

“NEW CORN FROM OLD FIELDS”: THE *AUCTOR* AND *COMPILATOR* IN FOURTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

The study of medieval texts in their manuscript context has only recently been of widespread interest to scholars. Editors, generally but not always, look at the chosen original manuscript, and then extract the text from its surroundings presenting it in a clinically clean, restored, and tidy version, divorced from its physical context. The material the text is written on, the inclusion and arrangement of glosses, the type of script, the presence or not of illustrations can, however, be the source of a wealth of information about author, reader, book production, and theories of authorship. In this sense, the advent of electronic editing gives us the possibility to recreate as closely as possible what might be called the medieval reading experience, which in turn can allow us to glimpse at clues as to the authorial process in late medieval English literature.

KEY WORDS: Electronic editions, glosses, authorship, Chaucer.

RESUMEN

El análisis de los textos medievales desde el contexto de los manuscritos sólo ha logrado interesar a los estudiosos muy recientemente. Por lo general, aunque no siempre, los editores seleccionan uno de los manuscritos originales para, a continuación, privar al texto de toda la información que lo rodea y reducirlo a versiones clínicamente limpias, restauradas, divorciadas de su contexto físico. Sin embargo, el material sobre el que se escribe el texto, la inclusión y ordenamiento de las glosas, el tipo de letra, o la presencia o ausencia de las ilustraciones, suponen una rica fuente de información sobre el autor, el lector, la producción del libro y las teorías sobre la autoría. En este sentido, la llegada de la edición electrónica nos ofrece la posibilidad de recrear lo más fidedignamente posible lo que podríamos denominar “la experiencia de lectura medieval” que, a su vez, nos ilumina sobre el proceso autorial que presenta la literatura inglesa de la baja Edad Media.

PALABRAS CLAVE: ediciones electrónicas, glosas, autoría, Chaucer.

It invariably surprises students to learn that the study of medieval texts in their manuscript context has only recently been of widespread interest to scholars.



Editors, generally but not always, look at the original manuscript, and then extract the text from its surroundings presenting it in a clinically clean, restored, and tidy version, divorced from its physical context. We still do not have an edition of *The Canterbury Tales* which records all the information on the page that would have been available to the fifteenth-century reader; the early manuscripts, for example, present text and gloss side-by-side and this significant juxtapositioning of material was never restored after the invention of printing. The electronic revolution, however, has given us the potential to show facsimile page and transcription or edited text simultaneously and to recreate as closely as possible what might be called the medieval reading experience.¹ The manuscript membrane, or whatever material the text is written on, can be the source of a wealth of information about author, reader, book production, and theories of authorship, and so we need to be archaeologists and treat the manuscript as an object or a palimpsest with layer upon layer of useful material.

The author or scribe's choice of material is significant. Is the text written on membrane, paper, wood, wax, slate or other stone? The quality of the membrane will convey information about the cost and prestige of the manuscript and thence about its readership and use. Recently I was involved in an exciting new find of fragments of late medieval Scottish lyrics found in a sealed medieval drain under Paisley Abbey, near Glasgow.² The fact that they are written on slate tells us much about the scribe's intentions. The hand helps us date the slates to c. 1560, the dialect and other linguistic features locate the text to Scotland of the same period and the fact that slate was used suggests that they were draft versions. Slate has also the advantage of standing up to heavy usage and it has been suggested that it might be used in schools or school choirs for texts or music that were frequently distributed to children.³ The poetic text is only lightly inscribed on the slates, but there are other slates which contain musical notation—the first polyphonic notation in Scotland—and these might have had a scholastic use. Other slates contain rows of practice letters and attempts to draw interlaced knots, so they are definitely not intended for posterity. I believe that the lyrics were not meant to be preserved in this form for a long period and that the scribe was practising his art. We are just lucky to have these examples of draft texts, as the vast majority would be on material which would be either recycled or scrapped.

Wax tablets were also used for writing that was not intended for posterity and we have examples of writers using wax for notes which they would commit to

¹ See my article "Hypertext and Multiplicity: The Medieval Example," *Renaissance Texts: Theory, Editing, Textuality*, ed. A. Murphy (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000) 30-43. The Canterbury Tales Project at Sheffield and DeMontfort universities has made major progress in this area. More information is available at: <<http://www.shef.ac.uk/uni/projects/ctp/index.html>>

² "The Inscribed Paisley Slates," *The Monastery and Abbey of Paisley*, ed. John Malden (Paisley, 2000) 199-204.

³ CAIE, "Inscribed" 203.

membrane when time and occasion permitted. Michael Clanchy gives the example of the twelfth-century Orderic Vitalis⁴ who wanted to copy a life of St William which had been shown to him by a monk from Winchester, but, as it was cold and the monk in a hurry, Orderic produced a wax tablet from his belt, wrote an abbreviated draft, and stated “I shall endeavour to entrust it summarily to parchment.”⁵ The first was a draft and worthy only of wax tablet, the second was to be on parchment and a version to be read or copied. In the case of a manuscript, the script and ornamentation, even the quality of the membrane, would have sent out signals concerning the prestige or otherwise of the text transmitted.

Today we discourage the writing on books, although it is tempting to reply to the author with critical marginal remarks such as “Nonsense!” or “Well put!” or to give ourselves reminders of important points with a brief “NB.” Such glossing, however, was common and indeed encouraged in the Middle Ages, as commentary especially in the scholastic period became considered an integral accompaniment to text. This tradition of gloss and commentary was gradually adopted by later vernacular manuscript compilers and indeed by the authors themselves, as in the case of Boccaccio or Chaucer, if they were involved in manuscript compilation. It is interesting to see that the collections of glosses, trial signatures, doodling and practice letters appear to die out in the printed text and an examination of this topic would reflect different attitudes to printed book and manuscript. Julie Coleman has recently studied the marginalia in manuscripts and early printed versions of the *Brut* found in Glasgow University Library and found that owners and readers treat the two media differently.⁶ There would appear to be a tendency amongst contemporary readers to view the manuscript version as an ongoing, evolving artefact, something to which they can contribute and perhaps help shape by adding to it during its transmission. The printed book on the other hand has a greater sense of finality or closure.

The author of *Piers Plowman* kept revising his work throughout his lifetime, never satisfied with it and constantly adapting it as events changed around him, and so it might have been acceptable to the reader of a medieval manuscript to append additions and changes as the text moved from witness to witness. There was no sense of closure, therefore, as the text never had to go off to the printer, and this “work in progress” must have affected both the authorial and the reading experience. Whatever the reason, everything which surrounds a text —the glosses, illustrations, capitals, *lemmata*, doodles, etc.— creates the overall experience of a manuscript and must have influenced the contemporary reader’s interpretation of the text. In our own age the electronic revolution that has brought us hypertexts and

⁴ M.T. CLANCHY, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979) 91.

⁵ *Op. cit.*

⁶ Julie COLEMAN, Diss. U of Glasgow.



digitised facsimiles of manuscripts is beginning to recreate this experience of reading a text with the same accompanying apparatus which was available to the medieval reader.

It is significant that few manuscripts with vernacular, poetic texts are glossed in the early medieval period. At least this is the case with Old English poetry. There are line drawings in the Junius 11 manuscript, but none of the poems in the poetic corpus are glossed. The main reason might be that these are works written to be recited and few laity would have access to reading them. The gloss or footnote simply does not function in a recited work. However, the scholastic text of the twelfth century onwards would undoubtedly have been glossed for a number of practical reasons. It would have been used in the schools and universities for teaching purposes and the texts of the *auctores* would be discussed and commented upon verbally and in copious marginal notes. An unglossed text was considered as unworthy of attention as an unreviewed book today.⁷ The membrane would have been carefully prepared, that is pricked and ruled, to accommodate glosses, and this suggests that these glosses were a significant part of the text itself and of the reading experience.⁸ The fact that a text was glossed would also have signalled to the medieval audience that this was an authoritative text, as glossing gave the text *gravitas*. All texts presented with an apparatus of lemmata, glosses and commentary would be known as objects of authority and value. The fact that all such authoritative texts had known authors was also of significance. The author of a scholastic text would invariably be an accepted, ancient writer and if the author's name were unknown, the text would be ascribed to one of the church fathers. Walter Mapp, for example, immodestly laments the fact that he cannot be considered an author until after his death and resigns himself to the fact that no living writer, even of his stature, can be seen as writing *auctoritas*. The elevation to this status is akin to beatification or canonisation, states which also require the person involved to be dead.⁹

The relationship between author and *auctor* and *auctoritas* has been expertly investigated by A.J. Minnis, to whom I am indebted in this article. In brief, the Bible is the ultimate, authoritative text and the Holy Spirit the only true *auctor*. The preparation of the great medieval Bibles, such as the richly illuminated Lindisfarne Gospels, reflects an attempt to approximate in visual terms the awe, wonder

⁷ See Beryl SMALLEY, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1964) 56, 66 and 367.

⁸ See Martin IRVINE, "‘Bothe Text and Gloss’: Manuscript Form, the Textuality of Commentary, and Chaucer’s Dream Poems," *The Uses of Manuscripts in Literary Studies: Essays in Memory of Judson Boyce Allen*, ed. Charlotte Cook Morse, Penelope Reed Doob & Marjorie Curry Woods (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan U, Medieval Institute, 1992) 81-119. See also Martin IRVINE’s *The Making of Textual Culture: Grammatica and Literary Theory 350-1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 390-393.

⁹ CLANCHY 157-158. Map, he says, discounts “the success of innovation in writing vernacular scripts [and] suppresses the voice of vernacular literature by ignoring its existence” (158).

and miracle of the sacred Word of God. Gerald of Wales mentions on reading an illuminated book that he considers it the work of an angel not a man. It is significant to see that an eleventh-century monk managed to copy only three or four books a year, while a fourteenth-century scribe could complete a large manuscript in three days. There was, therefore, a distinct change in the attitudes to authorship and book production, as well as a change of readership from early to late Middle Ages.

So with this mass production of texts for the schools and an increasingly literate public, there had to be greater standardisation of texts. Control had to be introduced to reduce scribal error which easily crept in with the *pecia* system of copying texts. For educational reasons the text, either from scripture, patristic writing or the classics, was invariably accompanied by a commentary in the form of a gloss. The text and gloss on the same page became standardised and practised throughout European scriptoria, the gloss often forming a frame round the text.

During the thirteenth century we find that interpretative glosses, which formed the *ennaratio*, were also written interlinearly, as well as marginally. Visually one could see at a glance what was text and what was commentary and also the relationship between them:

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.¹⁰

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. The word *auctor* was said to come from *augere* “to grow, augment” and related to the Greek *authentim* “authority.”¹¹ Similarly related are words such as “authenticity” and “authoritativeness.” The *auctor* was a giant who produced work of intrinsic merit, worthy of imitation. Although this concept changed and was modified throughout the Middle Ages, the link between authority and author remained and is central to any discussion of authorship even in the late medieval period.

It is interesting to note that the names of very few vernacular authors are known in England or the continent before the fourteenth century, but by the end, we can recite many names of authors eager to put their name to their work. It could well be that the earlier “authors” did not see their work as sufficiently authoritative

¹⁰ Martin IRVINE 89-90.

¹¹ MINNIS 10.





to carry a name. We know of no Old English poet's name and few before *Lazamon*.¹² But by the late fourteenth century we have a wide range of known authors. This is also the time when vernacular works are first glossed and it is possible that there is a connection between the two phenomena, namely that this is the period when certain vernacular writers consider themselves *auctores* —original and imaginative authors whose work is worthy of veneration and equal in seriousness to the accepted authorities.

The glossed book, then, has great ideological and cultural significance. The gloss had another function, namely as a regulator, a control on the interpretation of the text it accompanied. The problem with manuscripts is that no two are identical as the text is constantly moving with every copy in the same way as no two theatrical performances are absolutely the same. This sense of *mouvance* also had its downside —at least for the authorities and later for the authors who wished to exercise control over these moving objects. In the high Middle Ages with the growth of lay literacy, and, as contemporary observers mention with horror, even women were reading, there was a growing need to control the text and avoid heresy. We can sense Chaucer's dismay at the way in which scribes distort his text in his poem "o Adam Scryven" in which he begs Adam "after my making... [to] wryte more trewe." The Dominicans were especially keen to keep strict control over the text and the gloss was one of their instruments of control. The text as such was the authoritative, accepted word and the commentary accompanying on the page attempted to establish the accepted interpretation. As commentaries proliferated it was not uncommon to see the text on the page consist of only a few lines, while the commentaries on commentaries took up most of the space. Even though the text trickled through the commentary, it was always prominently displayed and never eclipsed by it. This was achieved by presenting the text in a more prestigious script and larger hand than the gloss and by placing the text in a section with more liberally spaced lines. The manuscript compiler was responsible for the layout and he would ensure that the text was given prominence often with decorated capitals. There evolved a hierarchy of scripts, the most obvious difference being between the formal *textura* or Gothic script reserved for the major *auctores* and the court or cursive scripts, such as *anglicana* or secretary hands, common in the vernacular. On a practical level the cursive hands were very much quicker to write and the time and care taken to present a text reflected its veneration. The hybrid hands that evolved in the fifteenth century were an attempt to introduce some features of *textura* to the cursive hands, thereby raising their prestige. It is interesting to see the same scribe change script depending on the nature of the text he is copying often in the same line if a word or phrase of Latin is introduced in a vernacular text.

In addition to the script, the layout or *mise-en-page* was important, not only to show the relationship between gloss and text, but as an *aide memoire*. Un-

¹² I am assuming that *Caedmon* and *Cynewulf* are fictitious names.

like today when we think we know a work if we possess the book, the paucity of books owned in the Middle Ages meant that a book borrowed had to be committed to memory. The layout with its columns, decorated capitals, rubrication, lemmata, etc., was the key to memory. Today we may remember if a passage we seek is on a left- or right-hand page, while in the Middle Ages there were innumerable clues and cues given to help the memory. Mary Carruthers in *The Book of Memory* presents an excellent discussion of the multifaceted methods and tricks that medieval scribes and compilers used; for example, the finger pointing to an important passage:

The distinctive format of the glossed book, used especially for Biblical texts and law, but later also for secular authors, is the most satisfying model of authorship and textual authority which the Middle Ages produced... The relationship is functional; the book “supports” *memoria*, because it serves its requirements.¹³

If we consider the above-mentioned functions of manuscript *mise-en-page* and the relative importance placed on the work of an author and a commentator, it stands to reason that such considerations influenced the very act of writing by vernacular authors. They would have known that composing starts with memorised reading.¹⁴ Nothing new can be said and it would be presumptive to consider one’s thoughts original, so one collected ideas from others, memorised them and presented them in an innovative fashion. The author, we hear, is like a bee—a concept that came from Seneca—collecting honey and arranging it into cells.¹⁵ The author is a compiler, a plunderer of libraries, one who redistributes existing material. Eventually the collected material becomes part of our own knowledge-hoard and thence there was little criticism of plagiarism, as having one’s ideas copied implied that they were of sufficient weight to be memorised.

A composition might go through a number of draft stages, as well as being worked on by the author throughout his lifetime, as Langland did. The initial, draft copy was called *dictamen* and I think this is the stage reached by the scribe of the Paisley slates. To write a draft on wax is *dictare*, hence *dictamen*, while the final act of composition is *scribere*, to inscribe, an exemplar.¹⁶ Mary Carruthers cites the example of Anselm’s biographer, Eadmer:

Eadmer makes clear the distinction between the composing and copying stages. Of the first, he uses the verb *dictare*, of the second, *scribere*. *Dictare* is done “in cerae”, “on wax”; *scribere* is the action whereby the *dictamen* is *traditum*, “transcribed.”¹⁷

¹³ Mary CARRUTHERS, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 194. See also Michael CAMILLE, *Image on the Edge: Margins of Medieval Art* (London: Harvard UP, 1992).

¹⁴ *Opus. cit.*

¹⁵ CARRUTHERS 192.

¹⁶ CARRUTHERS 195.

¹⁷ CARRUTHERS 196.

Scribere, therefore, has a sense of closure about it, as inscribed texts on a manuscript, unlike temporary writing on soft wax or chalk on slate, are cut into the membrane and cannot be easily erased. If one's work had to be "what oft was said..." and innovation was presumption, then the vernacular author can only aspire to be a commentator, a glossator of earlier wisdom. Old books were the source of new learning, as Chaucer states in *The Parliament of Fowlis*:

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. (22-5)

The innovative poet has to pretend that his material comes from "a bok... write with lettres olde" (19). Marie de France in the Prologue to her *Lais* states that ancient authors deliberately wrote obscurely, so that later writers could *gloser la lettre* "gloss or interpret their word." Old is good and the best writers are the most ancient and the most commented on. Authors had to be named and their work presented in a fine, prestigious script on the best vellum. This was not a promising starting point for budding Chaucers and Boccaccios! As scholastic literary theory was widely known it also influenced vernacular authors and their attitudes to the function of creative writing. Scholastic literary theory did not merely provide these poets [Gower and Chaucer] with technical idioms: it influenced directly or indirectly the ways in which they conceived of their literary creations; it affected their choice of authorial roles and literary forms.¹⁸ A.J. Minnis has shown how the "Aristotelian Prologue," initially used in commentaries on ancient *auctores*, was modified; the primary, efficient cause is God, the true *auctor* of the work, and the present author becomes the secondary cause, the channel through which God operates. Such humility was expected and led Gower to state in *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.¹⁹ The *auctoritas* was God as expressed by the *voces plebis* and he is only the "instrumental *causa efficiens* working under the primary *causa efficiens*, God."²⁰

Minnis quotes Gower's interpretation of authorial *intentio*:

In this matter, take the product, not the person; the intention not the bodily form: because I, myself, am a worthless man. But a precious thing often resides in a vile mineral, and the commodity, on being extracted, is valued.²¹

¹⁸ MINNIS 160.

¹⁹ MINNIS 184.

²⁰ MINNIS 173.

²¹ MINNIS 172; here lines 13-14 of the Prologue to *Vox Clamantis* are cited.

Gower continues by stressing the importance of the intrinsic worth of the work, irrespective of the rhetorical skills or faults in what he writes. Just as such devices appear to underline the humility of the author, by using scholastic idioms, they raise their work to the level of commentary.

Boccaccio also claims he is but a scribe when writing the Decameron:

But 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.²²

Boccaccio can only mean this with tongue in cheek, as he was well aware of his innovative skill. Indeed with a work such as the *Teseida* he made sure that it had the outward appearance of a fine, authoritative text. There is a holograph manuscript in a large and formal hand with rubrics, decorated initials and glosses—all contributing to the prestige of the work. He adds annotations and commentary, as if it were a work by a church father. All this is under the guise of humility: he is simply repeating a story he has read in Statius, but in fact his work is one of imagination and originality and this he proclaims indirectly by the physical presentation which he himself directed and executed.²³ He has in fact become an *auctor*.

Chaucer, similarly, was an author sure of his status and his authority and when the humility topos is invoked we can sense that he does not intend us to take it seriously. His stance as the simple commentator, as one who “rehearses,” that is “repeats,” other people’s matter is used to amusing effect:

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
Everich a word, if it be in his charge,
Al speke he never so rudeliche and large,
Or ellis he moot telle his tale untrewe,
Or feyne thyng, or fynde wordes newe. (*General Prologue*, 730-736)

Similarly in the *Astrolabe* he states that his work was not “founden of my labour or of myn engyn,” while in the Prologue to *The Miller’s Tale* Chaucer the pilgrim states:

He nolde his wordes for no man forbere,
But tolde his cherles tale in his manere.
M’athynketh that I shal reherce it heere.

²² MINNIS 204.

²³ CARRUTHERS 218; she states “Boccaccio is both the originator of his text, and its reader; his own commentary invited commentary from others... [It] is the unending collocation which the author-text conducted with the readers in the margins.”

And therfore every gentil wight I preye,
For Goddes love, 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* 3168-3175)

Chaucer is, therefore, the commentator, reciting what he read in another source, or what he heard on a pilgrimage, afraid of falsifying his “mateere” or “feigning” the truth by inventing new words. He naturally distances himself from criticism, but surely does not expect his readers to take him seriously. By repeating, hence reminding us of, the traditional *topoi*, Chaucer is inviting us to see the vast literary distance between earlier, anonymous vernacular works and his great endeavours.

Minnis claims that Gower was very conscious of his status as *auctor*, as preacher, in *Vox Clamantis* and *Confessio Amantis*, the latter being accompanied by a Latin commentary which appears in many manuscripts, while Chaucer, Minnis claims,

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.²⁴

I believe that Chaucer was so sure of his standing as a great author that he immodestly promotes himself by the protestations of being a compiler. There are constant attempts to distance himself from being the originator of his texts, by claiming to have dreamt the story or read it elsewhere and he even gives us false source information, such as the Lollius allusion in the *Troilus*. Then the Chaucer manuscripts project another image, as they have the appearance of works of authority not of mere commentary.

There is growing acceptance of the fact that Chaucer was responsible for the earliest manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales*, Hengwrt and Ellesmere, and that the early editor who arranged the order of the tales, added the glosses, etc, might very well have been Chaucer himself, working along the same lines as mentioned above in relation to Boccaccio. Whether this is true or not, the earliest manuscripts with Latin glosses, prestigious script, fine membrane and illustrations, have all the physical features associated with works of *auctoritas*. Chaucer tells us one thing, while the manuscripts make it clear that he is not to be taken seriously.

²⁴ MINNIS 210.

The compiler of the Ellesmere Manuscripts —whether Chaucer or a contemporary— has made sure that the text is off-centre in order to accommodate liberal glosses, most of which are in Latin; they are in the same hand and in as large a hand as the text with the same size of initial capital. *The Canterbury Tales* glosses have several functions, only one of which is to give the text “authority.” They also suggest that the author did not consider his work completed when he allowed it to be distributed, but he was inviting his reader to enter into a dialogue with him as in the case of Boccaccio. The glosses are not all source references, but many are extended quotations which divert the reader’s eye from the text to the source material thereby inviting the reader to contemplate this source work. Robert Enzer Lewis has shown how the glosses in *The Man of Law’s Tale* from Innocent III’s *De miseria humane conditionis* probably came from the same source manuscript as that used by Chaucer when translating sections of this work in the *Tale* and also suggests that Chaucer was the author.²⁵ Many of the glosses accompany a list of examples in the text. It is possible that these additional, marginal examples were intended to be added later by Chaucer. Other glosses, e.g., those in *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue*, present in Latin the church’s teaching and thence provide a commentary on the Wife’s antics and dubious interpretation of her *auctores*.²⁶ Whatever the function, they do point to an evolving, incomplete text —a work in progress.

The glosses have never been given their rightful place by editors; Manly and Rickert transcribed some of the glosses “when they seem important” in volume III of their edition,²⁷ Robinson gave a selection in the “Explanatory Notes” to his edition,²⁸ while the Riverside Chaucer translates most of the glosses, but relegates them to the notes. It is only with the advent of electronic editing, such as the

²⁵ Lewis states that “It is therefore extremely likely, and in fact the only reasonable conclusion, that not only is the manuscript used for Chaucer’s paraphrase *practically* identical to the one used for the glosses, but they are one and the same manuscript. And if this is so, 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.” Robert Enzer LEWIS, “Glosses to the *Man of Law’s Tale* from Pope Innocent III’s *De Miseria Humane Conditionis*,” *Studies in Philology* 64 (1967): 13. Lewis lists (2-3) the critics who support the argument of Chaucerian authorship. See also my comments on the possibility of Chaucer’s authorship of some of the glosses in “The Significance of the Early Chaucer Manuscript Glosses Marginal Glosses (with special reference to the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue*),” *The Chaucer Review* 10 (1977): 354-55.

²⁶ CAIE, “Early Chaucer” 351-56. See also Daniel S. SILVIA, Jr., “Glosses to the *Canterbury Tales* from St Jerome’s *Epistola contra Jovinianum*,” *Studies in Philology* 62 (1965): 31-33 and my article “The Significance of Marginal Glosses in the Earliest Manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales*,” *Chaucer and the Scriptural Tradition*, ed. D.L. Jeffrey (Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 1997) 337-350.

²⁷ John MANLY and Edith RICKERT, eds., *The Text of the Canterbury Tales*, vol. 3 (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1940) 3, 525.

²⁸ F.N. ROBINSON, ed., *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957). In the “Explanatory Notes” to *The Man of Law’s Tale* the editor adds comments such as “Four lines of the Latin [of Bernardus Silvester] are quoted in the margins of several MSS” (693).



“*Canterbury Tales* Project,” that there is the possibility of restoring the glosses to their rightful place beside the text and not as marginalia to be hidden in endnotes.²⁹

By looking at the text in context, therefore, and in particular all that surrounds the text, we glimpse at clues as to the authorial process. Chaucer, I maintain, was not the “self-conscious author” hiding behind the appearance of being a mere compiler, as Minnis suggests. He was very much aware of his status as a prestigious *auctor* and was keen that his work was presented with all the trappings of an authoritative text such as the Latin gloss. Chaucer more than Gower revels in his own marginal status: he’s just a fellow pilgrim on the margins of the pilgrimage commenting on what others. He creates a Chinese box effect or palimpsest of commentary within commentary, gloss within gloss: the Latin marginal gloss provides a commentary on the text and is itself taken from an authoritative, patristic; the poetic text is conveyed by a fictitious character and is based on a work he or she has heard elsewhere or dreamt, while the narrator provides a commentary on this commentary. The text is a gloss and the author has disappeared. Writing is an ongoing sequence of supplements and interpretations from the wax tablet onwards and the physical appearance of the writing material is itself a gloss on the authorial process.



²⁹ Information about the Project is available on the Web (see above) and in the two volumes of *The Canterbury Tales Project: Occasional Papers* (Oxford: Office for Humanities, 1993 and 1997).

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