

"I DO NOT WISH TO BE CALLED AUCTOUR, BUT THE PORE COMPILATOUR": THE PLIGHT OF THE MEDIEVAL VERNACULAR POET

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In the middle of the fifteenth century Osbern Bokenham, an Augustinian friar of Stoke-Clare and author of works such as the *Legendys of Hooly Women* and the *Mappula Anglia* writes: "I do not wish to be called auctour, but the pore compilatour". He sees his work, therefore, as that of a compiler of others' writings and claims no originality or the title of author. He does not give his own name (except in an acrostic), but one might ask how many authors' names we in fact know before the last quarter of the fourteenth century? "Anon" was a very busy writer in the Middle Ages. Apart from Cynewulf, who we know nothing about and may never have existed, we have no known Old English poets, and there are also very few names in the early Middle English period other than Layamon. Who wrote, for example, *Cursor Mundi*, *Sir Orfeo*, *King Horn*, *Havelok the Dane*, *Floris and Blanchflour* or *Arthur and Merlin*, and in the Chaucerian period who were the geniuses responsible for *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Pearl*, *Patience*, *Purity*, *St Erkenwald* and the medieval mystery plays?¹

Then in Chaucer's time and in the fifteenth century we know of Gower, Langland, Hoccleve, Lydgate, Clanvowe and many more. Suddenly poets are no longer ashamed to be seen as authors and one wonders about the significance of this change. Is anonymity simply a modesty topos, or are authors afraid of political or ecclesiastical criticism? This is indeed the case of the Wycliffite and Lollard writers and poets of political and religious satire, but would the author of romances have

felt politically threatened? Latin works of authority, on the other hand, *had* to have named authors and be accompanied by commentary. If there were no author, then a patristic name would be assigned to the writing. Even vernacular theological works had named authors, for example in the Old English period we know of Wulfstan and Ælfric.

The second question that arises from Bokenham's statement is why does he not want the term 'author' given to him? To answer that we need to investigate how the medieval vernacular writer viewed his function and see why there is a change happening in the later period —late fourteenth century— when we have so many known names. I believe that there *is* a change in attitude from modest compiler to self-confident author and that it can be traced not only in *what* they wrote, but in how they presented their work in manuscripts. For that reason I shall be looking at codicological evidence —the manuscript context of their work.

John Gower, Chaucer's contemporary and friend, stresses at the conclusion of his Latin work, *Vox clamantis*: "I have not written as an authority [*ut auctor*] these verses in a book; rather, I am passing on what I heard for you to read. A swelling of my own head did not cause me to write these things, but the voice of the people put them in my ear".² The *auctoritas* or the primary efficient cause, as it is called in rhetorical handbooks, was God. Gower equally modestly states in his Prologue to this work: "I myself am a worthless man. But a precious thing often resides in a vile mineral and the commodity on being extracted is valued" (Minnis 1988: 172). Gower then claims that he is not an author but a medium, a compiler of material, akin to the manuscript compiler, taking pieces from others and presenting them anew.

Boccaccio, Chaucer's contemporary, also claims in his *Decameron* that he is a mere scribe:

I could only transcribe the stories as they were actually told [...] even if one could assume that I was the inventor as well as the scribe of these stories (which was not the case) I still insist that I would not feel ashamed if some fell short of perfection, for there is no craftsman other than God whose work is whole and faultless in every respect. (quoted in Minnis 1988: 204)

So it is expected that postlapsarian man will write flawed works, as it would be presumptuous, if not sinful, to think oneself a perfect author.

The Senecan image of a bee is often quoted in the Middle Ages to describe this process: the bee gathers nectar, arranges it into cells and creates honey: it borrows, re-arranges and comes up with something new. A similar image is that given by Isidore of Seville who compares the *compilator* not with an artist but a paint dealer who mixes ingredients together to make the paint. A writer of fiction then is a

borrower and arranger, like the person responsible for the layout and arrangement of others' material in manuscripts (Carruthers 1990: 192). Medieval rhetoricians claimed that *compilatio* comes from *pila*, a pillar or column, as the manuscript compiler arranges his material in columns like the later type-setter and so is also given the functions of author and the 'manager' of the manuscript.

The true *auctor* is one with *auctoritas* 'authority', one who wrote works of truth, which were worthy of imitation. So *auctor*, authority, and authenticity were all cognate terms. Innovation was no more welcome amongst poets than it was amongst students who were expected to memorise the authoritative commentaries. There was also a perception that old was good and the best writers were the most ancient. Like canonisation or being called an 'Old Master' in painting, the title of *auctor* was only given after generations agreed to honour a work or author with this accolade. Walter Map in the late twelfth century, aware of his talent and the intrinsic worth of his writings, immodestly apologises for being still alive: "My only fault is that I am alive [...] I have no intention, however, of correcting this fault by my death" (quoted in Minnis 1988: 12).

In the Middle Ages there was a clear distinction between scribe, who copies and adds nothing, compiler, who, as mentioned above, mixes and rearranges the thoughts of others, commentator who supplies a fresh reading of another's work and finally the author who is divinely inspired to convey a work of intrinsic worth and truth, generally reinforced by patristic commentary. The authentic work was, then, one that had been confirmed by commentary and glossing. As nothing that is not in Latin can be of such worth, all the vernacular author can hope to do is to be a compiler, conveying the essence of the meaning of authoritative texts to a lay audience—to be a midwife to the *sentence* 'meaning'.

Marie de France claimed that the ancient *auctores* deliberately wrote obscurely so that later writers might "gloss" or interpret ("gloser la lettre") their great works (Irvine 1992: 97). So there grows up in the Middle Ages a palimpsest of commentaries on commentaries, all explaining the original *auctor*. The implication is that any new literature can therefore only be commentary. An example might be Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Prologue* which is a "gloss" on speeches by La Vieille in the *Roman de la Rose*, which in turn is a "gloss" on Jerome's *Contra Jovinianum*, which is based on St Paul's teaching. Chaucer wishes us to see him as someone who recites the work of his pilgrims who in turn are retelling old stories. Ralph Hanna states that "the Wife's *Prologue* becomes marked as a compilation because so much of it, very nearly the whole thing, is pieced together from verbatim translation. Moreover, this translation is derived—as a series of extracts—from a fuller source explicitly inscribed in the text of the poem" (Hanna 1987: 1). Yet no one would

accuse Chaucer of religiously copying other texts or of the Wife of Bath being stereotypical.

In order to avoid any accusation of originality, the medieval poet frequently turned to the dream vision form. John Gower in *Vox Clamantis* claimed his source was a vision from St John and Chaucer placed most of his early work in the dream genre, which distances the author and makes him appear as one who recites others' material. A similar stratagem is the false assertion that the source came from an ancient text. In both cases the poet appears to provide a compilation or supplementary text, thereby interpreting, commenting on and rewriting his authoritative source. Many scholars have spent time searching for these sources; for example, Chaucer never acknowledges in his *Troilus and Criseyde* that he is deeply indebted to Boccaccio, as he too was a living, vernacular author, but gives the Latin and fictitious name of Lollius as his source, thereby adding authority.

Robert Henryson, the fifteenth-century Scottish poet, in his *The Testament of Cresseid* states that after he had read about Criseyde in Chaucer, he took "ane-uther quair" in which he claims he finds an account of "the fatal destenie/Of fair Cresseid, that endit wretchitlie" (*The Testament* ll. 62-63). He then queries the 'truth' of Chaucer's work and the second book —probably a work that never existed:

Quha wait gif all that Chauceir wrait was trew?
Nor I wait nocht gif this narratioun
Be authoreist, or fenyeit of the new
Be sum poeit, throw his inventioun. (*The Testament of Cresseid*, lines 64-67)

The implication is that Cresseid was a historic character and Henryson's narrator queries the veracity of both Chaucer's narrative and that of this second "narratioun". There is however a tension created in these lines between the "authoreist narratioun" and the "inventioun" "fenyeit" by "sum poeit", the latter being inferior and lacking 'truth'. Henryson cleverly distances himself from any accusations of "inventioun" and assumes the role of the compiler of material, the simple narrator of what he heard or read elsewhere. Jean de Meun, the author of what might be called the greatest medieval work of fictional narrative, *Roman de la Rose*, similarly opens with a typical *apologia*, stating that he simply compiles material he has found and if you doubt him, go to his source books to check. If there are any lies, then they are not his, but belong to his sources. "Je n'i faz riens fors reciter", "I do nothing but recite/report", he states (quoted in full in Minnis 1988: 198).

This is echoed later in Chaucer's protestations in the *General Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales*:

“I do not wish to be called auctour, but the pore compiler”: the Plight...

For this ye knowen al so wel as I,
Whoso shal telle a tale after a man,
He moot reherce as ny as evere he kan
Al speke he never so rudeliche and large,
Or ellis he noot telle his tale untrewē,
Or feyne thyng, or fynde wordes newe. (*General Prologue*, lines 730-5)

The danger is that he will “feyne thyng, or fynde wordes newe” and such originality is to be avoided at all costs. The narrator’s job is to “reherce” or “recite”, as Henryson says, as closely as possible his source or else he is being “untrewē”, even if it means reciting what the foul-mouthed Miller says:

He nolde his wordes for no man forbere,
But tolde his cherles tale in his manere.
M’athynketh that I shal reherce it here [...]
[...] demeth nat that I seye
Of yvel entente, but for I moot reherce
Hir tales alle, be they bettre or werse,
Or elles falsen som of my mateere. (*The Miller’s Tale*, lines 3168-3175)

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Chaucer repeats the verb “reherce”, for his action is that of scribe not even compiler. The alternative is to “falsen”, “falsify” his material. The poet, then, goes to great lengths to avoid any criticism of originality. In his *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* (ll. 59-62) he states: “But considere wel that I ne usurpe nat to have fownde this werk of my labour or of myn engin. I nam but a lewd compilatour of the labour of olde astrologens.”

So, according to Chaucer, all the writer must do is to recycle old material, or, as he puts it in *The Parliament of Fowls*:

For out of olde felde, as men seyth,
Cometh al this newe corn from yer to yere,
And out of olde bokes, in good feyth,
Cometh al this newe science that men lere. (*The Parliament of Fowls*, lines 22-25)

Just as new corn grows from the earlier seed, so also is new material taken from the works of the ancients. Once more the concept of “good feyth” or “truth” is introduced as a kind of escape clause. The vernacular author, then, reproduces and recycles the ancients.

Are these declarations simply a case of the modesty topos? I believe that in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries there is a definite concern about the status of the poet; many are deliberately drawing attention to the process of composition and by playing with these modesty topoi they are *confirming* not *denying* their

originality and power of creativity. And this change can be seen in the manuscripts in which their works appear.

With the preparation of medieval manuscripts there is a similar divide between the Latin and the vernacular. Indeed scribes, aware of the status of the two languages, will change script in mid-line when shifting from Latin to vernacular. The Bibles of the Old English period are elaborately illuminated and illustrated, such as the Lindisfarne Gospels or Book of Kells, but we have no attractive manuscripts of vernacular Old English. The Junius 11 manuscript with its religious verse is the only poetic manuscript with a few basic line drawings. The poetry in all the poetic codices is not set out as verse, as was Latin verse, but as continuous prose and is often marked with prompts for reading. The reason for this was that Old English poetry was not work that was intended to be *read* but to be *listened to* and therefore there was no need for elaboration. The plain and unadorned nature of the vernacular manuscripts stands out in sharp contrast to the ornate Books of Hours, Graduals and Psalteries which were of intrinsic worth and truth, works of illumination in every sense of the word. The presence of illuminations, illustrations, coloured capitals, glosses and rubrication also reflected the status and prestige of the text the page displayed.

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The script chosen by the scribe also sends signals to the reader. The finest works of authority would be in clear, Gothic or textura script, the more painstaking, formal script such as the rotunda or quadrata, while by the fourteenth century vernacular works and less important documents would normally be in a court or cursive hand, the predecessor of our modern handwriting. There developed, therefore, a hierarchy of scripts which carried significant associations. Square capitals might be used for headings and less imposing minuscule script for glosses. It was not uncommon to have the same scribe change from textura to cursive on the same page if he were moving from a Latin to a vernacular text. In the Old English *A Summons to Prayer*, found in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge 201, pp. 166-7, the scribe changes hand within each line of this macaronic poem as it shifts from Latin to Old English (Caie 2000a: 15-19). By the fifteenth century professional scribes would prepare sample pages of scripts for their clients to choose from and of course the cost depended on the time a specific script took. It is significant that much (though not all of) later Lollard writings appear in reasonably cheap manuscripts in a fast, utilitarian, cursive script, as the aim was not to produce attractive books, but to spread religious ideas as quickly, cheaply, legibly and widely as possible.

There is also a difference in layout in Latin and vernacular manuscripts. The early vernacular manuscripts were mostly free from marginalia and other non-textual prompts, as these could not be contained in oral delivery, while in Latin works the

manuscript is very ‘busy’; one finds in addition to the main text headings, marginal and interlinear glosses, historiated or illuminated capitals, lemmata, pointers, etc. These manuscripts containing works of *auctoritas* provided a host of visual signals as they were obviously meant to be read silently and committed to memory, as that was the final aim in reading an *auctor*. As books were rarely owned by students, they were a means to the end of memorising the great authorities. Mary Carruthers in *The Book of Memory* outlines this process:

The book itself is the chief external support of *memoria*. In its layout and ordering, it serves the requirements of readers who expected to engage it in their own memories. It will contain in its glosses a chain of comments on the source text, presenting in its multiple margins the graphic display of a whole community of readers over time. The distinctive format of the glossed book is the most satisfying model of authorship and textual authority which the Middle Ages produced. (Carruthers 1990: 194)

The gloss was the mark of the privileged, authoritative or canonical texts, not a mere after-thought. The layout itself then had an interpretative function in the presentation of the text to the reader, as Martin Irvine points out:

In every format that was designed to include glosses, page layout and changes in script were used to signify both the distinction between text and gloss and the inseparable textual relationship between them. The text and gloss format, and the literary methodology that it represents, continued in various forms throughout the later Middle Ages... The layout of manuscripts in the grammatical tradition reveals a striking case of interpretative methodology crystallizing into a visual form that disclosed an underlying principle of textuality. (Irvine 1992: 89-90)

Even writing on vellum was a commitment. The material was expensive and the act time-consuming perhaps akin to publication today. Wax tablets, scraps of vellum and slates were used for rough copies. The verb ‘to write’ has a Germanic root that means ‘to tear’ or ‘scratch’, hence ‘inscribe’ and it has a sense of permanence about it. Dictamen ‘dictation’ was the word used for rough copy and implies the oral function of dictating. Michael Clanchy mentions the story of Orderic Vitalis who hears a good legend while visiting a neighbouring abbey, but it is too late and too cold, he says, to ‘write’ it, he will instead ‘dictate’ it onto wax tablets and write in later in the comfort of his own abbey. He states: “I made a full and accurate abbreviation on tablets, and now I shall endeavour to entrust it summarily to parchment” (Clanchy 1987: 91).

Recently in Paisley we discovered slates with faintly inscribed fragments of lyrics in Middle Scots, obviously attempts to practise poetry and alongside them equally feeble attempts to draw Celtic crosses. Membrane was not the material for such

practice works, although cheap vellum or vellum cut from the margins of books might also be used in this context.³

The next clue is *how* the manuscript is arranged, the *mise-en-page*, as this too gives us important clues as to interpretation and readership. The layout of the manuscript page is of vital importance. The script, its size and position tells the reader—and I stress the need for these to be read—immediately which text on the page has authority, just as today we know that the footnote in smaller typeface is less important than the main text on a printed page.

The presence of glosses was of major importance as they were not merely marginal additions, but an integral part of the work and necessary for the reading experience. They were carefully planned when the page was ruled, sometimes with a ratio of 1:2 lines for text and gloss. The interlinear gloss gave lexical or syntactic aids and the *enmaratio* or commentary was generally positioned in the margins. All manuscripts presented with an apparatus of glosses and commentary would be immediately recognised as containing works of cultural value and spiritual significance. An unglossed text was not worth consideration just like an unreviewed book today.⁴

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The reason for this is the nature of the university teaching system of the twelfth century onwards, namely scholasticism. Schools were gradually divorced from monastic control and with the growth in bureaucracy there was a need for more educated men and more written material. The explosion in learning, especially after the Black Death, meant that more and more texts were needed. Pragmatic literacy was on the increase and “was becoming something of a survival skill” (Coleman 1981: 47). In the later fourteenth century members of the stationers guild in London were allowed to remain open on Sundays to catch up with the growing demand for books (Coleman 1981: 56).

The way to eradicate heresy was to ensure that the accepted, authoritative commentaries were glossed in the margins of the texts, and so a palimpsest of gloss on gloss grew up. Additional commentary was squeezed in between text and official commentary as the text evolved. This relationship is typical of medieval textuality, namely a dialogue between text and metatext or gloss, centre and margin, which could continue over centuries. For this reason the medieval manuscript is considered fair game for addenda. It is an organic, living, regenerating object. There were glosses on glosses in a Chinese box fashion and in the manuscripts of scholastic texts the original text trickles through wide margins filled by commentary on commentary. Beryl Smalley stresses the vital importance of the glosses in teaching and exegesis up to the seventeenth century (Smalley 1964: 367).

The manuscripts which contain Chaucer's translation of Boethius's *De Consolatione philosophiae* contain the Boethian text in a fine textura hand and well spaced, while Chaucer's translation and the commentary by Nicholas Trivet are in a less prestigious hand and confined to margins.⁵

But where does this leave the compiler or author of a vernacular text? In the fourteenth century vernacular writers were growing in confidence and with their increased fame and power, they were usurping the privileges of the authoritative text. This can be seen in the layout of the manuscript page, for example in the use of marginal glosses. Boccaccio was one of the first to add his own glosses to the manuscript of his work. In his manuscript of the *Teseida* Boccaccio himself invented and wrote down his own glossed commentary, in addition to rubrics and decorations (Carruthers 1990: 218). It is an exemplar for scribes to imitate in every detail, as Mary Carruthers points out:

The stanzas of the source text are written in the large display hand reserved for “auctors”, and commentary, written in the appropriate script, surrounds it in the margins. These annotations, comments and corrections are also Boccaccio's [...] In *Teseida*, Boccaccio is both the originator of his text, and its reader; his own commentary invites commentary from others [...] By giving his new work all the trappings of a glossed book, Boccaccio was claiming for it the immediate institutional status of an ‘auctor’. (Carruthers 1990: 218)

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So the vernacular poets of the fourteenth century who, like Gower and Chaucer, were aware of their talents and originality could ensure, by adapting some of scholastic manuscript practices, that the layout and presentation of their work made the reader immediately aware that this was the work of an *auctor*, in spite of explicit, textual claims that they were mere compilers. One example is the layout of the Gower manuscripts. Gower furnishes his *Confessio Amantis* with Latin apparatus such as glosses and a Latin colophon. The marginal glosses which he composed himself provide commentary or refer to sources. Gower, then claims to be a mere compiler, but, like Boccaccio, presents his own works in a manuscript setting which would lead his contemporary readers to think that this was the work of a genuine *auctor* (Minnis 1988: 275). As with the Latin works there is a difference in the script between the vernacular and the Latin. The same scribe wrote both, but with a more formal hand for the Latin, which is rubricated and introduced with a paraph. Derek Pearsall states that Gower's plan was carefully preserved by later scribes and that “we have to understand [...] how exceptional for a vernacular work was the role that Gower chose for the Latin apparatus” (Pearsall 1989: 14). Pearsall also sees a dynamic relationship between the Latin and the English in Gower and “Latin is the means by which Gower's poem is turned into a Book” (Pearsall 1989: 23).

And what of Chaucer? Alistair Minnis states:

Chaucer was content to assume the role of compiler and to exploit the literary form of *compilatio*. Indeed, so deliberate was he in presenting himself as a compiler that one is led to suspect the presence of a very self-conscious author who was concerned to manipulate the conventions of *compilatio* for his own literary ends. If Gower was a compiler who tried to present himself as an author, Chaucer was an author who hid behind the ‘shield and defence’ of the compiler. (Minnis 1988: 210)

However, the manuscript evidence suggests otherwise. One of the earliest of *The Canterbury Tales* manuscripts is Ellesmere which is written on fine membrane in a careful and attractive hand. It has illustrations of the Canterbury pilgrims which were prepared for by the compiler and not squeezed in later. As Malcolm Parkes states, “he [the compiler of Ellesmere] clearly anticipated the apparatus of headings and glosses, since he added a frame ruling in the outer margins to receive it, and all the apparatus —headings as well as glosses— is placed within the ruling [...] In Ellesmere the scribe allowed for one- or two-line decorated initials” (Parkes 1991: 225). He used an impressive anglicana formata script for the main text and a finer bastard anglicana (that is, with textura elements) for the heading, incipits, explicits and any Latin in the glosses. Parkes assays this manuscript as follows:

The value of a *compilatio* depended on the wealth of the *auctoritates* employed, but its utility depended on the way in which the *auctoritates* were arranged. The *ordinatio* of the Ellesmere manuscript interprets *The Canterbury Tales* as a *compilatio* in that it emphasizes the role of the tales as repositories of *auctoritates-sententiae* and aphorisms on different topics which are indicated by the marginal headings. (Parkes 1991: 228)

The Ellesmere manuscript is a large, imposing book —what today might be considered a coffee table book, as much for display as use. Its appearance and *ordinatio* then immediately tell the reader that this is an impressive work and thereby signal that its composer is an *auctor* as much as Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* or Boccaccio’s *Teseida*.

Of major significance is the fact that the earliest and most authoritative manuscripts such as Ellesmere and Hengwrt also have Latin glosses. I have shown elsewhere that I believe that many of the glosses in *The Canterbury Tales* were authorial, just as Gower’s and Boccaccio’s were. The glosses, however, have never been given their rightful place by editors, and it is only with the advent of electronic editing and manuscript digitisation that we can see their significance. Most glosses are in Latin and quote source material. The very presence of glosses in the same hand (or even more prestigious hand) with the same size of initial capital, with paraph sign and given equal visual prominence on the page, makes it look like an authoritative text.

They are found in around thirty of the fifteenth-century manuscripts of the *Tales*, and were considered by succeeding generations of scribes to be sufficiently important to copy. They are not all source references, but comments which divert the reader's eye from the text to the gloss.⁶

Some glosses simply state ‘Verum est’, for example in the Wife of Bath's Prologue when the Wife says that no man can swear and lie as any woman (line 227). Some quote Chaucer's Latin source, but in doing so remind the reader of the biblical context and in some occasions by quoting the text, they highlight the Wife's deliberate, partial quotation from the Bible in which she omits the reciprocal continuation of the text, e.g., “God bad oure housbondes for to love us weel” or “I have the power duryng al my lyf/Upon his propre body and not he”. Other biblical quotations in the glosses are in fact comments: The Wife claims that no clerk ever praised a woman (689), while the gloss adds the Proverbs 31:10 text: “The value of a virtuous woman is far above rubies”, thus showing that clerks do praise women, but only virtuous ones.

At one point the Wife says she is attracted to her fifth husband “for his crispe heer, shynynge as gold so fyn” (304), “for his curly hair that shone like fine gold” —an innocuous line, except that our attention is shifted to the gloss “Et procurator calamistratus” (“The curled darling who manages her affairs”); this quotation comes from St Jerome's *Contra Jovinianum* I, 47, and refers to the married whore who has what today is called a toyboy, a young man with blond, curly hair. One might pass over this comment about blond, curly hair, if the gloss had not quoted from Jerome, and reminded us of the Wife's literary ancestry —the married whore who misuses marriage to conceal adultery and milk the husband of his money. The glosses attack not her sexuality as much as her textuality —not so much the sexual harassment of her husbands but the textual harassment of Jerome.

The English and Latin texts are balanced on both sides of the page and so it might be that the compiler of the manuscript wished to counterbalance the subversive views of the Wife which are in English with Latin glosses from genuine authoritative texts such as the Bible and Jerome. Ironically it is now the Latin that has the lesser role of providing the commentary on the vernacular text.

Many critics who have studied the glosses in detail seem to agree that it is likely that they were written by Chaucer himself. This might also explain why they were given such prominence on the page and were faithfully copied for a century. Robert Enzer Lewis has shown how the glosses in *The Man of Law's Tale* from Innocent III's *De contemptu mundi* probably came from the same source manuscript as that used by Chaucer when translating Boethius in his *Boece*, as the same phrasing and errors occur in both. He states that the glosses “were written either by Chaucer in his autograph copy of the *Man of Law's Tale* or by a scribe under Chaucer's

supervision from Chaucer's own manuscript of the *De Miseria*, or by a scribe shortly after Chaucer's death from that same manuscript found among Chaucer's papers" (Lewis 1967: 13).⁷

The new breed of English poet in the fourteenth century, therefore, verbally *claimed* to be mere *compilators* (the Ellesmere manuscript has a colophon which states "compiled by Geoffrey Chaucer"), but the manuscript evidence says otherwise. In the visual presentation of their work poets, beginning with Boccaccio, went to great lengths to ensure that they *appeared on parchment* as authoritative texts. In fact in their own lifetime they had 'arrived' —they were genuine *auctores*. And this evidence is only conveyed on the manuscript page, contradicting the self-effacing and traditional modesty that is protested in the text. Such a conclusion can only come from viewing the text in its manuscript context.

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Notes

¹. Parts of this article are forthcoming in Caie, Graham D. and Denis Renevey. (eds.). *Medieval Texts in Manuscript Context*. London: Routledge.

². This translation is quoted from Minnis (1988: 185), who continues: "The *auctoritas* belongs to God or to the divine will as expressed by the voice of the people [...]; he is a humble and unworthy minister of that doctrine" (Minnis 1988: 186).

³. See my article "The Inscribed Paisley Slates" (Caie 2000b).

⁴. See Smalley (1964: 56, 66 and 367).

⁵. See Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawl. G.41, fol. 1r, Cambridge University Library, MS li.3.21, fol. 14r. These are reproduced and discussed in Irvine (1992: 90-94).

⁶. See Caie (1977: 354-5) and Caie (1984).

⁷. Lewis (1967: 2-3) lists the critics who support the argument of Chaucerian authorship. See also Silvia (1965).

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