

*Permeable Bodies in Medieval
and Early Modern Visual Culture*



Marginalisation on the Margins ?



Historical Perspectives on the Representations
of Physical Disability
in some Medieval Manuscript's margins.

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Introduction

Margins

An organized space with planned *marginalia*'s figures (J. Alexander, 2018)

Illustrators or directors choice to represent disabled people proves that :

1. Noble audience cares about the *infirmus*'s representation in the manuscripts
2. Disabled people are highly involved in medieval society



Introduction

Marginality and alterity

Margins as “liminal social space” (C. Michael, 2003)

=> express imaginary and attitudes
towards disabled people



Medieval Disability

@MADisability

Abonné



So that's about where we're at: thinking of disability as a socially constructed experience of the body that must be historically and culturally situated in any given historical moment/geographical region. 14/

Traduire le Tweet

18:30 - 10 juin 2018

Introduction

Hypothesis

SUBJECT: Gothic manuscripts from the XIII and XIV c. in England,
Flanders and France

RESEARCH: Particular circumstances of a manuscript's production
(sponsor; recipient; illustrator; purpose)

OBJECTIVE: Enlighten how & why disabled people are depicted
in the manuscript to:

1. Reveal the integration of disabled people in the social fabric
2. Shed a new light on the margins' power to incorporate
their bodies in the visual culture.

I. Imago Christi

Disabled people are depicted with two patterns (Pestilli, 2017)

1. as petitioners for a miraculous healing
2. as receiving alms

They are visible in the margin's *bas-de-page*:

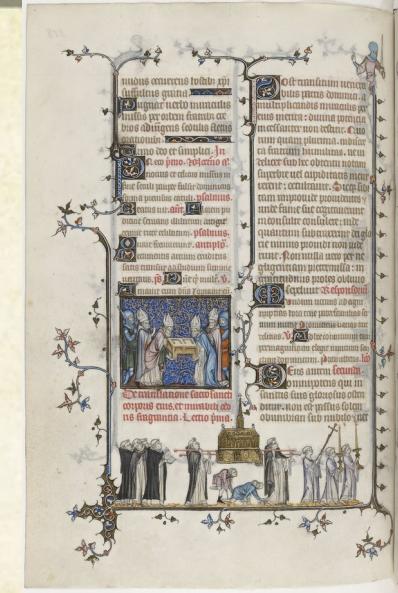
1. as some very constructed playlets
2. with a very special meaning for the medieval audience

I. Imago Christi

Suffering Christ

First represented in hagiographics manuscripts.

Then, in the margins narratives vignettes during the XIII and XIV c.



BNF, MS 10 484, F. 218V

Disabled images reflect:

- the belief in miracles
- the contemporary practices of pilgrimage



I. Imago Christi

Suffering Christ

=> Their increased representation reflects:

- the growing importance of the Christian precept of Charity
as part of the Gregorian reform
- tropes for modeling laudable Christian behavior

I. Imago Christi

Social hierarchy

Disabled people are represented as poor beggars in order to:

- glorify the act of Charity
- maintains social hierarchy, as between men and women, poors and richs



I. Imago Christi

Social hierarchy

These representations of disabled people communicate more about the world of the elite viewers rather than the marginal subjects

=> Clearly promote the elite's social role of Charity
in the medieval society

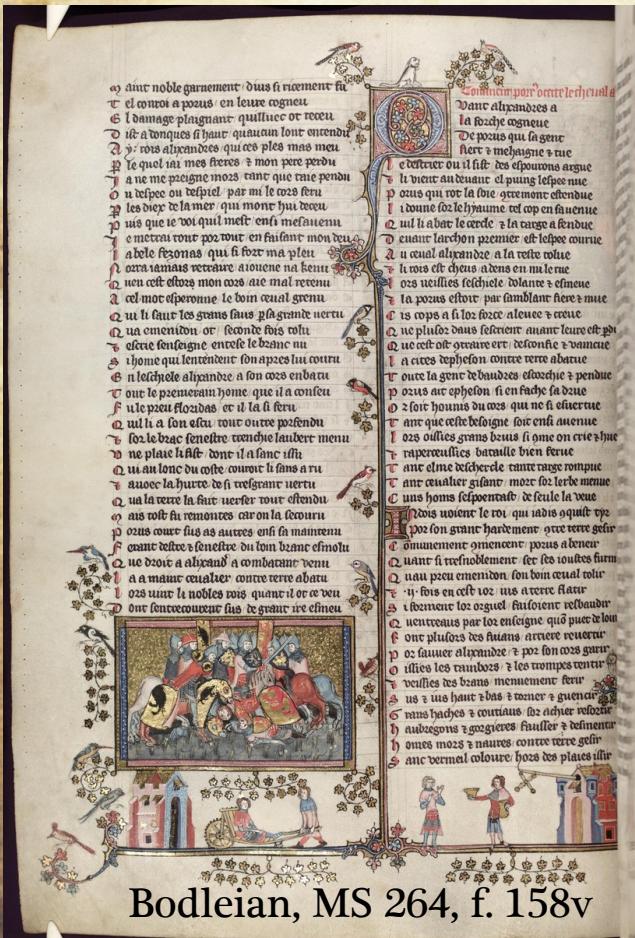


Royal 10, E IV, f. 220

I. Imago Christi

Helpers

In addition to their visible physical or sensory impairment, the disabled appear well surrounded by children, women and men helping them to eat, walk and collect donations.



Bodleian, MS 264, f. 158v

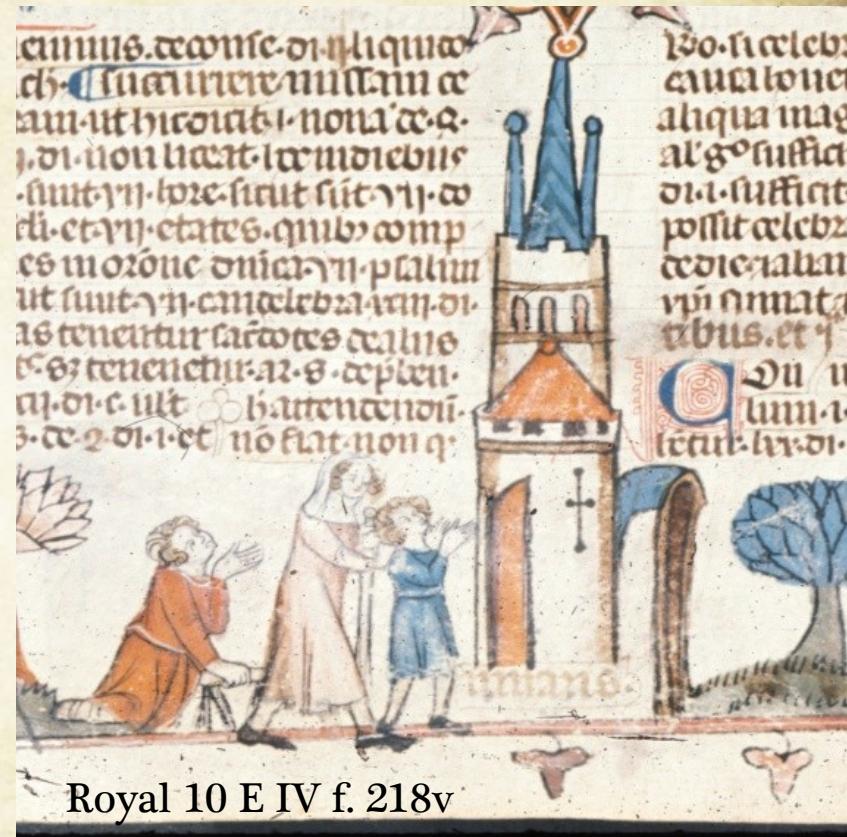


I. Imago Christi

Helpers

Young people help them to

- receive alms by going to the saintly locations (right top)
 - Fulfill daily tasks, like eating (right below)



I. Imago Christi

Helpers

- Move the disabled from one place to another (above)



I. Imago Christi

Helpers

Guide dogs as children, seems to have been criticized
for their lack of reliability = Not safe in theory

But used in practice, as companions, and to perform while begging

=> These representations of daily life reveal a sort of
disabled's integration in social fabric



II. Integration of diversity

Curiositates

Disabled people also populate the margins
with no connection to any border

=> margin's power (Caviness, 2001)

=> recapturing lost presence (Taylor, 1995)

So, they represent:

- relativization of social norms : mockery

(Fabry-Tehranchi, 2017)

- serious, pious and didactic purposes : charitable acts

(Gurevich, 1990)



II. Integration of diversity

Curiositates

- => have a comic effect of ugliness and deformity, as a kind of hybridity
- => Prove the integration of *infirmus* in the society



- => Show the role of visual images in controlling people's lives



II. Integration of diversity

Symbols

Several visible and characteristic attributes
to distinguish them from the Others:

- mobility aids
- body shape



BNF, fr 95, f. 327

=> disabled as a group, sharing the same symbolic elements:

- Signs of belonging
- social distinction markers



Bodleian, MS 264, f. 109r

Conclusion

=> The function of the *marginalia* in the visual culture is a mean to recognize the Other and to find his place in the society

=> *Marginalia* are *specula* of medieval life:
worldview rather than real world (Stanton, 2001)

=> Margins are a part of the medieval reading experience
and a vector of expression and reception (Withe-LeGoff, 2017)

=> Margins reflect:

- a medieval world full of diversity
- the complexity of medieval disability



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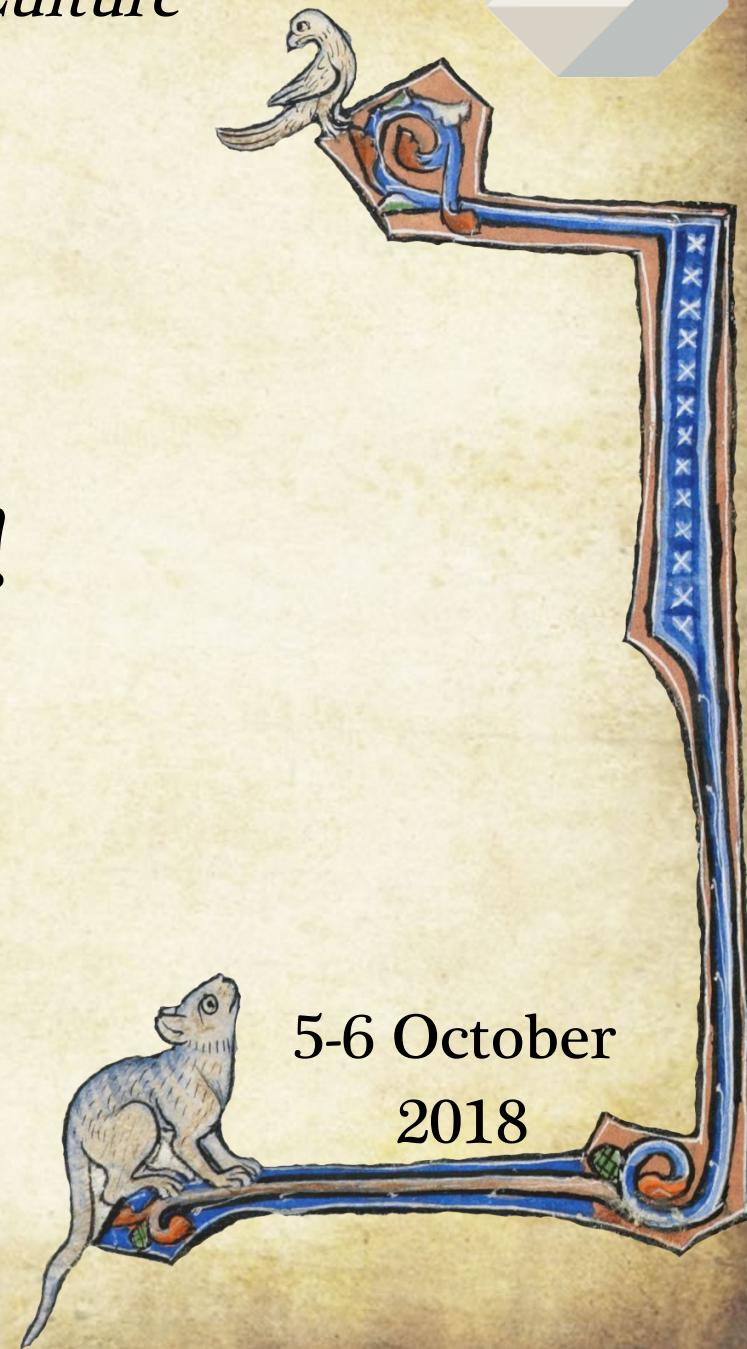
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Thanks !

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Credits p. 1-2-18 (mostly from Discarding images)

Egg man : *Livre de Lancelot du Lac*, France, ca. 1300 Beinecke Library, MS 229, fol. 31r

Tongue man : *Bute Psalter*, Paris, ca. 1285, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Ms. 46, fol. 12r

Knight and cock : *Livre de Lancelot du Lac*, France, ca. 1300, Beinecke Library, MS 229, fol. 282v

Peacock : *Alphonso Psalter*, London, ca. 1284, BL, Add. 24686, fol. 16v

Rabbit : *Breviary of Renaud*, Metz, 1305, Verdun, Bibliothèque municipale, ms. 107, fol. 127v

Monkey : *Book od hours*, Arras, ca. 1296-1311, Cambrai, BM, ms. 87, fol. 138r

Snail cat : Maastricht Hours, Netherlands, 1300, BL, ms. Stowe 17, fol. 185r

Cat & bird : *Biblia porta*, France, ca. 1250, Lausanne, Bibliothèque de Lausanne, U 964, fol. 357v