals-Semblant once again broadens his subject to explain – on the authority of Guillaume de Saint Amour – just who does have a right to beg. This passage is a close translation of Jean de Meun's text, according to which there are six legitimate categories (6716-6762): 1) a person who has no other way of supporting himself while he learns a craft; 2) a person incapable of working due to age, illness, feebleness or extreme youth; 3) an indigent noble person fallen from a life of luxury and without any work skills; 4) a working person temporarily out of work; 5) a working person whose labor is not sufficient to support him or his family without a supplement from begging; 6) a person engaged in trying to rescue or defend the Christian faith by arms (crusaders) or letters (clergy), but only during the period of these efforts. Most of these categories of legitimate begging involve laymen, and some even include the able-bodied, at least temporarily. Thus this passage tends to complete and nuance the earlier allusion to the Justinian Code, with its blanket condemnation of beggars *mighty of body* (6618). At the same time, this passage opens the subject of begging by laymen to more intense scrutiny.

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In the fourteenth-century context of increasing wariness of beggars, it is worth noting that Geoffrey Chaucer treated no secular beggars in his surviving writings and never raised the question of the legitimacy of begging by laymen. His adaptations of Jean de Meun's *Faux Semblant* (through the characters of the Friar and the Pardoner of his *Canterbury Tales*) focus exclusively on begging by able-bodied

religious. The *worthy lymytour* Friar Huberd is, according to his portrait in the *General Prologue*, not only *strong [...] as a champion* but also *the best beggere in his hous*, a man whose preaching and presence is so pleasing that he manages to get alms from the most difficult of audiences, the indigent:

For thogh a wydwe hadde noght a sho,
 So plesaunt was his "*In principio*,"
 Yet wolde he have a ferthyng, er he wente. (A 253-55)

The shoeless widow's farthing, given to a begging friar, may gain her a place in heaven, but the friar's willingness to take the widow's last farthing may seem like stealing directly from the poor, rather than indirectly, as he does when he diverts the charity of the wealthy to his order. He avoids contact with those secular beggars from whom he siphons off charity (lepers, beggar-women...), arguing that it would be both unprofitable and dishonorable to deal with them:

He knew the tavernes wel in every toun
 And everich hostiler and tappestere
 Bet than a lazar or a beggestere,
 For unto swich a worthy man as he
 Acorded nat, as by his facultee,
 To have with sike lazars aqueyntaunce.
 It is nat honest; it may nat avaunce,
 For to deelen with no swich poraille,
 But al with riche and selleres of vitaille. (A 240-48)

Like *Faux Semblant*, the begging friar would exclude lay competitors for alms by substituting himself and his order as recipients of the charity of the rich. Friar Huberd and the Mendicants get their comeuppance later in the *Canterbury Tales*, for the "Summoner's Tale" demonstrates the gluttony and greed of a friar and makes these the cause of his humiliation: a fart in the face which he must divide equally with his fellow friars.

Chaucer's Pardoner, licensed by the Pope to sell indulgences, to preach and hear confession like the friars, is also modelled on *Faux Semblant*. Although he is not an able-bodied beggar (for he has things to sell), the Pardoner is a hypocrite and a charlatan. If Chaucer read a B version of the *Roman de la rose*, it is possible that he was inspired by its interpolated warning against the vengeance of chastized *truants* as well as by *Faux Semblant's* later revelations (in all manuscript versions) about the friars' methods of bringing about an enemy's

downfall.¹ In effect, we have an imaginative expansion upon this warning in the lines of the Pardoner's "Prologue" where he tells how some of his sermons are inspired by hate and aimed to get revenge on those who have offended him or his "brothers":

For certes, many a predicacioun
 Comth ofte tyme of yvel entencioun;

and som for hate.
 For whan I dar noon oother weyes debate,
 Thanne wol I styngre hym with my tonge smerte
 In prechyng, so that he shal nat asterte
 To been defamed falsly, if that he
 Hath trespased to my bretheren or to me.
 For though I telle nocht his propre name,
 Men shal wel knowe that it is the same,
 By signes, and by othere circumstances.
 Thus quyte I folk that doon us displesances;
 Thus spitte I out my venym under hewe
 Of hoolynesse, to semen hooly and trewe. (C 407-22)

If he read it, Chaucer understood and exploited the B version interpolation with reference to able-bodied religious beggars and frauds (not with reference to lay beggars as potential criminals, as did the translator of the C fragment of the *Romaunt*).

In his silence with respect to lay begging and his consistent criticism of religious begging instead, Chaucer's attitude seems to differ from that of his English contemporary, William Langland, and it is, as we shall see, diametrically opposed to that of his French contemporary, Eustache Deschamps. In the prologue of *Piers Plowman* William Langland devotes six harsh lines to his narrator's observations about beggars:

Bidderis and beggeris faste aboute yede,
 Til here belyes and here bagges were Bretful ygrammid;
 Fayteden for here foode, foughten at the ale;
 In glotonye, God wot, go thei to bedde,
 And risen up with ribaudie, tho roberdis knaves;
 Slepe and sleuthe sewith hem evere. (A version, lines 40-45)²

¹ See footnote 2 p. 373.

² *Piers the Plowman: A Critical Edition of the A-Version*, ed. Thomas A. Knott and David C. Fowler (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1952), p. 68.

Langland's beggars are able-bodied people who move around rapidly but are too lazy and dishonest to work for a living; they are imposters who get food by deceiving people into believing they are too sick or disabled to work, and then fight over their ale. Having crammed their bags and bellies during the day, they go to bed gluttoned at night. Although Langland associates beggars with robbers, rascals, and the slothful, and although he focuses exclusively on "illegitimate" begging, he does not seem to want to exclude beggars from society. Langland's beggars are part of the *fair feld ful of folk* made up of all sorts of people working and erring in the world.

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The avowed purpose of a series of imprecatory *balades* against beggars written in the last quarter of the fourteenth century by the French courtier poet and royal official Eustache Deschamps was to further marginalize beggars, that is, to rid the church (and Christian society) of them.¹ Each *balade* ends with an envoy addressed to ecclesiastical or civil authorities or to respectable citizens exhorting them to expel beggars from the interior of churches, where they disturb the celebration of mass with their foul odors and crowding:

L'en ne s'i puet agenoillier
 Qu'il n'en ait devant et derrier ;
 L'un tent sa main, l'autre s'escuelle,
 Puans comme une orde ruelle. (VI, p. 237, lines 16-19)

The stench of the beggars is one of the ways they "pollute" the temple (*Du temple ou font polucion*, VI, p. 280, line 18). Furthermore, their loud demands drown out the rites:

Car l'on ne puet au moustier messe oir
 Pour leur annuy, tant sont fort emparlez
 De faindre maulx, d'aumosnes requerir ;
 Chascun est la par leur fait deboutez.
 Ilz sont puissans, larrons, atruandez,
 Oyseux, faillis, dont nul bien ne puet ystre,
 Pour amender leur donne ceste epistre,
 Dont mains prisiez seront des gens latins

¹ These six *balades* are numbered 1229, 1230, 1233, 1259, 1299 and 1300 in *Œuvres complètes d'Eustache Deschamps*, ed. Marquis de Queux de Saint-Hilaire and Gaston Raynaud, 11 vols. (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1878-1901); the first four appear in volume VI; the last two, in VII.

Ceuls qui des maux de sains se donnent titre,
Ribaulx, paillars, truandes et coquins. (VI, p. 231, lines 21-30)

The two strophes preceding this one in *balade* 1229 are nothing but a series of curses calling down lightning, hail, thunder, rain, mad dogs and other sorts of violent death upon beggars who “entitle” themselves to charity by pretending to be afflicted with an illness. It is with irony that Deschamps calls this written poem (*epistre*) a means of correcting sturdy beggars that will make many of them highly “prized” by the clergy (*gens latins*). Indeed this poem would make them targets of physical chastisement, for Deschamps calls upon all clerical institutions and orders (even the Mendicants!), along with civic authorities, to beat beggars out of their churches:

O colleges, chanoines et curez,
Moines, prieurs, abbesses et abbez,
Tous mendiens, chartroux et celestins,
Coustres, patrons es villes et citez,
A bons batons de voz moustiers fustez
Ribaulx, paillars, truandes et coquins. (VI, p. 231, lines 31-36)

Like Christ whipping the moneylenders out of the Temple, Deschamps uses the lash of verbal invective to purge the Church of those who beg for alms. With their strings of curses and invective epithets aimed at beggars, Deschamps’ imprecatory *balades* are a verbal act of expulsion which he urges ecclesiastical and civic authorities to imitate by using physical force. Although the kinds of punishments he threatens in the central strophes of his imprecatory *balades* are usually more drastic – from being struck by lightning to being hanged or burnt alive – in the end, his envoys usually recommend a good beating. For example, the envoy of *balade* 1233 calls on ecclesiastics to “purge” the church by preventing the entry of all rogues (*paillart, lourdier...truandes*), and especially sturdy beggars (mentioned twice), whom they must correct well (*bien corrugier*):

Gens de l’eglise, on doit purgier
D’entrer enz tout paillart, loudier,
Truandes n’y doyvent manoir ;
Faictes les donc bien corrugier.
Truans, il vous convient voidier,
Que l’en vous puist trestous ardoir ! (VI, p. 238, lines 33-38)

Elsewhere Deschamps is more explicit about the form this “correction” should take. In the envoy to *balade* 1259 addressed to

princes and prelates, he assures that beating sturdy beggar-men and beggar-women with a short stick full of big knots will get rid of their illnesses and drive them out of the region:

Prince et prelas, soiez certains
 Que caymans seront ratains,
 Truans, truandes, s'on les presse
 A cours batons de gros neux plains ;
 Lors seront de leurs mauux restrains,
 Et fuiront vostre region ;
 Grant pechié fait qui les y lesse :
 Que n'en fait l'en pugnicion ? (VI, p. 280, lines 31-38)

Indeed, Deschamps argues that it is a great sin for responsible men not to punish beggars in this way. In the envoy to *balade* 1299, Deschamps urges laymen who go to church in the morning to “give” to each beggar two blows with a heavy stick (which will send them on their way “cured”), while the two-line refrain of the same poem more radically urges bailiffs and seneschals to arrest the beggars and to hang them as a good deed:

Vous qui alez au moustier le matin,
 Noble, bourgeois, marchant et pelerin,
 A telz truans donnez chascun .II. caux
 D'un gros baston, pour aler leur chemin :
 A truander ne seront plus enclin,
 Mais s'en fuiront sanz chaucés et deschaux,
 En demoustrant que gueri sont et net.
 Advisez y, baillis et seneschaulx,
 Prenez, pandez, et ce sera bien fet. (VII, p. 53, lines 31-39)

At best, Deschamps would allow beggars space to sit outside the church, at the door:¹

¹ In Romanesque art, monstrous images were in part replaced by images of jongleurs, vagabonds, and the suffering poor carved in relief on corbels outside churches (where these people would have gathered in the hope of attracting alms). By the mid-thirteenth century, these same sorts of “grotesque” images, some of people afflicted with misshapen or maimed bodies, were carved high up on corbels and bosses inside the naves and transepts of churches, as for example in the Cathedral of Saint Maurice in Angers. This change of situation, from outside to inside, may signify a change in the space where begging and almsgiving took place. For examples and reproductions of these sculpted popular figures, see Nurith Kenaan-Kedar, *Marginal Sculpture in Medieval France: Towards the Deciphering of an Enigmatic Pictorial Language* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995).

A tout le moins, qui ne vous mande,
 Au portal soit vostre establee,
 Par dehors, sur paine d'amende. (VI, p. 238, lines 23-25)

At worst, he would have beggars excluded from medieval society altogether, either by beating them so that they flee the region or by hanging or burning them as criminals or heretics. In these invective *balades*, there does not seem to be any such thing as a beggar with a legitimate claim to Christian charity. Deschamps' beggars are all imposters pretending to be ill, handicapped, or maimed in order not to have to work for a living:

Car pluseurs font le potencier,
 Qui sont sain, couchans en bon lit ;
 Toute nuit leurs jambes saingnier
 Font par sang et herbes qu'on frit,
 Tant qu'ilz ne soient escondit ;
 En cheant font aux gens freour,
 Et en escumant grant paour
 Par sablon qu'ilz ont et par sieu,
 Faingnans cris et horrible plour ;
 Mais ce sont tuit larron a Dieu. (VII, p. 54, lines 11-20)

In feigning illness to divert alms from the truly needy – from the poor who represent Christ on earth (*pauperes Christi*) – Deschamps' beggars become, in effect, “robbers of God.” But the speaker also accuses them of literal robbery.

In his invective lists, Deschamps confounds beggars with robbers, pimps, prostitutes, debauched people, rascals, sorcerers, and fortunetellers. The opening list of one *balade* (VII, p. 52, lines 1-6) mixes *potencieres*, or women on crutches, with a whole series of denigrating epithets: *truant*, *caymant*, *coquin*, *maquerelles*, *ribaudes*, *repenties*, *sorcières*, *divin*, *ribaulx*, *paillars*, *larrons*. Deschamps treats the *truand* (a person who lives by begging) as a *truant* (a person who breaks the law). He stresses the robberies and murders committed daily by these sturdy, but lazy, beggars, who prey on merchants at markets and fairs and on the truly poor:

Qui sont puissans leur pain gaingnier,
 Et chascun d'eulx d'oiseuse vit,
 Que Dieux deffent, et mendier
 Ceuls vont, espier le Landit
 Et les marchiez pour leur prouffit,

Robans et tuans chascun jour
 Les bon marchans, c'est grant horreur,
 Et les vraiz povres en maint lieu,
 Eulx faingnans estre en grant tristour ;
 Mais ce sont tuit larron a Dieu. (VII, p. 55, lines 21-30)

In *balade* 1299, Deschamps specifically accuses sturdy beggar-women of being prostitutes and of searching for clients while seeking handouts, but also of spying or serving as sentinels for bands of robbers who fall upon merchants in the woods:

Ilz roberent Dieu et le peuple en la fin,
 Les truandes font les maqueleries
 En truandant, en portant leur cofin,
 Et pour rober sont maintefoiz espies :
 Plus ont de plait qu'estourneaulx, gais ne pies.
 Aux bons marchans font es bois mains assaulx,
 Robent, tuent, es moustiers, es portaulx,
 Font trop d'annuis ; l'un crie et l'autre bret :
 Advisez y, baillis et seneschaulx,
 Prenez, pandez, et ce sera bien fet. (VII, p. 53, lines 21-30)

These imprecatory *balades* present beggars as anything but harmless unfortunates; they are predators, organizers and perpetrators of crime, members of criminal bands.

Deschamps' wariness of beggars as a dangerous group bears comparison to the previously discussed interpolation in the B version of the *Roman de la rose* (and to the English *Romaunt's* translation of it), which warns anyone who would "chastise" beggars that they may not take it patiently but seek their revenge. Deschamps does not heed this warning, for beggars' very lack of patience makes them the object of his ridicule in *balade* 1230, to the refrain of *Atten encor jusqu'a demain*. This *balade* is written in the form of a dialogue between a speaker and a whole series of beggars, each with a different physical illness and a different complaint. Invariable, the speaker puts off each beggar's request by recommending that he take his suffering in patience and look on the positive side. For example, to the blind man's plea, he responds by sending the man to bed without a candle, happily in no danger of setting the bedclothes on fire:

—Va t'en sanz chandoille couchier,
 D'ardoir ton lit es hors de doute. (VI, p. 232, lines 3-4)

To the beggar who complains of pain in his head, arm and elbow, the speaker replies that he is in no danger of knifing anyone and having to pay a fine for the crime. The facetious replies seem to grow in cynicism. For example, to the beggar who complains that he is burning up with fever, the speaker responds that the man need not spend money on firewood and can use the river Seine as a cover to cool himself (which amounts to telling him to go drown himself).

Modern readers, even medievalists, are likely to be shocked by such uncharitable views on the part of a fourteenth-century Christian poet who was also a royal administrator.¹ The sheer excess of his exasperated diatribes may make the speaker himself seem comic at times, as is often the case in “angry,” Juvenalian types of satire, but the brunt of his verbal attack is clearly aimed at sturdy beggars. Deschamps’ view that the beggar pollutes the Church and should be excluded from society contradicts Christ’s teaching that the poor are an elect group who represent him on earth (Matthew 25: 34-40). To give food, drink, shelter, clothing, and comfort in sickness or in prison to one of the “least” (or poorest of humans, *fratribus meis minimis*) is, according to the Bible, a sure way to salvation, for it is the same thing as helping Christ himself.

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As medieval historians have demonstrated, such a change of attitude toward the extremely poor did not come about all of a sudden.² For instance, the teaching that the poor are especially dear to Christ conflicted with the widely held view that extreme poverty and illness were divine punishments for personal sin, and consequently

¹ Jean-Patrice Boudet discusses Deschamps’ imprecatory *balades* against beggars in the context of the harsh social legislation and opinions of the Marmouset reformers in *Eustache Deschamps en son temps*, dir. Jean-Patrice Boudet et Hélène Millet (Paris: Sorbonne, 1997), pp. 263-67.

² See the studies of Bronislaw Geremek, *Les marginaux parisiens aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles*, transl. Daniel Beauvois (Paris: Flammarion, 1976); Michel Mollat, *Les pauvres au Moyen Age* (Paris: Hachette, 1978); and Brian Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law: A Sketch of Canonical Theory and Its Application in England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959).

justifications for being wary of the sinner, justifications for social opprobrium and exclusion:

Les hérétiques, les lépreux, les prostituées sont [...] marqués de signes infamants. En un certains sens, les mendiants aussi doivent se différencier par l'aspect, non seulement par l'habit [pauvre], qui est l'indice naturel de leur situation matérielle, mais surtout par leur aspect physique qui doit justifier leurs demandes d'aumônes et prouver leur incapacité de travail. Or l'infirmité physique est considérée, au Moyen Age, comme une punition de Dieu et l'on touche là, de même qu'au sujet de la maladie et des malades, à l'ambivalence des attitudes sociales : la compassion voisine avec le mépris ou l'horreur.¹

In the thirteenth century, as we have seen, the legitimacy of a voluntary poverty that resorts to begging – that of the religious orders of Mendicants – was called into question. By the end of the century, the debate was extended to include the voluntary poverty and begging even of laymen, that is, of sturdy beggars who “deliberately chose” not to work. Only in the last decades of the thirteenth century did manuals used by confessors begin to make distinctions between the truly poor and the deceptive or lazy poor.² Through his vernacular *Roman de la rose*, Jean de Meun both popularized and broadened the debate about the legitimacy of begging, and this was relayed by his later interpreters and translators. As we have seen, a fourteenth-century French interpolation and its English translation in the *Romaunt of the Rose* take a harsher view than was Jean de Meun's to call for the chastisement of beggars and to warn against possible revenge on their part.

From the middle of the fourteenth century on, the predominant view was that charity should be given only to the “deserving” poor, that is, to those who, through no decision of their own, were incapable of working to earn their own living.³ Some wills began to specify that almsgiving for the benefit of the dead person's soul should be restricted to beggars “sans fantise.”⁴ Suspicion that many beggars were indeed capable of working, if they really wanted to, was

¹ Geremek, pp. 361-62.

² Mollat, p. 158.

³ Mollat, p. 348.

⁴ Geremek, p. 216.

heightened by the penury of labor and the social dislocations caused by the Black Death. In both England (the Statute of Laborers of 1349) and France (the royal ordinances of 1351 and 1354), laws were invented to prohibit vagabonds, which included sturdy beggars.¹ The ordinance of 1351 concerning the Paris region required the exile, after branding on the forehead by a hot iron, of any vagabond (with the exception of the frail and the maimed) who had been caught for the third time playing dice, begging, or singing for coins in the street. This ordinance criminalized sturdy begging, as Bronislaw Geremek has explained (pp. 32-33):

Constatant que la ville et de nombreuses bourgades avoisinantes sont pleines de personnes qui traînent sans travailler, refusent tout emploi, mais fréquentent tavernes et maisons closes, il recommande de mettre un terme à cette situation. Pour cela, un choix très simple est offert à ceux qui manquent d'embauche – quel que soit leur sexe, leur condition, leur métier – aux oisifs qui passent leur temps à jouer aux dés, aux mendiants, aux chanteurs des rues (seuls sont exclus les estropiés et les malingres) : tous doivent, sur-le-champ, embrasser un métier, gagner eux-mêmes leur vie, sinon quitter Paris et autres lieux dans un délai de trois jours. La non-observation de ces prescriptions est punie d'amendes très sévères. La première fois qu'on surprend un individu à traîner sans emploi, il est passible de quatre jours de prison au pain et à l'eau, la seconde fois il risque le pilori et la troisième, il est proscrit après avoir été marqué au front d'un fer rouge.

This same ordinance exhorted preachers to encourage their listeners to deny alms to able-bodied beggars capable of working for a living:

que ilz dyent [...] en leurs sermons que ceulx qui voudront donner aumosnes n'en donnent nulles a gens sains de corps et de membres, ne a gens qui puissent besongne faire dont ilz puissent gagner leur vie, mais les donnent a gens contrefaiz, aveugles, impotens ou autres misérables personnes.²

In short, almsgivers were urged to be more suspicious of beggars in order to distinguish the deserving from the undeserving.

¹ See Mollat, pp. 246-47, and Geremek, pp. 32-36.

² Geremek, p. 228.

Art historians have recently begun to explain the appearance of beggars in the margins of fourteenth-century religious manuscripts as a sign of social rejection:

In a Book of Hours from the thriving commercial city of Ghent, a well-dressed burgher is pictured in the side margin about to proffer a coin to a cripple holding his begging-bowl between his teeth. In the same Book a beggar dressed in a fool's cap carries a monkey instead of a child on his back, suggesting people's unease with the "staging" or simulation of poverty. In many cases these unfortunates are depicted as variants of the deformed forms of *babewyns* [...] but rather than having extra body parts, these unfortunates lack them, the most common type being the legless figure who pulls himself, often acrobatically, forward on his stumps with small wooden contraptions for crutches.¹

Even the Book of Hours made in Jean Pucelle's workshop as a wedding gift for the young queen Jeanne d'Evreux, a manuscript whose central miniatures idealize Saint Louis' charity to the "institutionalized" poor (in settings such as the Hotel Dieu), also presents more troublesome marginal figures of beggars holding out their bowls for alms. These emerge from nowhere at the ends of short lines, bear up the architectural framework of central miniatures, or appear in the lower margins. Beggars who bear weight while on their knees must be sturdy (folio 142v). Less certain is the true physical condition of those who are prone or seated. For example, a woman holds up her begging bowl as she lies in a wheelbarrow on folio 81 verso. However, the woman with monstrous hindquarters who holds up a bowl with a squirrel in it (folio 20v) is probably to be understood as a prostitute who seeks clients and alms at the same time. An art historian has argued that beggars in the margins of this Book of Hours illustrate the undeserving poor: "The recipients of Louis's charity are shown alternately as either voluntary or involuntary in their poverty, while the figures in the margins remain excluded, reflecting an alternate world as flawed and tainted by sin as the world of the miniatures is idealized."²

¹ Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 133, and illustrations 70 & 71.

² Gerald B. Guest, "A Discourse on the Poor: The Hours of Jeanne d'Evreux," *Viator*, 26 (1995), p. 180, and figures 8-10. This manuscript is number 1954 in the Cloisters Collection belonging to the Metropolitan Museum, New York.

Already in 1300, the disturbing numbers of the complaining, begging poor are displayed as they march along the bottom of the page of an English *Legenda sanctorum* probably copied for a monastic or ecclesiastical institution (fig. 1).¹ This row of barely clad vagabonds appears to be a family – an indigent father and his six children – who communicate in English. In one hand the father carries a begging bowl, in the other a very large axe which also serves as a walking staff. This axe is a sign of his capacity to work, but might it not also be used as a weapon to defend himself, or to attack others, making him dangerous? The baby on man's back, along with the nakedness of his children, should attract pity and alms. All of them have complaints. The baby wails "WaWa." The first child, with only a hood for covering, complains that he is dying of heat (fever?); the next two complain that they are dying of cold; and the two bringing up the rear complain of their heavy burdens, for one bears a basket and two ewers, while the other bears a small harp on his back (which suggests street singing or performance for alms). This small harp does not appear to be a particularly heavy burden; hence the beggar's complaining children seem to be learning to dislike work, learning "impatience." Cripples and lepers also appear in the margins of this manuscript, along with monstrous and sinful figures. Lucy Freeman Sandler argues that these pen drawings are illustrations of the world outside the monastery or ecclesiastical institution in which the copyist "Alanus" lived. Into the margins of the manuscript, he projected what was "potentially threatening," thus maintaining it at a mockingly contemptuous distance.²

The late fourteenth-century English *Romaunt's* added warning to be wary of the "impatient" able-bodied beggar, who may seek revenge on his chastiser, is merely one of many indications of a radical change in the late medieval attitude toward the extremely poor, who were no longer seen simply as "Christ's poor" but as "robbers of God," no longer as victims to be aided, but as victimizers to be feared. We find the same suspicions expressed in both English and French and in

¹ This figure is copied after Lucy Freeman Sandler, "Pictorial and Verbal Play in the Margins: The Case of British Library, Stowe MS 49," in *Illuminating the Book: Makers and Interpreters*, ed. Michelle P. Brown and Scott McKendrick (London: British Library, 1998), fig. 17.

² Sandler, pp. 61-62.

many other texts: in poetry, in social legislation, and also in visual images meant for the eyes of potential almsgivers (the relatively wealthy owners of Books of Hours or an ecclesiastical institution responsible for charity). Marginalization, exclusion, and even capital punishment of beggars were the solutions found to deal with the fourteenth-century perception of a growing threat.



Fig. 1. London, British Library, Stowe MS 49, fol. 220.