

Writing After Chaucer

*Essential Readings in Chaucer
and the Fifteenth Century*

Edited by
Daniel J. Pinti



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BASIC READINGS IN CHAUCER AND HIS TIME
VOLUME I
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CHRISTIAN K. ZACHER AND PAUL E. SZARMACH, *Series Editors*

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SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

Basic Readings in Chaucer and His Time is a series of volumes that offers reprints of significant essays in the field, written mainly after 1950, along with some new essays as commissioned by editors of the individual volumes. The series is designed so that each volume may serve as a "first book" on the subject within the area of Chaucer studies treated, thus offering students easy access to major landmarks in the subject. There are three main branches within the series: collected essays organized according to Chaucer's work or works, essays collected from other fields that support an understanding of Chaucer in his time (e.g., art history, philosophy, or comparative literature) and special volumes addressing specific problem areas in the study of Chaucer. Each volume editor has the autonomy to select essays that reflect the current state of knowledge and that point toward future directions. Chaucer remains the major pre-modern author in English and has become a center-point where the history of literature intersects with contemporary methodologies. Basic Readings in Chaucer and His Time aims to offer an authoritative entry through its several volumes to this lively, engaging, and perduring area of study. The series is part of the remarkable flowering of Chaucer studies that has marked the last few decades, reflected in the growth of the New Chaucer Society, including its conference and publications programs; the Chaucer sessions at Kalamazoo; and the sustained activity of the Chaucer group at the Modern Language Association. At the same time, Basic Readings in Chaucer and His Time seeks to compensate for new publications patterns and changed library acquisitions policies in serials and retrospective titles by providing affordable access to significant scholarship in the field.

In this first volume to appear in the series, Daniel Pinti gathers together significant recent essays that examine the fundamental ways in which scribes, commentators, poets, and editors shaped and defined both the Chaucer canon and Chaucer's reputation in the first century after his death. Like other volumes in the series, this one is meant for those studying how Chaucer was initially received, defined, and transmitted to later eras. The volume begins with the 1979 article by Barry Windeatt

that initiated scholarly realization of just how significant fifteenth-century reactions to Chaucer were for the history of Chaucer's reception. It continues with an array of important investigations of the fifteenth-century Chaucer, including contributions by John Fisher on Chaucer's role in the development of the English language, Paul Strohm on the nature of Chaucer's audiences, Louise Fradenburg on how Scots poets used the English Chaucer, and Seth Lerer on how Caxton, the first printer of Chaucer, transformed Chaucer out of a manuscript environment into the new print culture. Stephen Partridge's opening essay, the only commissioned one in the collection, is meant to introduce readers to the distinctive nature of fifteenth-century manuscript culture.

The series editors thank Daniel Pinti for composing this collection, whose subject appropriately inaugurates this series of Basic Readings in Chaucer and His Time. The series editors invite those interested to offer proposals for subsequent volumes.

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Introduction

Daniel Pinti

Sic plures penitere se postea dicunt quando mala sua et mala per eos inducta destruere non possunt; sicut Chawserus ante mortem suam sepe clamavit ve michi ve michi quia revocare nec destruere jam potero illa que male scripsi de malo et turpissimo amore hominum ad mulieres et jam de homine in hominem continuabuntur. Velim. Nolim. Et sic plangens mortuus.

Likewise they say that more people themselves do penance afterwards, when they are not able to destroy their own evil things and the evil introduced by them; just as Chaucer often cried out before his death, “Woe to me! Woe to me! I can neither call back nor destroy those things I wickedly wrote concerning the evil and most foul love of men for women, and now those things will be perpetuated, from one person to the next. I wish. I don’t wish.” And weeping thus, he died.

Dr. Thomas Gascoigne, ca. 1434-57¹

THOMAS Gascoigne’s fifteenth-century narrative of Chaucer’s death, its almost certain fictionality notwithstanding, is in its own moralistic way a dramatic portrait of Chaucer *agonistes*. It also represents in a condensed form some of the fifteenth-century “Chaucers” that the scholars whose articles make up this book discuss: Chaucer the poet of love; Chaucer the model to be followed—or, in this case, avoided; Chaucer the writer all-too-aware of the afterlife of texts, knowingly writing for a contemporary audience as well as for posterity.² In at least two important respects, however, the picture presented in this fifteenth-century response to Chaucer is significantly different from the others discussed in this anthology. First, none of the other fifteenth-century writers considered here seems especially interested in either the state of Chaucer’s soul or the idea that his works could be considered “*mala*.” More intriguingly, though, Gascoigne

imagines Chaucer imagining an “infectious” literary history, one in which the production and reproduction of (his) manuscripts contaminates not poems (as traditional editorial theory might have it) but people. Yet as the essays in this collection amply bear witness, the fifteenth century’s engagement with Chaucer was a much more active and creative process than Gascoigne’s Chaucer might have envisioned. In other words, Gascoigne’s Chaucer conceives of himself as creating and perpetuating evils, but of course it is more accurate to say that Gascoigne and his contemporaries created and perpetuated “Chaucers.”

Or, as Seth Lerer puts it, “Chaucer’s poetry, in a quite literal sense, *is* the product of his fifteenth-century readers and writers,” and in widely varying ways all of these essays attest to this fact.³ Readers of this collection will find that it focuses on relatively recent work on this subject of Chaucer in the fifteenth century. It does so, I think, with good reason. The earliest piece, Barry Windeatt’s, dates from 1979, and “The Scribes as Chaucer’s Early Critics” marks a convenient and defensible starting point for the new directions and the revaluations that have characterized current approaches to fifteenth-century Chaucer traditions. As I suggested above, the reception of Chaucer was a noticeably active process, and nowhere is this activity more visible and intriguing than in the interpretive moves performed by scribes and glossators on Chaucer’s poetry. Although medieval scribes did count some bunglers among their ranks, and even the best of them surely made the occasional mistake, the recognition that many scribal “variants” represent revealing responses rather than obscuring errors is one of the most far-reaching changes in recent medieval literary studies. What Windeatt does, something that all too rarely had been done before him, is take the scribal responses to Chaucer’s poetry seriously—that is, as serious sources of information about the medieval understanding as well as the misunderstanding of Chaucer. Likewise, Susan Schibanoff’s “The New Reader and Female Textuality in Two Early Commentaries on Chaucer” illustrates just how powerfully productive this revaluation of scribal and glossatorial responses can be. Schibanoff’s effort to “gloss the glosses” demonstrates in fascinating ways how differently medieval glossators could respond to the same poem (in this case *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale*): indeed, how for one glossator that very variety of potential responses was something to be facilitated, and for another, something to be discouraged.

Together these two essays remind us that there’s no way to begin to probe the complex questions surrounding Chaucer’s reception in the fifteenth century without some knowledge of the manuscripts that preserve Chaucer’s writing, and the one new article in this volume, Stephen Partridge’s “Questions of Evidence: Manuscripts and the Early History of Chaucer’s Works,” is an admirably detailed overview of these all-important artifacts. In addition to providing a summary of the state of the scholarship on Chaucer’s manuscripts and a helpful reading list on the subject, Partridge articulates how crucially important it is to take into account the material

contexts in which Chaucer's writings are actually preserved. Partridge's article, in short, offers an up-to-date introduction to a somewhat technical but utterly essential body of knowledge, and readers of this volume—particularly those new to its subject—will find it indispensable.

That Chaucer's works contributed in important ways to the history of the English *language* as well as its literature should perhaps not be surprising, but the nature and extent of the contribution are still very much the subjects of debate. John H. Fisher's article, "A Language Policy for Lancastrian England," represents a notable contribution to this ongoing dialogue, narrating the historical connections to be found in the rise of the Lancastrian line, the "burgeoning of composition in English," and the increasing production of manuscripts of Chaucer's works. Fisher's essay also shows us (as does Partridge's) how we must not pretend that the year 1400 marks some impermeable boundary beyond which we are not to venture when considering the fifteenth-century's Chaucer. Something else that Partridge's and Fisher's articles share is an interest in questions regarding Chaucer's audiences—and what they illustrate so profoundly is the necessity of that plural. Paul Strohm's contribution to this volume, "Chaucer's Fifteenth-Century Audience and the Narrowing of the 'Chaucer Tradition'," deepens our understanding of these audiences even further. Strohm carefully describes the "dispersion" of Chaucer's original audience of knights and esquires moving in fourteenth-century court circles and the consequent broadening of Chaucer's audience and narrowing of readerly tastes as Chaucer's work moved into the fifteenth century.

It is perhaps inevitable, certainly not surprising, that the vast majority of Chaucer scholarship focuses on either *Troilus and Criseyde* or *The Canterbury Tales*,⁴ and it is precisely for this reason that Julia Boffey's article on "The Reputation and Circulation of Chaucer's Lyrics in the Fifteenth Century" is so necessary to this volume. Boffey shows us, through an intensive examination of the forms in which the lyrics circulated, that in the century following Chaucer's death his lyrics were both "well-known and influential," and thus that, while certainly admired in the fifteenth century for his narrative poetry, Chaucer could be turned to as a model for lyric verse as well.⁵ John Bowers' article, "*The Tale of Beryn* and *The Siege of Thebes*: Alternative Ideas of *The Canterbury Tales*" also points to the fact that what we think to be obvious or most important about Chaucer's writings is not necessarily what medieval audiences responded to or concluded. In this case it is not Chaucer's "finished" lyric poetry but his unfinished tale collection that prompts two different reader-poets, the *Beryn*-Poet and John Lydgate, to compose texts that provocatively challenge the order and implicit goals of yet another fifteenth-century "writing" of Chaucer, the justly famous Ellesmere manuscript.⁶

Bowers' article points us to the poets whose reading of Chaucer was so much a part of their own "making" of late-medieval English literature and to the concurrent, vexed questions surrounding fifteenth-century "Chaucerian" poetry. A. C. Spearing's account of the reception by fifteenth-century poets

of their “Father Chaucer” charts the problem from an angle somewhat different from Bowers’, first analyzing Chaucer’s rather problematic representations of fathers and sons and Chaucer’s own deeply ambivalent dealings with his literary forebears and then suggesting how difficult it seems to have been for poets like Lydgate to construct an individual voice alongside yet against such an indeterminate poetic “Father.” The complex negotiations of poetic *auctoritas* provoked by later poets’ readings of Chaucer are also addressed in different ways by Louise Fradenburg, C. David Benson, and Tim William Machan. While Spearing ends by intimating the importance of the Scots poet Robert Henryson’s empowering question—“Quha wait gif all that Chauceir wrait was trew?”—the earliest of these three articles, Fradenburg’s “The Scottish Chaucer,” outlines in some detail a critical landscape that still provides the context in which questions of the reading of Chaucer by Middle Scots poets need to be asked. Remarking on James I’s *The Kingis Quair*, Henryson’s *Testament of Cresseid*, and other works of medieval Scottish literature, Fradenburg indicates the intricate process by which the English poet is appropriated for a Scottish literary past. In “Critic and Poet: What Lydgate and Henryson Did to Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*,” Benson distinguishes between Lydgate’s adopted role as “scholarly commentator ready to annotate” and Henryson’s creative “exploit[ation of] ... Chaucer’s innovative literary devices.” Like Bowers, although now with regard to the *Troilus* rather than the *Tales*, Benson bolsters the idea that *disparate* understandings of Chaucer in the fifteenth century need not be categorized by us as either “right” or “wrong.” In a similar vein, Machan’s “Textual Authority and the Works of Hoccleve, Lydgate, and Henryson” examines the various ways in which an “idea of English poetry” was conceived and accomplished in the fifteenth century by analyzing these three poets’ assorted metatextual references to books and authorship in their construction of vernacular literary authority and comparing them to Chaucer’s own poetic enactment of similar issues.

The last article addresses the “translation” of Chaucer into print. Today almost everyone’s first encounter—indeed, almost everyone’s *only* encounter—with Chaucer’s writing is in a printed, usually “critical” edition of his work. Seth Lerer’s essay, “At Chaucer’s Tomb: Laureation and Paternity in Caxton’s Criticism,” demonstrates how crucial was the transformation—for us and for the late fifteenth century—of Chaucer in manuscript to Chaucer in print, and how revealing are the publisher Caxton’s interpretations of Chaucer as he mediates Chaucer into an incipient print culture. Somewhat ironically, and unlike the poets discussed in some of the other essays here, Caxton is less interested in rewriting Chaucer’s poetry *per se* in an effort to construct poetic *auctoritas* than in creating a “laureate” Chaucer of the purposes of literary history. For Caxton, as for Gascoigne, a patently dead Chaucer can have a distinctive utility.

In sum, the purpose of this volume is to make conveniently available to teachers, scholars, and students a range of the most provocative and influential articles on Chaucer’s “afterlife” in the fifteenth century, on the

scribes, glossators, poets, and editors whose reception and transmission of Chaucer's writing influence so much our own reception of it. Two final points are now in order about the scope and nature of this volume as a whole. First, the one conclusion not to be drawn from this anthology is that the essays collectively constitute *all* of the "essential readings" on the subject of Chaucer's fifteenth-century "afterlife." No editor can come away from a project like this one anything but painfully aware of what has been left out, of the fact that the final volume amounts to a useful snapshot but not an exhaustive documentary of the field. Here I take some solace in the fact that one of the things that makes each of the present essays so valuable is the thorough nature of their respective notes and bibliographies, and I am sure that anyone sincerely interested in delving further into the subject will search out the no-less-essential scholarship referred to therein.⁷ And finally, the essays that are presented here testify, I believe, to the vitality of this subject and to the vigor of the debates surrounding it. It's obvious, but nonetheless "worthy for to drawen to memorie" (*CT* I.3112), that the essays embody neither critical consensus nor cacophony but rather the divergent views inherent in a rapidly developing field of Chaucer studies. If collecting these previously published articles along with Stephen Partridge's new introduction to the manuscripts encourages the continuing development of this field, then this anthology will have done its job.

NOTES

1. Martin M. Crow and Clair C. Olson, eds., *Chaucer Life-Records* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 547. The translation is my own. Crow and Olson note that "This passage follows an allusion to Judas Iscariot among examples of people who had repented too late to make restitution for their sins" (p. 547).

2. On Chaucer's audiences in his own time, see Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). Chaucer's short poem "To Adam Scryven" might be cited as evidence of Chaucer's self-conscious awareness of contemporary and future audiences, as might be the ending of *Troilus and Criseyde* (e.g., "O moral Gower, this bok I directe / To the, and to the, philosophical Strode" [V.1856-57]; "And red wherso thou [i.e., the poem] be, or elles songe, / That thou be understonde, God I beseche" [V.1797-98]). If we add Gascoigne's comment following the lines quoted above, that "idem Chawserus" was the father of Thomas Chaucer (cited in Crow and Olson, p. 543), we have a version of what Spearing characterizes as "Father Chaucer" here as well.

3. Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 8.

4. For example, the annotated Chaucer bibliography for 1995 in *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 18 (1996) lists thirty-six items related to the *Troilus*, five total for all of Chaucer's "Lyrics and Short Poems."

5. Chaucer's translations, too, did not go unnoticed or unpraised in the century after his death, and they clearly were incorporated into the narrative of his contribution to the development of the language. See, for example, Caxton's epilogue to his edition of Chaucer's *Boece*, where he describes Chaucer as the "first translatour of this sayde boke into englissh and enbelissher in making the sayd langage ornate and fayr." Lerer cites and discusses this epilogue in his article in this volume.

6. Recent research on the Ellesmere manuscript can be found in Martin Stevens and Daniel Woodward, eds., *The Ellesmere Chaucer: Essays in Interpretation* (San Marino, CA and Tokyo: Huntington Library and Yushodo Co., Ltd., 1997).

7. Here it might be useful to remind the reader of a few of the previous books that also deal with Chaucer and the fifteenth century: Ruth Morse and Barry Windeatt, eds., *Chaucer Traditions: Studies in Honour of Derek Brewer* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Derek Pearsall, ed., *Manuscripts and Readers in Fifteenth-Century England* (London: D. S. Brewer, 1983); D. S. Brewer, ed., *Chaucer and Chaucerians: Critical Studies in Middle English Literature* (London: Nelson, 1966); R. F. Yeager, ed., *Fifteenth-Century Studies* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1984); H. S. Bennett, *Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947); and Ian Robinson, *Chaucer and the English Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

Questions of Evidence: Manuscripts and the Early History of Chaucer's Works

Stephen Partridge

ALTHOUGH Chaucer died in the last year of the fourteenth century, virtually all the surviving manuscripts of his works date from the fifteenth.¹ The manuscripts therefore provide evidence not only for what he wrote during his lifetime, but also for how his work was read in the century after his death; thus they are among our chief means of understanding Chaucer's relationship to the fifteenth century. It is in this light that I will consider the manuscripts here. Space does not permit me to offer an introduction to the bibliography of the manuscript book, or a systematic survey of the manuscripts' dates, materials, and textual affiliations, or a comprehensive review of recent scholarship.² Instead, by referring to selected examples, I will highlight several aspects of pre-print culture that a student of literature might keep in mind when beginning to work with manuscript evidence. Treated with sensitivity, this evidence has the potential, often still untapped, to give us access to the history in which Chaucer's works are situated. Whatever their other reasons may be, most scholars who work with manuscripts do so in part because handling a physical artifact from the Middle Ages gives them a sense of contact with the people who lived, read, and wrote in that period that can be achieved in no other way. I hope that my readers will go on to examine Chaucerian and other medieval manuscripts for themselves in order to discover the many aspects of the medieval experience of literature which are difficult to recover from modern printed editions.

Comparing my purposes with those of an earlier introduction to the same material highlights recent developments in the study of medieval manuscripts. Even the title of E. T. Donaldson's essay, "The Manuscripts of Chaucer's Works and Their Use," is revealing; according to the essay, a scholar uses manuscripts to produce a printed edition.³ Donaldson devotes his entire piece to explaining how an editor interprets the evidence of

manuscripts, primarily the words they contain, in order to recover, so far as is possible, what Chaucer actually wrote; and how that editor then presents his conclusions, in the shape of a text, in order to make Chaucer's artistic intentions accessible to "the modern reader."⁴

Ironically, Donaldson's essay happened to appear at a time when Chaucerians, like other medievalists and literary scholars in general, were beginning to interrogate the assumptions and methods of standard editions. In addition, they were seeking new ways to incorporate the evidence contained in manuscripts and printed books into a historical understanding of literature. For Chaucerians this return to the manuscripts has led to an atmosphere of lively debate. Informed cases have been made for sharply diverging opinions on such fundamental questions as whether Chaucer actually wrote all the works attributed to him, whether he revised those works, whether he is likely to have circulated them in his own lifetime, whether he "finished" them or whether the forms familiar from modern editions were largely created by fifteenth-century "editors" supervising the scribes who copied those works. Moreover, as they have reconsidered Chaucer's own intentions, scholars have also paid extended and sympathetic attention to the many other parties who helped shape the manuscripts, such as scribes (and their supervisors), the artists who illustrated and decorated the manuscripts, patrons, and other readers.⁵

But this transformation of manuscript study has not made obsolete the editorial work Donaldson's essay describes. Barry A. Windeatt's essay on "The Scribes as Chaucer's Early Critics," which draws on material collected while preparing his edition of *Troilus and Criseyde*, shows that studying a text's transmission and reception and preparing a modern edition are complementary rather than antithetical tasks. Moreover, one should not suppose that all the traditional work with the manuscripts has been done and only waits to be reviewed or redone. For example, the Textual Notes to *The Riverside Chaucer* record the considerable number of manuscripts of the *Boece*, the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, and the lyrics that were newly discovered between the 1950s and the 1980s.⁶ The edition of the *Treatise on the Astrolabe* produced for the *Riverside* was in fact the first attempt to take account of all known manuscripts in the way Donaldson advocated. What follows, therefore, aims not to supersede Donaldson's essay but to supplement it, by focusing on those approaches to manuscript evidence which have come to the fore since it was published.

VARIATION

One of the most fundamental characteristics of Chaucer's works—and all other texts—in manuscript culture is that no two copies of the same text are identical.⁷ There are many kinds of variation between manuscript copies. A scribe was liable to substitute a familiar word for one in his exemplar (the manuscript he was copying) which was unfamiliar, for example, or restore "normal" order where his exemplar's was unusual. The manuscripts were

copied at a period when written English was still subject to many regional variations, and a scribe might “translate” unfamiliar forms into those of his own dialect. He might also add prepositions or pronouns to clarify the text’s meaning. It is difficult or impossible to determine whether such changes were made consciously or unconsciously. Even if scribes were aware of them, they may not have considered them mistakes or faults in their work, particularly if they made the text easier to read.

Other kinds of variants were introduced as a scribe moved his eyes between his exemplar and the new manuscript. Copying a line at a time, a scribe might easily return to the wrong place in his copy, particularly if two lines began with similar or identical phrases. The result would be the omission of the intervening lines. Another common kind of mistake occurred when a scribe confused a word from a nearby line with one in the line he was copying; this might be especially likely to happen if the words sounded alike and both made good sense in context. Other variations could result when a scribe simply had trouble deciphering the handwriting in his exemplar. Difficulty reading minims, the letters used to form *m*, *n*, *u*, and *i*, was particularly common and could produce radically different but still plausible readings in a new copy. A given act of copying probably was not likely to introduce many variants of these kinds, but most surviving Chaucer manuscripts are several generations removed from the author’s own copy, and so their texts contain several layers of scribal variants.

One example may give some idea of how even a seemingly minor variant can make the “Chaucer” of fifteenth-century readers significantly different from our own. In *The Clerk’s Tale*, at the point when Griselda has exchanged her peasant’s smock for the robes befitting a marquis’s wife, *The Riverside Chaucer*, supported by the best manuscripts, reads:

Unnethe the peple hir knew for hire fairnesse
Whan she translated was in swich richesse.
(IV.384-85)

Two recent and influential readings of the tale have taken their titles and significant parts of their arguments from these lines; the word “translated” has been interpreted as a crucial pun, echoing the allusions to *translatio studii* in *The Clerk’s Prologue* and suggesting a metaphorical equivalence between Griselda and the tale itself.⁸ But roughly a third of the manuscripts contain different words in this line, usually “transformed,” a more common word which an early scribe substituted for “translated,” and which was passed on to many other manuscripts thereafter. Thus a piece of wordplay integral to our contemporary understanding of the tale was invisible to a substantial number of Chaucer’s early readers.

Other kinds of variants affect not single words but entire lines or passages. Some manuscripts of *The Merchant’s Tale*, for example, preserve lines added to make the account of May and Damian’s union in the pear tree even more obscene; these were apparently among the spurious lines to which

a gentleman reader of Caxton's first edition objected. On the other hand, this entire final episode is absent from the tale in a few manuscripts, probably because an outraged scribe or reader suppressed it.⁹ Similarly, the final section of *The Summoner's Tale* was omitted from quite a few copies, apparently because it also offended readers. *The Cook's Tale* was also subject to moralizing intervention; two different endings written for the tale bring Perkyn Revelour and his companions to swift justice. Another solution for the unfinished state of *The Cook's Tale*, devised very early and copied in many manuscripts, was to insert the romance of *Gamelyn* after I.4422.

Variation is especially noticeable at the ends of Chaucer's works. In addition to the examples already discussed, there are significant variations--whether by addition, suppression, or substantial revision of text--at or near the endings of *The Parliament of Fowls*, *The House of Fame* (in Caxton's print), and the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, among others. It is quite possible that scribes or their supervisors intervened in their texts partly for commercial reasons, to provide a superficial completeness which would make their products more marketable. There are, in turn, at least two possible reasons why they would have inherited unsatisfactory texts. First, Chaucer himself apparently left several of his works unfinished. Second, if his works circulated in separate booklets (or quires), particularly at an early phase in their transmission, endings written on the final leaves of quires may have been especially vulnerable to physical damage. The need for a superficial completeness that would satisfy a customer's inspection of a book seems also to have motivated the writing of prologues to tales for which Chaucer did not provide them; scribes apparently expected customers to assume that if some of *The Canterbury Tales* had prologues, then the work was not complete unless all had them.¹⁰

COLLATION AND CORRECTION

Abundant evidence in the manuscripts shows that fifteenth-century readers were often aware of the differences between copies of the same work and made judgments about which readings were preferable. Collation (the comparison of two or more copies) and correction took place in a variety of circumstances.¹¹ In Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 686, the scribe undertook extensive correction from his main exemplar after he had completed an initial stage of copying. He ruled additional lines for the corrections below the text area and used symbols to show where these added lines belonged in the text above.¹² We must recognize that "correction" was not merely a way to make the copy more faithful to the exemplar, for the changes in the scribe's hand suggest that he added a new, inauthentic ending to *The Cook's Tale* in the same stage of work as he supplied several omitted but authentic lines. It is also striking that the scribe made no attempt to disguise the corrections while executing what was surely a very expensive commission. Apparently their visibility was not felt to mar the appearance of pages over which the scribe had clearly taken great care; perhaps they were

taken as additional evidence of his thoroughness. In another de luxe copy of the *Tales*, London, B. L. MS Harley 1758, the scribe "Cornhyll" made corrections by consulting not only his main exemplar but additional ones as well. By this process he acquired, for example, those obscene lines added to *The Merchant's Tale*, which he carefully wrote in the outer margins.¹³ The scribe of Oxford, Christ Church MS 152 likewise relied on a supplementary exemplar for *Gamelyn*, which he copied in space he had originally left blank after *The Cook's Tale* and in an added quire.

Scribes could also gather exemplars and compare and choose readings before they began to write a manuscript. Ralph Hanna III has argued that such a process best explains the distinctive text of the Ellesmere manuscript; the scribes were not sophisticating their copy but rather consulting several manuscripts in order to improve their indifferent main exemplars.¹⁴ Because collation was part of the careful preparations the scribe made before copying, Ellesmere does not have the obvious signs of collation which appear in the manuscripts discussed above; instead, Hanna was able to detect it only by comparing Ellesmere's readings with those in other early manuscripts. Occasionally one finds more obvious signs of collation even in a manuscript the scribe has prepared with great care. Blank spaces in a later manuscript of the *Tales*, Bodleian Library MS Selden B.14, suggest the scribe was hesitating over conflicting readings in multiple exemplars of *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* and never completed the final stage of work in which he would have chosen between them. Analyses of textual traditions so often reveal such conflation of readings from different exemplars, particularly in widely circulated works such as the *Tales*, that in analyzing a particular manuscript, one must always allow for this possibility.

Collation and correction might also take place after a manuscript had passed from the control of the scribe(s) who first produced it. The patron and first owner of the Paris manuscript of the *Tales*, Jean d'Angoulême, made corrections after his scribe John Duxworth was finished with his work.¹⁵ The St. John's manuscript of *Troilus* contains many corrections over erasures in a hand both later and less polished than that of the scribe but still belonging to the fifteenth century; this hand could have been either an owner's or that of someone hired by an owner, but in any case the correction appears to have taken place at some remove from the original production of the manuscript. Additional material and annotations in several hands show that Lincoln Cathedral MS 110 was repeatedly collated with other copies of the *Tales* throughout the second half of the fifteenth century. Collation and correction in fact continued well beyond 1500, though the sources for later collation and correction were often printed books rather than other manuscripts.¹⁶

ATTRIBUTION

Modern readers may well be surprised to learn that those copying Chaucer's works sometimes consciously changed them, even to the point of interpolating and suppressing large portions of text. Perhaps equally foreign

to a modern sensibility is the frequent failure to attribute Chaucer's works to him. Thus, for example, Chaucer's name never appears before or after his lyrics and dream poems in Bodleian Library MSS Tanner 346 and Bodley 638, and he is named only a few times in MS Fairfax 16. Likewise, the copy of *Troilus* owned by Henry V when he was Prince of Wales, Morgan MS 817, does not identify Chaucer as the author of the poem. And although more than half of the manuscripts that preserve the *Retraction* include an Explicit stating Chaucer "compiled" the *Tales*, a number of scribes omitted Chaucer's name in the course of amending or omitting the Explicit. This is especially surprising given that the *Retraction* lists many of Chaucer's works and thus, when joined with an Explicit naming him, has the effect of fixing the author's canon.

Most excerpts from *The Canterbury Tales* which appear in anthologies lack any ascription to Chaucer or any sign they have been drawn from the larger work. The usual practice in manuscripts of the entire *Tales* was to title the tales by their pilgrim tellers; these titles generally appear at the beginnings and endings of tales and prologues and sometimes in running page headings. By contrast, in the miscellanies, the tales, if they were given any titles at all, were named by their subject matter. Thus, for example, in Longleat MS 257, *The Knight's Tale* is given the title "Arcite and Palomon," and *The Clerk's Tale* is headed "Grisild." The scribe of Manchester, Chetham's Library MS 6709, while copying *The Prioress's Tale* and *The Second Nun's Tale* from Caxton's second edition, removed Caxton's titles and instead called the tales "Miraculum Beate Marie Virginis" and "Vita Sancte Cecilie." Moreover, most such manuscripts also omit any material from the pilgrimage frame which would connect the tales to particular tellers (no material from *The General Prologue* is ever excerpted in these manuscripts).¹⁷ That such omission was intended as a way to remove the tales from the potentially ironizing "dramatic" framework is confirmed by the fact that the anthologies retain the prologues of the Prioress and the Second Nun; these, exceptionally, consist of prayers rather than dialogue between pilgrims. As a result of this treatment, the tales are removed from the context which modern readers find a crucial part of their meaning.

Yet surely it would be mistaken to take such instances as evidence of an anonymous literary culture in which an author's identity was unimportant. It is clear that the organizing idea of several of the anthologies containing the lyrics and dream-visions is Chaucer as author. The majority of the poems are by Chaucer, and what many or all of the remaining texts have in common is an indebtedness to Chaucerian genres and forms. Although the anthologies may consist largely of poems reflecting aristocratic attitudes to romantic love, they also include texts emphasizing moral or devotional themes, such as Chaucer's "Boethian" lyrics or, in the second part of Pepys 2006, *Melibee* and *The Parson's Tale*. Similarly, Chaucer-as-author motivated more ephemeral productions, such as when someone copied *Truth* into the Ellesmere flyleaves, or when *Truth* and lines from the *General Prologue* describing the Parson were written in an early manuscript of the *Boece* (B. L.

MS Additional 10340). Sometimes too the gravitational pull of Chaucer's reputation led to others' works being attributed to him; this could be either explicit or implicit, as when Lydgate's *Temple of Glass* was included, without attribution, in Gg.4.27, a manuscript clearly intended as a "collected works" of Chaucer. Occasionally those false ascriptions were sustained even after the misattributed work passed from the context of the Chaucerian anthology to a manuscript dominated by very different kinds of texts.¹⁸

Issues of attribution and reputation become more uncertain when we consider evidence from the earliest part of the fifteenth century. How are we to interpret, for example, the omission of Chaucer's name from the Morgan *Troilus*? If, as John Fisher proposes in "A Language Policy for Lancastrian England," the Lancastrians did seek to capitalize on Chaucer's reputation in order to help promote both English writing and their own claim to their throne, surely commissioning this manuscript was important to that strategy. Was Chaucer's reputation already so well established, and so clearly associated with the titles of his major works, that it was unnecessary to identify him as the author of *Troilus* in the manuscript itself? If so, how had that reputation been created?

BEYOND THE TEXT

So far discussion has focused on what modern readers regard as the texts of Chaucer's works—on those words in the manuscripts to which modern editors assign line numbers and which we cite in literary analysis of Chaucer's writing. But as a glance at almost any folio will show, the manuscripts contain many other elements as well; these are also important evidence for medieval readers' experience of Chaucer.¹⁹ Titles have already been mentioned; these sometimes take the form of Incipits (as in Hengwrt's "Here bygynneth the Book of the tales of Caunterbury") or Explicits. Such Incipits and Explicits also occur at the beginnings and endings of major divisions of text, such as the books of *Troilus* and the prologues and tales in *The Canterbury Tales*. Typically the use of red ink and/or a larger, more elaborate script distinguishes these Incipits and Explicits from the text. Other features often give additional emphasis to major textual divisions. These range from full borders and demivinetts (borders on 3 sides of the page) to champes (large, illuminated initials with sprays) to various kinds of smaller initials.²⁰ The pilgrim portraits in a few copies of the *Tales* likewise serve to mark the divisions between tales. Such means of clarifying the organization of the text often work in concert with other features. These include, for example, running titles at the tops of folios, and annotations which mark inset genres (such as lyrics in *Troilus* and the dream-visions) or provide brief summaries of a longer work.²¹ Even the use of brackets or blank space to indicate stanza-divisions was part of the scribal presentation of Chaucer's texts.

Among the manuscripts of a given work, one often finds a general similarity in such features, but a greater degree of variation than in the text.

For example, in many *Tales* manuscripts the beginnings of tales are decorated more elaborately than prologues. This hierarchy remains in place even when manuscripts vary sharply in their general level of decoration. In de luxe manuscripts, a champe typically marks the beginning of a prologue, but a demivinet appears at the first line of a tale. More modest copies retain the distinction between prologue and tale by employing two different kinds of initials—though it may be that neither kind is as elaborate as a champe. There are variations from this hierarchy, however; one reason for Ellesmere's extraordinary luxury is that it includes demivinets at both prologues and tales, as well as at major divisions within the tales of the Clerk and Parson.

Many other aspects of *mise-en-page* exhibit a similar mixture of continuity and variation. As the discussion of the anthologized *Canterbury Tales* has shown, scribes sometimes changed the titles of the works they copied. But they did not do so routinely; as a result, one may well find, for a frequently copied work, more than one title in the manuscripts—but not a different one in each manuscript. A few copies of the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, for instance, give it the charming title of “Bread and Milk for Children.” By sometime in the first quarter of the fifteenth century, there had emerged at least four different traditions for the Incipits and Explicits of *The Canterbury Tales*. Though later scribes sometimes translated these from English into Latin or French, or introduced small variations in wording, they generally based their Incipits and Explicits on these traditions. The mixture of continuity and variation appears in other aspects of *mise-en-page* as well. A series of marginal annotations, often Latin citations from Chaucer's sources, entered the textual tradition of *The Canterbury Tales* at a quite early stage and continued to be copied in many manuscripts throughout the fifteenth century. But scribes sometimes failed to copy them at all, or copied only some of them, through either systematic selection or simple carelessness. Yet they also added to what they found in their exemplars.²² The manuscripts preserve several different series of scribal summaries to *The Knight's Tale*, for example. Features of *mise-en-page*, like passages of the text, could be acquired through collation; the scribe of Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson poet 141 drew on University of Chicago MS 564 of the *Tales* for text and some glosses, but gathered many additional glosses from a manuscript resembling Ellesmere and B. L. Additional MS 35286. Moreover, such aspects of *mise-en-page* could be added long after the original scribe had finished work; for example, two or more readers added running page heads to folios which lacked them in B. L. MS Harley 7334, a very early copy of the *Tales*. The manuscripts also include many signs of attention to particular passages—underlining, pointing hands, brackets, as well as “nota bene” and other remarks—written by readers during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Although some extratextual features enter the tradition so late they cannot possibly be connected to Chaucer himself, others are present in the earliest surviving manuscripts and in many others as well. Scholarly discussion about whether any of these can be attributed to Chaucer has still not proceeded very

far. It is hard to imagine Chaucer would not have provided some elements of layout for his longer works, in particular, but because we cannot apply some of the tests, such as metrical ones, which are often used to distinguish authorial from scribal readings in the text, and because scribes and readers added or modified features of *mise-en-page* so readily, it is also hard to be confident that these features derived from Chaucer's own copy without scribal interference.

There is another side to the question of attribution for extratextual features; that is, how were they perceived by early readers? When we make judgments about attribution, we do so partly by comparing readings in many manuscripts. But no fifteenth-century reader had access to so much information. If his or her manuscript contained marginal summaries or citations from Chaucer's sources, what status were they judged to have? In an age preoccupied, as Tim Machan has pointed out, with textual authority, were both text and gloss believed to carry Chaucer's authority?²³ Did it matter to early readers whether or not such features were to be ascribed to Chaucer? The varying amounts of care taken in copying them may reflect early readers' different levels of interest in extratextual features.

THE MAKERS OF BOOKS

At this point we should consider the status and relationships of those involved in producing books. Recent investigations have undermined the model of shops or scriptoria which shaped earlier scholarship on the manuscripts.²⁴ Craftsmen in the book trade had begun to congregate in the area near St. Paul's in London by about the middle of the fourteenth century, and many of the de luxe Chaucer manuscripts were probably produced here, but "a book made for the commercial trade in London, such as the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts, was more probably the joint product of work done in many different places, with each stage in a book's creation occurring in a different artisan's shop."²⁵ Copies of even the most popular vernacular texts were made on a commission or bespoke basis. The materials of books were too expensive, and the demand too unpredictable, for stationers to have produced copies "on spec," and so we cannot imagine readers browsing among readymade copies in the window of a shop. Expense and uncertain demand also make it unlikely that scribes kept exemplars on hand. Rather, the customer may often have been responsible for supplying an exemplar of the text he or she wished to have copied. As a result, a customer could play a greater role in determining the shape of a book than he or she does in print culture. This seems especially true with respect to the anthologies of dream poems and short poems, where the choice of texts was probably largely up to the customer.

Similarly, alliances among the various craftsmen needed to produce de luxe or intermediate-level copies seem to have been developed in response to specific commissions. In de luxe copies decoration (and illustration, if any) constituted a significant part of the customer's expense, and the artists may

well have supervised the scribes in the execution of high-end commissions. For even the most accomplished scribes, the copying of vernacular works may well have been a sideline, as their main source of work was probably the copying of Latin works such as books of hours or even of legal or government documents. In manuscripts written by more than one scribe we can often infer—from correction, from other finishing work such as rubrication, or from the apportioning of text for copying—that one scribe acted as supervisor of the others. But this relationship may well have existed only for this particular piece of work, probably because the “supervisor” was the one who received the original commission and then parceled out some of the work to others. It is best not to suppose any individual consistently acted as the “corrector,” for instance, of other scribes’ work.

Production of English manuscripts was by no means limited to this London book trade. Those involved in producing university texts at Oxford would have been available for the copying of vernacular literature and so would scribes in other cities and towns, who were probably also employed primarily in copying Latin texts. Such producers would have been especially dependent on their customers for texts, some of which they probably obtained in London.²⁶ Significant numbers of manuscripts were also produced in noncommercial environments. In the large households of the provincial gentry, clerks engaged in a variety of administrative tasks might have been asked to copy literary texts—probably a very small part of their duties. Some copies were made in religious establishments. In all of these circumstances the writers might have decorated the manuscripts themselves or may have called on the services of local or itinerant artisans. Finally, some readers copied texts for themselves. The Findern manuscript preserves the work of not one but many such readers.

Copies of Chaucer’s works clearly passed readily between these various environments. Dialectal variation shows that they were disseminated throughout much of the British Isles during the fifteenth century. Bodleian Library MS Selden B.24, for example, an anthology including *Troilus*, the *Parliament of Fowls*, and several lyrics along with works by others, was produced in Scotland late in the century (or possibly early in the sixteenth). A now-battered copy of the *Tales*, B. L. Additional MS 25718, apparently was written in Ireland in the second quarter of the fifteenth century. Other kinds of evidence show that those in religious houses or making copies for themselves drew on the same exemplars as scribes in commercial environments. For instance, annotations and Incipits to several of Chaucer’s works in B. L. MS Harley 7333, a large anthology apparently prepared in or for a house of Austin canons at Leicester, show that these texts ultimately derive from John Shirley, who had close connections to the London book trade.²⁷ The three anthologies which form the “Oxford group” are usually highly similar in their texts but clearly differed sharply in their expense and circumstances of production. Fairfax 16 has de luxe decoration, including gold leaf and a full-page illustration; Tanner 346 was written by accomplished scribes but has more modest decoration; while the entirely

unadorned Bodley 638 must have been written by “Lyty” for his own use and his family’s.

AUTHORS AND MANUSCRIPT PRODUCTION

We know much less than we would like to about what role an author would have played in the production of books. In general, we might imagine a number of possible interactions involving an author, those producing copies, and the person for whom a manuscript was intended—whether a patron of a work, a customer for a particular copy, or someone to whom the author wished to present a copy. For example, an author seeking copies for friends or others who had expressed interest, or for more public presentation to a prestigious recipient (perhaps in hopes of financial reward) might have commissioned a number of manuscripts. But if a person of means had commissioned a literary work, such as a translation, he or she might instead have been responsible for initial circulation. Having devoted some resources to supporting the author’s or translator’s work, a patron might well attempt to win some recognition for his patronage by commissioning copies for presentation to others. Then, once a work had begun to circulate and acquire a reputation, the primary demand for manuscripts might have come from readers seeking their own copies. But this would not necessarily have ended the involvement of the patron (if there was one) and author, since if they were still accessible, either the scribes or their customers might have turned to them for exemplars.

Relative to the number of surviving Middle English manuscripts, we have little evidence which would help us make more definite statements about these transactions; most obviously helpful would be more documentary records of payment for the making of books, or more manuscripts which we could be confident were overseen by authors. We have hundreds of documents which name Chaucer, but none acknowledges that he wrote poetry; and we have few if any manuscripts produced in his lifetime. As a result, we are forced to make inferences from his works about his relationships with scribes and with the possible recipients of copies. For instance, we know from allusions in the poem itself and in later passages listing his works that in *The Book of the Duchess*, Chaucer commemorated Blanche of Lancaster and her husband’s love for her. And we have a record of John of Gaunt’s grant of an annuity to Chaucer in 1374, within a few years of Blanche’s death. But the record does not mention the poem, so we can only infer that the payment was an award for it. If we do so, it would also seem logical to suppose Chaucer oversaw preparation of a copy and presented it to John of Gaunt. The earliest surviving copy of *The Book of the Duchess*, however, dates from the second quarter of the fifteenth century, perhaps 70 years after the poem was written, and we have no good basis for imagining what relationship if any that copy might bear to the hypothesized presentation manuscript.

Our literary evidence for Chaucer's possible role in book production and presentation is often vague and contradictory and, as in the case of *The Book of the Duchess*, often difficult to reconcile with the history of his works visible in the manuscripts. In the case of the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, the number of manuscripts, rather than their paucity, surprises us; in the first line Chaucer states that he wrote at the request of his son Lewis, about as informal a "commission" as one can imagine, yet the work clearly achieved early and wide circulation. In famous lines at the end of *Troilus*, Chaucer directs "this book" to "moral Gower" and "philosophical Strode" (V.1856-57). But the compliment to Queen Anne at l.171, the poem's frequent addresses to an implied audience of "lovers," and the account, however fictionalized, of the poem's reception in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* all suggest the poem was "presented" to an audience of rather different status and attitudes than Gower's and Strode's. The two earliest surviving copies, Corpus and Morgan, likewise argue an audience of the highest class. Lines 496-97 in the F prologue of the *Legend* seem to provide the clearest evidence that one of Chaucer's poems was intended for a royal patron, but the lines' omission from the revised G Prologue and the incompleteness of the surviving text raise doubts that the commission was fulfilled. Several short poems—*Scogan*, *Bukton*, *Purse*, *Stedfastnesse*, and *Truth*—give us some of our most specific information about occasions and recipients. But if we suppose copies of such poems were presented to their recipients on single leaves or in small booklets, we still confront difficult questions about how they might have been used to produce later anthologies like those in which the poems survive. How well would such small booklets have survived, even for the few decades that passed between their composition and the dates when we know they were being collected in anthologies? How would those making the manuscripts have known about and obtained exemplars after such a passage of time?

Questions also arise when we turn to Chaucer's remarks about scribes in *Troilus* (V.1793-98) and in the poem to *Adam Sciveyn*. The lines in *Troilus* imply that Chaucer foresaw, with some apprehension, his texts passing out of his control as scribes produced copies. In the poem to *Adam Sciveyn*, Chaucer portrays himself as involved in the making of copies of *Troilus* and the *Boece*, acting as a corrector of scribal errors. But the brief poem does not make clear for whom the copies are being made; it does not allude to any of the presentation scenarios of *Troilus* or the *Legend*, and so those copies may have been intended for Chaucer's own use rather than for others'. Given this lack of conclusive evidence, it is hardly surprising that Chaucerians sharply disagree about the nature, the number, and the dates of the lost manuscripts behind those which survive.

There are other kinds of evidence which also deserve to be considered in any hypothesis about the canon's "prehistory." Other writers alluded to or quoted Chaucer's works in the fourteenth century; we can be most confident about Usk's *Testament of Love*, of about 1387, and Clanvowe in *The Book of Cupid*, written in the late 1380s or the 1390s. Beyond mention of specific

titles or reference to specific lines, we must acknowledge that these writers have absorbed an entire idiom which Chaucer had introduced into English; Clanvowe, for example, while writing in a five-line stanza never employed by Chaucer, did write in the pentameter line which Chaucer had shown could succeed as a basic medium for English poetry. English poetry written very soon after Chaucer's death (at the latest), such as the early works of Hoccleve and Lydgate, likewise reflects that thorough absorption of Chaucerian forms and themes. Finally, Chaucer's allusions to his own works, in the lists of the *Legend*, the "Wordes of the Host" before the *Man of Law's Tale*, and the *Retractions*, as well as his allusion to the Wife of Bath in *Bukton*, should not be left out of account; they constitute some evidence that copies of those works were already in circulation.

In order to reconcile this literary evidence with the lack of surviving fourteenth-century manuscripts, some have proposed that Chaucer's works circulated in his lifetime only within a well-defined, limited community in London, consisting of men much like himself as well as people of higher status who were associated with the royal court.²⁸ The lack of evidence for Chaucer's public presentation of his works—the kind of event typically portrayed in medieval presentation miniatures—has, along with the lack of pre-1400 manuscripts, made scholars reluctant to characterize Chaucer's possible circulation of his works as publication. Certainly, the poet's offering of copies to a small circle of friends of his own social status would not have had the same cultural value as presentation to a royal or other highly prestigious patron. But for the production of manuscript copies, the two kinds of presentation have essentially the same significance; in each case the text would have been released from the strict control of the author and become available for further copying. As soon as the text circulated beyond that "first degree of separation" from Chaucer—perhaps when friends wished to make copies for their friends—then his work may well have passed into the commercial environment of the London artisans, for this would have been one obvious place to turn for anyone possessing an exemplar and wishing to make a copy. There is no *a priori* reason to suppose this would have happened only after Chaucer's death. In print culture, the distinction between coterie circulation and publication is connected to a change in medium, from manuscript or typescript to print. In manuscript culture, where there was no such change in medium, the distinction between the two kinds of circulation was much less clear.

REVISION AND TEXTUAL TRADITIONS

Manuscript culture also requires us to reconsider our notion of revision.²⁹ The technology and economy of print culture discourage frequent authorial revision. So long as copies of a book remain on hand, a modern publisher will be reluctant to print a revised edition that would make them obsolete. In addition, much of the cost of a printed work derives from the labor required to set type; having made this investment, a printer or publisher finds it