
REVIEWS

Stephen Partridge and Erik Kwakkel, ed. *Medieval Authorship in Theory and Practice*, Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2012. ix, 305 pp.

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The topic of 'authority in the Middle Ages' has recently attracted considerable interest, as reflected by several international conference, such as the Thirty-Fourth Medieval Workshop at Green College, the University of British Columbia, in 2004, and the symposium *Seeing, Hearing, Reading and Believing: Authorities in the Middle Ages*, Helsinki, Finland, Sept. 2010. While the papers of the former have now appeared in print, the papers of the latter are currently prepared for publication (with De Gruyter). We all think we know what authority might be, but it always becomes a serious matter of negotiations, both today and in the Middle Ages. As Stephen Partridge explains in the introduction to *Author, Reader, Book*, his research group was deeply inspired by the work published by Alastair Minnis (*Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 2nd ed. 1988) and by numerous other research projects focused on the same topic. Furthermore, 'authority' cannot be fully grasped if studied in disciplinary isolation, hence the editors' great effort to bring together scholars from a variety of fields addressing the issue at hand. It remains unclear, however, what specific approach carries this book, apart from the overarching theme. After all, authority was vested in the Church, the king, the aristocracy, university teachers, mayors, etc. All structures and hegemonies are predicated on the acceptance of authority.

Minnis begins the volume with an article in which he basically summarizes his previous findings, emphasizing, above all, the *accessus ad auctores* as discussed by Thomas Walsingham (d. ca. 1422) and by a variety of other philosophers in the Middle Ages. Sebastian Coxon follows the lead with an analysis of Walter Map's strategy to establish his authority as a learned writer in his *De nugis curialium* (Courtiers' Trifles) by way of utilizing satire and irony to ridicule the courtly life of his time (late twelfth-early thirteenth centuries). Erik Kwakkel offers a very different approach, studying how medieval scribes assumed and gained authority simply by putting together their manuscripts, which specifically directed their readers' perceptions and understanding of the texts. Kwakkel particularly examines how the individual parts of a manuscript were put together, and whether a scribe worked by himself or in tandem with others.

From here we turn to Chaucer's self-reflections on his role as an author in the *Manciple's Tale* as Ovidian metaphor, as Anita Obermeier explains. She returns to her remarkable monograph on the history of literary retractions (*The History and Anatomy of Auctorial Self-Criticism*, 1999) in order to illustrate how much self-deprecation could be used as a strategy of gaining in authority by making sure that he had, like Ovid and then also Gower, the last laugh in the public discourse. Stephen Partridge continues this line of argument, relying heavily on Obermeier's previous research, emphasizing how much Chaucer regarded himself as an authority and as the producer of his own books, especially through addressing his own scribe.

This provides a good segue to the next article by Deborah McGrady who investigates how Christine de Pizan quickly gained public authority not only because of her writings, but also because of a strong 'media campaign' making her well known through the numerous manuscript portraits. As McGrady emphasizes, through her self-presentation as a reader Christine succeeded in establishing her authority in late-medieval French society, especially because her works were then also read, meaning that she was a highly esteemed author at the peak of medieval society. Kirsty Campbell ruminates on the extensive vernacular writings by Bishop Reginald Peacock (d. 1460) in comparison with the famous *Constitutiones* by Bishop Arundel (in Latin), a set of legal documents enacted in 1409. Peacock's 'vernacular theology' obviously achieved its desired effect and was regarded with great respect since his claims on authority were met with full approval. We can here see already, which Campbell strangely ignores, forerunners of the Protestant Reformation, both in England and on the Continent. Iain Macleod Higgins introduces Robert Henryson's fable literature, which, because of his use of Middle Scot, has remained mostly understudied. But Henryson included a remarkable scene in the middle of his fables where the poet encounters the figure of Aesop who then serves as his guide, very similar to Virgil in Dante's *Divina Commedia*.

The volume concludes with an article by Mark Vessey on Erasmus of Rotterdam's *Lucubrations* (1503), a term which is highly unusual today in the English language. Here the writer emerges as an authority figure who burns the midnight oil for his intensive studies, which install authority in him because of his extensive erudition.

The various examples introduced here illustrate convincingly that the topic of 'authority' was of great significance in the Middle Ages. But the editors have not created a solid platform upon which the individual pieces can be built quite convincingly, since they are too diverse and do not form a harmonious unit. Each article represents very solid research, but the whole does not quite jell altogether. The tome ends with a cumulative bibliography, very brief notes on the contributors, and a welcome index. ✱