



Literature and Complaint in England 1272-1553

Wendy Scase

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Literature and Complaint in England 1272-1553 gives an entirely new and original perspective on the relations between early judicial process and the development of literature in England. Wendy Scase argues that texts ranging from political libels and pamphlets to laments of the unrequited lover constitute a literature shaped by the new and crucial role of complaint in the law courts. She describes how complaint took on central importance in the development of institutions such as Parliament and the common law in later medieval England, and argues that these developments shaped a literature of complaint within and beyond the judicial process. She traces the story of the literature of complaint from the earliest written bills and their links with early complaint poems in English, French, and Latin, through writings associated with political crises of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, to the libels and petitionary pamphlets of Reformation England. A final chapter, which includes analyses of works by Chaucer, Hoccleve, and related writers, proposes far-reaching revisions to current histories of the arts of composition in medieval England. Throughout, close attention is paid to the forms and language of complaint writing and to the emergence of an infrastructure for the production of plaint texts, and many images of plaints and petitions are included. The texts discussed include works by well-known authors as well as little-known libels and pamphlets from across the period.

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