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**Review Essay: John Taylor and Wendy Childs, eds., *Politics and Crisis in Fourteenth-Century England***

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may not be what some have argued—the first great vernacular prose writer in English—but he is at the least a significant figure both in the English medieval mystical tradition and in the beginnings of vernacular prose.

Gary D. Schmidt  
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John Taylor and Wendy Childs, eds., *Politics and Crisis in Fourteenth-Century England*, Alan Sutton, 1990, xvi, 157 pp., index, \$30.00.

The bulk of the papers that make up *Politics and Crisis in Fourteenth-Century England* were presented 8 March 1986 at a conference of scholars of fourteenth-century history that met at the University of Leeds. Early in the present century the Ordinances of 1311 had been characterized as an attempt by the magnates to reduce the royal household's control of the governance of the realm. About twenty years ago, the ordinances came to be seen as secondary to the personal rivalries of the aristocracy. Michael Prestwich, on the other hand, emphasizes the connection between the Ordinances of 1311 and issues having arisen in the reign of Edward I. Edward II began his rule confronted by the £200,000 debt left by his father, Edward I. At his deposition, he only owed £60,000 of this debt and had at least £87,000 in cash. Wendy Childs looks at Edward II's financial situation with special attention to overseas trade and the customs revenue, which provided the king with about twenty percent of his income. But the king went too far in the 1320s when with the Despensers he confiscated lands of his opponents and extorted money from the population as a whole.

County society has been characterized as either cohesive or conflictive in the later Middle Ages. Focusing on the gentry, Nigel Saul points out that this dichotomy resulted in part from the utilization of different kinds of source material. Saul suggests that the period's violence seems to be ritualistic as disputants seek a resolution of their disagreements. Helen Jewell examines the A, B, and C texts of William Langland's *Piers Plowman* with regard to political, social, and economic crises of the 1360s, 1370s, and 1380s. Much of her paper summarizes the major events of this period, which form the background for Langland's dissatisfaction with his world.

Since the so-called Good Parliament of 1376, contemporaneous and later writers have viewed it positively. John Taylor believes that the initial

interest in this particular parliament arose from the activities of the Commons led by Sir Peter de la Mare as well as from its long duration and large membership. James Sherborne reminds historians that the charge in the impeachment of Michael de la Pole of not having defended England by keeping the seas was a very important part of the Commons' action in 1386. Antony Tuck discusses Richard II's efforts, which ultimately produced a twenty-eight year truce in 1396, in trying to end the Hundred Years War. Because willingness to perform liege homage for Aquitaine proved to be the condition that parliament would not accept, Richard got a long truce instead of an end to the war.

Once again, Caroline Barron argues that Richard II had far more support in 1399 than Lancastrian propaganda allows us to believe. She wants historians to "sweep away" (132) the interpretations of both Lancastrian and French contemporaries, all of whom, but one, she finds tainted. For her it was not the king's unpopularity but rather his absence while he was at war in Ireland that resulted in men leaving his cause. While each of these chapters has value for specialists, the ones by Prestwich and Saul should be read by generalists as well. Barron's essay will probably engender the most debate in the near future.

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Susan K. Hagen, *Allegorical Remembrance: A Study of "The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man" as a Medieval Treatise on Seeing and Remembering*, University of Georgia Press, 1990, xii, 268 pp., biblio., index, \$35.00.

The goal of Susan K. Hagen's *Allegorical Remembrance* is to provide a new understanding of medieval allegorical composition through analysis of John Lydgate's verse translation of the second recension of the *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine* by Guillaume de Deguileville. The introduction notes differences between Guillaume's first and second recensions critical for Hagen's argument, especially the scene in which Grace Dieu insists that the pilgrim place his eyes in his ears because the pilgrim is to visualize the incorporeal, to be taught what Hagen calls the "process of allegory" (4). Allegory is not so much a language of abstraction as of abstract concepts that are embodied in visual analogies, particularly to be memory aids so that an understanding of the Christian life may be imparted.