Citation, Intertextuality and Memory in the Middle Ages and Renaissance

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Edited by
Giuliano Di Bacco
and Yolanda Plumley

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At the end of John Lydgate's short poem, 'Explication of the Pater Noster', the author pauses to reflect wistfully on his poetic procedure:

Lyk as a glenere on a large lond
Among shokkys plentifuls of auctours,
Thouh I were besy to gadren with myn hond,
Lyk my desire, to haue founde out som flours,
The grene was repen, russet were the colours.¹

Marshalling an analogy that became increasingly common between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Lydgate compares the process of authorial creativity to harvesting an abundant crop. Late in the season, the vernacular author gathers what fruit remains from the authors of old, blending it with his own material, to produce something new for readers to digest.² This poetic imagery has long been recognized as a representation of a new state in the affairs of literary creativity in medieval England—flourished in universities from the thirteenth century onward, and shaped by the growing popularity and demand for English translations of Latin and French works, vernacular authorship at the end of the Middle Ages is defined by its referentiality, allusiveness and intertextuality.³

Overt as Lydgate is about his poetic methodology, evidence for similar creative awareness and ambition among illustrators of vernacular works in late medieval England has eluded modern scholars. Thus, while the changing role of the vernacular author has received abundant attention, the concomitant change in the role of the vernacular illuminator, or illustrator, has been largely overlooked. It is known that, at the turn of fifteenth century, there was an explosion of manuscripts containing Middle English literature with an unprecedented abundance of pictorial embellishment;⁴ yet what remains unexplored is how this pictorial turn in vernacular manuscript production led to a change in the way the professional illustrator conceived of and went about his own labour.⁵ The aim of this essay is to provide evidence for illustrators' burgeoning creative ambition, which paralleled contemporary poets' embrace of intertextuality as the dominant means of invention. In another essay in this volume, Naomi Howell demonstrates in vibrant colour and fascinating detail that citation of both images and other texts was a key mechanism in the production of meaning in medieval literary culture;⁶ it was in the later Middle Ages, when authors became explicit about this technique, that it emerged as a methodology, that is, a self-consciously theorized method of composition to be advertised to the reader. As expressions of intertextual creativity suffused vernacular poetry, it lent book artists the means with which to claim their own quasi-authorial position within the late medieval culture of the book.

Focusing on a form of authorial portraiture that developed in this period, I observe not how it reflects changing ideas about textual authorship, but rather how it projects an intensified self-awareness among illuminators—that is, the individuals who were responsible for creating these depictions. Accompanying such harvesting metaphors as Lydgate's were author portraits that enshrined the physical act of reference as the new mode of intellectual and artistic creativity. Yet medieval author portraits are frequently presented as uncomplicated portrayals of an authorial identity, mounted on the covers of modern books and supplementing texts devoted to a given medieval author. Commenting more generally on manuscript illustration of the later Middle Ages, Scot McKendrick has lamented that the increased naturalism has convinced many to accept these images as 'simple views of medieval life, 'photographs' of the age before photography'.⁷ As such, these authorial portraits have been valued as reflections of contemporary working conditions, furnishings and dress, as if they offered a newly transparent window into history. More recently, they have been substituted for authorial intention, confirming how the author projects her or himself through the text.⁸ Rarely is the artifice of such author portraits recognized, much less discussed as an idealization of creative work, motivated by the artists who produced them.

At the foundation of all these approaches is the negation of the individuals who created the images at hand, whether because of their anonymity or because of their ostensibly negligible function as intermediaries. Michael Michael has pointed out that 'the lack of information often associated with works of art from the Middle Ages has led to the implicit acceptance by art historians of the view that the individual artist/author should not be regarded as the person who defined meaning for his own work of art'.⁹ In
contrast, by considering these late medieval author portraits as the product of their producers’ hands and minds, not always dictated by the verses they illustrate, we can make important inferences about how illuminators themselves conceived of creativity. I argue that, in creating a new kind of author portrait that enshrines the physical act of reference as the new mode of intellectual and artistic creativity, book artists acknowledged their awareness of current developments in literary production and staked a claim for their own agency in its enterprise.

Early Author Portraits: The Subordinate Scribe

In order to understand the new attitude embodied by the visual representation of authorship that was developed during the Middle Ages, it is necessary first to survey the kind of author-image that had prevailed in manuscripts from Late Antiquity through the mid-fourteenth century. During this long period, author images had conformed with remarkable consistency to the prototype provided by the Evangelists in the earliest illustrated Gospels. The standard depiction appears in two variations. In the first, exemplified in the image of Matthew from the Lindisfarne Gospels (Figure 6.1), the Evangelist is seated with a bound book balanced on his lap, pen in one hand, and with his symbolic representative hovering above his halo, blowing the trumpet of divine inspiration. One of the most significant features of this portrait’s conception of authorship is its excision of the bookshelf and books that are placed behind the writer in the image that served as its exemplar. Priority here is placed on the single Book, and its origins in the Word of God, rather than the words of other men. Moreover, although the author is shown in the act of writing, the page with which he makes contact is blank: as an emblem of wisdom and truth, its power is ‘unmitigated by reference to [its] actual function’. In the second, slightly different variation, the zoomorphic representation of the Evangelist assists the writer by propping up his scroll. In both formulae, the authors are shown as scribal subordinates to a transcendent dictation.

This same configuration, but without the Holy Spirit or zoomorphic representative, was retained in non-scriptural imagery as well. A typical example is the image of Bede preparing his *Prose Life of St Cuthbert* and * Ecclesiastical History* (Figure 6.2). Enclosed within a private space whose frame recalls contemporary church architecture, Bede sits before a slanted, anthropomorphic lectern with legs, feet and even a draped torso whose contours suggest arms extending a blank book outwards, much like the angel often seen supporting St Matthew’s scroll. There is a suggested naturalism in the evening sky flanking the author, but the author himself is placed against a hieratic gold background that is aligned with the church-like structure above.
Placed this way, the gold leaf appears to descend from above and flow into the author himself. The visual implication of this composition and use of colour is that although Bede's writing is not officially prompted by the Holy Spirit, his inspiration nevertheless issues from the Church. Moreover, the location of Bede's hand proclaims his intercessory role: poised at the point of contact between the gold and blue backgrounds, or the other world and this world, the author's text is what stitches the two together. Thus, while Bede's Life of St Cuthbert and Ecclesiastical history are not scriptural texts, and while they are both compilations mined and alloyed from pre-existing material, the visual notion of Bede's authorial work is modelled on a paradigm of sacred authorship: one man, one writing surface, one book. His authorship, as the Evangelists', is a conducive act, and he is the vessel through which the Word of the true auctor, God, flows.

Portraits of vernacular authors produced during the period preceding the mid-fourteenth century emulate the visual idea of sacred authorship, although subtle changes begin to appear that coincide with the development of scholastic writing in medieval universities. Before the emergence and growth of the universities in the twelfth century, there was little expressed interest in human agency over written culture, which was instead articulated as exclusive to God Himself and the ancient auctores whose words were embodiments of divine wisdom. As Alastair Minnis famously quipped, 'the only good auctor was a dead one'.\textsuperscript{18} Changes in readership in the twelfth century—from meditative, monastic reading to interactive, academic reading—necessitated an alteration to the format of books in order to facilitate study. This change drew attention to the ways in which the individual himself creates knowledge, not through inspired innovation \textit{ex nihilo}, but rather through intellectual and physical engagement with pre-existing material.\textsuperscript{19} This theory of authorship diffused throughout Western Europe and was expressed most cogently by Bonaventure:

The method of making a book is fourfold. For someone writes the materials of others, adding or changing nothing, then this person is said to be purely the scribe. Someone else writes the materials of others, adding, but nothing of his own, and this person is said to be the compiler. Somebody writes both the materials of other men, and his own, but the materials of others as the principal materials, and his own annexed for the purpose of clarifying them, and this person is said to be the commentator, not the author. Someone else writes both his own materials and those of others, but his own as the principal materials, and the materials of others annexed for the purpose of confirming his own, and such must be called the author.\textsuperscript{20}

In short, one can copy the contents of one book to create another book (scriptor); compile a new book from copying the material of many books...

Bonaventure's categorization of the four ways to make a book is often misperceived as a hierarchical outline.21 However, what Bonaventure's distinctions articulate, significantly, is an inclusive formulation of writership encompassing a range of activities that 'combine[d] into a single continuum two functions which seem fundamentally different to us: composition and the making of copies'.22 To make a book was not simply a metaphor for the intellectual labour of producing literature, but also a literal description of giving form to that literature: no matter where an individual sat on Bonaventure's continuum, he would at some point turn his head and take into his hands written material that once existed in another place.23 Over the next two centuries, this notion of writership extended beyond scholastic discourse and influenced vernacular poets' conception and representations of their own work.24

In the first known portrait of a vernacular writer in an English manuscript (Figure 6.3), the author La3amon appears within the introductory 'A' to the first line of text ('An preost wes on leoden; La3amon wes ihoten' ('there was a priest in the land / who was called La3amon')).25 Like the more explicitly architectural frames in the images of the Evangelists, the inner curvature to the 'A' evokes an ecclesiastical space within which the author is confined. Compelled to assume a posture of humility, this figure is made to bow his head in order to fit within the arch. Being a priest himself, it seems natural that La3amon is portrayed as he is here, with tonsured head and cowl. But a small feature strongly distinguishes this vernacular author from the Evangelists on whom he is modelled: the pen in his hand, placed at an unusually high place at the top of the depicted book, touches the medial ligature of the decorated initial 'A'. This visual deixis actualizes La3amon's writing not as a text or the text, but this text. Though the words that he writes are visually sanctioned by the Church—that is, placed within the arch, he writes under its auspices—they issue from the man himself and appear on this very page. The difference between this and earlier author images is that it announces the present writer's responsibility for the book at hand and his physical relationship to it. This subtle, though significant, change in representation precedes a full break with the Evangelist archetype in author portraits, which occurs in the middle of the fourteenth century.

Late Medieval Author Portraits: Furnishing Intertextuality

It is around this time that the poetic imaginary of authorship exemplified by Lydgate's harvesting analogy was joined by a new visual imaginary of authorship.26 This visual conception typically shows an author seated between an exemplar or reference book and a book in which he is writing.27 Distinguishing between authorial and scribal writing, Eugène Vinaver claimed that, while an author fixes his eyes on his own page, a scribe must repeatedly transfer his gaze back and forth from exemplar to copy:

Mechanically speaking, original writing is a process limited to one plane—that of the page facing the writer. It is on this plane and on this plane alone that he moves his hand and fixes his eye, and there is no necessity for him ever to separate his line of vision from the movement of his hand. Not so with the copyist: his object is to transfer the text from the original to the copy, and his eye must travel at regular intervals from one to the other ... Thus the process of transcription requires a constant shifting of the line of vision from one plane to another.28

This definition evokes a Romantic hierarchy of intellectual over manual labour, in which the author telegraphs his own inspired thoughts on to parchment, while the automaton scribe slavishly duplicates. Given the hierarchical dynamic between transcendent author and subordinate scribe described by images of the Evangelists and writers before the fourteenth century, Vinaver's definition may be appropriate for the earlier Middle Ages. But this topos has been revised in recent years, as studies that address the 'intelligent scribe' proliferate,29 as well as those which examine the amorphous boundary between the labour of late medieval authors and the scribes who copied their words.30
The intertextual author portrait is typified by an image (Figure 6.4) that precedes the following lines in a manuscript of John Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes* (written in 1431-38/9):31

> Fruit of writyng set in cronycles old,
> Most delectable of fresshnesse in tastying
> And most goddly and glorious to behold
> In cold & hete lengyst abydyng
> Chaunge of sesons may do it no hyndryng
> And wherso be that men dyne or faste,
> The mor men taste, the lenger it wil laste.32

These verses extend what had become a common metaphor among English poets, who elaborated on Chaucer’s lapidary pronouncement:

> For out of olde feldes, as men seith
> Cometh al this new corn fro yeer to yere
> And out of olde bokes, in good feith
> Cometh al this newe science that men lcre.33

Although Lydgate’s verses invoke the tropish comparison of reading to the consumption of succulent fruit, it is critical to note that the artist has added a further activity to the illustration: in addition to reading the open codex at his side, the man portrayed works on a long roll before him. Kathleen Scott recently noted this image in an essay that aims to determine the extent to which such author or scribal portraits are useful as evidence for contemporary writing practices. She observes that ‘since it is generally accepted that scribes usually wrote on a bifolium, on a group of bifolia placed together with others to form a gathering or quire, or on an uncut folded sheet ... these scenes almost certainly do not in this regard depict the actual scribal process, unless we are unaware of certain stages of it’.34 Such scenes, Scott argues, are ‘about authorial possession of the text rather than its production ... emblematic in intent rather than literal’.35 While this interpretation is sound, and is certainly consistent with an extension of the authorial possession proclaimed by the portrait of La3amon, Scott does not address the significance of the ambiguous identity of the person portrayed, and whether he is in fact the author, author-translator or scribe.

I should pause here to point out that Scott’s conflation of scribe and author is a modern response to such images that is neither unique nor erroneous. An excellent example of how modern audiences respond to the (I would argue, deliberate) disintegration of the distinction between professions in the medieval image-text occurs in a miniature from a French translation of Vincent of Beauvais’s *Speculum historiale*, made for Edward IV (Figure 6.5).36
The frontispiece miniature displays the *Speculum* being composed by Vincent, identifiable by his habit and the titular mirror near his desk. Yet the lines beneath this miniature are the translator’s own prologue, written in the first person. Like Vincent’s *Speculum*, which was compiled from numerous well-known narratives, the translator’s writing is a referential process. Here, the writer at work is not only shown against a backdrop of tomes, but is also at a writing desk, from whose finial aperture issues a scroll of text. Although the writer’s attention is not presently fixed on the scroll, its presence and position allude to the labour of reference. This kind of image appears again and again, so that a crucial confusion ensues: are we looking at an image of the author or of the translator? What is more, with the reference work at least visually alluded to as an exemplar, Eugène Vinaver’s distinction between scribe and author collapses. As the illustration for Michelle Brown’s dictionary entry on ‘scribe’, Vincent of Beauvais is at once the intellectual and the manual force behind a new work, which is based upon pre-existing exemplars. It is clear enough both from the academic formulation of authorship expressed in Bonaventure’s outline and from vernacular poets’ expression of their activities that such a distinction did not truly obtain in the later Middle Ages. What this image and others like it demonstrate is how this occupational fluidity was understood and elaborated upon by illuminators who had been working from exemplars and model books—that is, intertextually and interpictorially—for centuries.

Returning to the miniature from the Lydgate manuscript, we can say that whether or not this image documents fifteenth-century writing practice, it nevertheless formulates an idea of writing practice very different from that described by earlier author portraits. The writer is shown not within an ecclesiastical space but instead in his own home: a comforting atmosphere that embraces the author within its circular walls. He sits in a canopied chair in the centre of the room, warmed by the fire at his feet, and joined by a watchful cat whose gaze echoes that of his owner. The circularity of the room is doubled in the set of round, tiered shelves at the writer’s side, suggesting that the act of writing here is a process of domesticating a pre-existing text by writing it anew. Man is responsible for mediating knowledge here, which comes from a range of books whose mock letters are visible and in the process of being formed—a stark contrast to earlier figurations of the author as conduit for the Word, most perfect in its unwritten state.

In the miniature, the artist visualizes the harvesting analogies discussed above, cued by but not in direct correlation with Lydgate’s metaphor that compares literature to an everlasting fruit. For just outside the window of the study is a man sowing in a ploughed field (Figure 6.6). Like the famous image of Mary of Burgundy whose meditation upon a Book of Hours is projected as a real-life scene of the Virgin and Child through the window behind her, the scene outside the study window of the sower casting old seeds into new
rows of soil corresponds to the thoughts of the author inscribing old words into new rows of text. Writing, this visual juxtaposition proclaims, is a creative act of recycling. And just as the field requires a series of different activities in order to produce fruit, so the poet's text depends upon a multitude of readerly and writerly acts of intertextual arbitration.

While Lydgate's agricultural imagery gives a poetic imagining to intertextuality, the accompanying portrait is not the inevitable visual rendering that his analogy suggests. In other words, there is no reason why a comparison of writing or reading to eating should result in an image that shows a man seated between a reference work and his own book-to-be. Rather, such a visualization of intertextuality demonstrates a choice made by the illuminator, which, to him, exemplified the behaviour of a learned author at work. Working as illuminators did from exemplars and model books, it seems reasonable that they would cast their own version of labour between books in the form of a man labouring according to a similar method. A prominent feature of the image is the tiered set of shelves to the writer's right, supplementing the cantilevered surface extended over his chair. Given its location within the composition, the furnishing is as important as the presence of the reference work in establishing intertextual movement as the mode of intellectual creativity.

Other miniatures from this period show artists taking equal liberties in order to feature idealized intertextual workspaces. All of these present alternative writing-surfaces that are intended to ease simultaneous composition and reference. These author portraits fantasize about 'machines of intertextuality', whose ingenious designs accommodate the multiple activities now associated with book production. Such workspaces externalize and hypostatize the constructional metaphor of memory as machina, so influential in medieval conceptions of invention. Note, for example, the image that illustrates the tale of Socrates' patience in an image from a manuscript of John Gower's Confessio amantis (Figure 6.7). According to the tale, Socrates sits at home one winter day, so absorbed in his reading that he cannot be roused by his
wife's demands for attention. Rankled, she pours water on his head, and his
impervious reply is that such a downpour accords with nature; for after a
great wind blows then comes the rain,

And thus my wif algates
Which is with reson wel besein
Hath mad me bothe wynd and rein
After the sesoun of the yer.47

In the image preceding this tale a key detail has been changed. Rather than
reading at his leisure,48 Socrates is at work writing. Sitting in his own home,
his back to a fireplace, and posed on a carved stone bench, the philosopher
writes on a slanted lectern before which is a taller lectern-cupboard. An open
book rests atop for reference, while a shelf beneath hosts numerous other
volumes. The choice made by the illuminator of this miniature hinged on
writing on a slanted lectern before which is a taller lectern-cupboard. An open
book rests atop for reference, while a shelf beneath hosts numerous other
volumes. The choice made by the illuminator of this miniature hinged on
representing Socrates as a venerable scholar and formidable mind. The image
of a man reading at his leisure was apparently not sufficient to the task, and
the involved lectern and desk-cupboard at which this figure writes serves far
better—to the illustrator's mind—in conveying his learning. This and the
image from the Lydgate manuscript discussed above are just two miniatures
from dozens of similar author portraits that delight in the fixtures of the
modern workspace.

Nor are such examples limited to the artists of England. Similar depictions
from Flanders and France abound, flaunting the same preoccupation with
the furnishings of intertextuality. As shown in other miniatures, the fixtures
of writing are as significant as the author, placed within the same plane of
space and visually connected to his own work through the coupled form of
the open codex. Illustrators further enhanced the importance of these shelves
in facilitating their visual display. In an image of Guyart des Moulins from
a Bible Historiale, for example, the perspective is shifted in order to offer the
viewer complete visual access to its contents and form.49 And, in a depiction
of Pierre Bersuira, the translator of Livy's Ab urbe condita is presented with his
back to the viewer in order to make visible the conical, rotating desk before
him.50 An even more involved work station surrounds Jean Miélot, where
the polymath scribe-author-illuminator can be seen sitting at a carpenter's
confection, decked out with a swinging double lectern whose nooks host ever
more documents for reference.51 Depicting in a similar fashion men such as
Socrates and Miélot, from widely separated eras, it is clear that the point
of these miniatures is not to present a historically accurate dramatization
of authors at work. Lacking any specific directive to portray the authors thus,
the illuminators have elected to display their subjects' erudition as an act of
physical mediation.

Although these images have received little attention as objects of critical
analysis, there are a number of studies on the medieval library that do
address the furnishings they depict and the tools of the trade they display.52
Lacking real artefacts, the authors, such as Eugène Emanuel Viollet-le-Duc,
writing in 1858, and John Willis Clark, writing in 1909, make repeated use
of similar manuscript miniatures as evidence for actual furnishings from the
late Middle Ages.53 More successful than they, I have not located one
desk that resembles those seen in the author portraits.54 Instead, what remain
are lecterns that were once used in ecclesiastical spaces and in monastic
scriptoria.55 Such standing lecterns contain an aperture to either end, where
the user might have stowed another book or perhaps even weighted chains
to mark his place, but adjoining reference desks are not in evidence.56 At
best, we have slim documentation of their existence, as in instructions for
the refurbishment of Henry IV's library at Eltham Palace, where, among the
necessaria was listed as: 'uno magno deske facto de ij stagez pro libris intus
custodiendis' ('a large desk made of two tiers for keeping books within').57
The use of the French stagez here may indicate the presence of an innovation,
which required a linguistic borrowing for a word not available in Latin. In
light of such documentation and actual furnishings from the period, arguably
the miniatures discussed here exhibit a creative projection on the uses of
existing technology, a fetishization of apparatuses that existed but perhaps
not in such elaborate form.58 In other words, the 'machines of intertextuality',
as one could call them, illustrate the desires of those whose daily labour
included jockeying numerous books at once—men who literally worked
intertextually.

The power of these machines of intertextuality as objects of desire courses
through Viollet-le-Duc's own work. Accompanying his description of lecterns
is an engraving he commissioned (Figure 6.8), which, rendered in nineteenth-
century style and with nineteenth-century engraving techniques, craftily
enhances its sense of reality. Before the image, Viollet effuses:

We see that, in the past, learned people at study knew how to be at ease during
their most serious occupations, and that they at least do not deserve the epithet of
barbarians. Lecterns placed on the tables of our public libraries would, we think,
be strongly appreciated by those who obtain permission to consult many works
at the same time. The reader would find it less tiring and the books would be
preserved from ink spots.59

No less enthusiastic in his praise, and uncannily similar in sentiment, is John
Willis Clark's summation of his research on medieval library furnishings:

I love, as I look at them, to picture to myself the medieval man of letters,
laboriously penning voluminous treatises in the writing room of a monastery, or
in his own study, with his scant collection of books within his reach, on shelves, or in a chest, or lying on a table. We sometimes call the ages dark in which he lived, but the mechanical ingenuity displayed in the devices by which his studies were assisted might put to shame the cabinet-makers of our own day.60

In reading these passages, it is evident how the author portraits become desiderata for the scholars who dreamt of apparatuses to ease their own transit among texts. It is significant that Viollet-le-Duc, in defending himself against charges of artistic license and whimsy in his restoration of Notre-Dame of Paris, issued the piteous lament, 'Why rob me of my centaurs?'61 The responsibility he felt to the integrity of the past lay not in 'archaeological evidence or historical truth, but in the architect's belief in his own powers of imagination'.62 His and Clark's projections of their own desires onto the manuscript miniatures of authors at work is not, however, the exclusive privilege of the modern scholar. Rather, the increased prominence of structurally impressive and accessorized workspaces in miniatures of writers at work—especially their presence when not necessitated by the adjoining text—gestures towards something similar occurring in the minds of the artists responsible for these images. In other words, the illuminators who produced such portraits can be said to have enfolded into them their own idealized notion of creative work. In doing so they codify intertextuality as a physical act, similar to the kind performed by the scribe copying from an exemplar and the artist drawing from a model book.

Few portraits of illuminators at work survive from this period.63 Those that do survive portray the illuminator in terms familiar from author and scribal portraits.64 In a manuscript of Giovanni Colonna's Mare historiarum a patron and his associates are shown visiting an illuminator working in his shop (Figure 6.9).65 Suspended on the back wall of the room is a shelf lined with closed volumes, perhaps finished products or the illuminator's own property. To the right, beneath the window, is a trunk atop which are the implements of the illuminator's work: pots of paint, brushes and a small vase of water. Next to this trunk, the illuminator sits on a backless wooden bench, with a book on his lap, on which he is working. Before him is an identical bench laid with an open book to which the illuminator had apparently been referring before he was interrupted by his visitors. It is unclear from this image whether the figure portrayed is shown in the act of writing or painting, although he is identifiable as an illuminator by the attributes of his shop. Such ambiguity is, I would argue, the point of interest in this image.

Michael Cole and Mary Pardo observe that, in the sixteenth century, Renaissance artists in Italy increasingly took on a scholarly role, the origins of which lay in the propinquity of drawing and writing. They write:

The emerging early modern theory and practice of drawing presented that work as an analogue to the kinds of activities that the scholar undertook. And as this happened, the artist came to look like the scholar in other ways as well ... In the premium that drawing, sculpting, engraving, and the other factive arts placed on the smooth and confident freehand execution of complex figures and flourishes, they all demonstrated a 'kinship' with writing that went beyond overlaps in textual content per se. And no less remarkable than this new proximity of drawing and lettering is the fact that books themselves came to count among the major products of the artist's workshop.66

There is little evidence that the medieval illuminator viewed his work in specifically scholarly terms. Nor would I argue that the fifteenth century illuminator's shop hosted a transitional phase before the 'birth' of the
scholarly artist in the studio. Cole and Pardo’s argument is useful in pointing up the importance of phenomenologically analogous activities in shaping the artist’s conception of his creative function. The division of labour between scribes and illuminators, following the professionalization of the trade in the thirteenth century, may have fragmented the proximity of writing and painting as carried out by monastic scribe-illuminators, and as celebrated in earlier medieval illuminations. But the images of late medieval authors, scribes and illuminators show much greater plasticity between the three groups, which took on a formative dimension by the turn of the fifteenth century. In 1403, the limners of London seceded from the Guild of Saddlers to join the Company of Stationers, which included scribes, parchmenters and book vendors. In this Company, illuminators even enjoyed joint wardship with the textwriters. If limners in England had not seen themselves as partners in the book arts before, then the change in their professional affiliations show that they certainly did by the turn of the fifteenth century.

It is not at issue here whether the images that promote a slippage between author, scribe and illuminator had a social impact on the status or individuality of book artists. While it is true that illuminators of the fifteenth century did earn a significant income, were respected members of the community, and even began to regard their creations as private property, few illuminators and scribes attached their names to their work in the way that artists of later periods did. And there is no indication that audiences venerated the illuminator’s personality or searched out traces of it in his work. But the notion that individuality is a pre-requisite to creativity is historically contingent and inapplicable to the era at hand. Just as Renaissance ‘artists developed traits of personality which would tally with current ideas of creative talent’, so the ideas of creativity expressed by vernacular poets shaped book artists’ ideas of their own work.

This theory of creativity was one founded upon complex, varied and systematized assimilation of pre-existing material—in other words, the production of modified copies. Robert Scheller has cautioned that a reliance upon copies and model books as explanatory devices for similarities between manuscript images ‘does not always make sufficient allowance for the more theoretical contexts surrounding the concepts of ‘copy’ or ‘transmission’ in the Middle Ages’. What the author/scribe/illuminator portraits I have discussed suggest is that illuminators were aware of these theoretical contexts, and that their images stand as a testament to this awareness in equal measure to poets’ own declarations of intertextual practice. Consequently, the shared features of writerly and painterly performance in late medieval book culture sanction an interaction with illustrators’ work on the same level at which we address the work of the writers whose literature they illuminated.

More broadly, late medieval illuminators’ insistence upon the artisanal nature of cultural transmission is useful in re-energizing our queries into the mediation of antecedent material. Unimpeded by the constricting demands of novelty, late medieval culture was a culture of translation, compilation, commenting and copying—or, in our current critical language, of remediation and remixing. In laying visual stress on the interstitial moment between objects of visual cognition, these author images celebrate physical and even technological intervention in our memory of the past. What the phenomenology of intertextuality represented in these author portraits teaches us is that much of the significance of what is produced lies in the acts of arbitration that lay behind it.

6 Visualizing Intertextuality: Conflating Forms of Creativity in Late Medieval Author Portraits


2 John Lydgate (c.1370–1451) was both a prolific poet as well as a monk of the Benedictine abbey of Bury St Edmunds, where he was initiated into the order in 1382 and ordained as a priest in 1397. His oeuvre is extensive, amounting to 145,000 lines of verse and prose, and dealing with a wide range of subject matter from politics to religion to courtly love. Lydgate did not cloister himself in the abbey, but rather spent protracted periods of time outside of its walls, studying at Oxford, attending the royal court, and sojourning in Paris. It is widely agreed that, while attending Oxford, Lydgate associated with the future Henry V, which led to a string of commissions, including Lydgate’s first major work, the Troy Book. For a recent biography of Lydgate, see D. Pearsall, John Lydgate (1371–1449): A Bio-Bibliography (Victoria, 1997). After a long period of relative disdain and neglect, there has been a surge in the interest of Lydgate and his poetry, in both monographs and collected essays. Of note are: L.H. Cooper and A. Denny-Brown (eds), Lydgate Matters: Poetry and Material Culture in the Fifteenth Century (New York, 2008); L. Scanlon and J. Simpson (eds), John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England (Notre Dame, 2006); M. Nolan, John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture (Cambridge, 2005).

3 I discuss this ‘new state of affairs’ in greater depth below; after describing the early traditions of authorial portraiture.

4 Edwards and Pearsall claim that ‘even the most cursory comparison of the seventy-five years on either side of 1400 reveals a spectacular transformation: in broad figures, one is speaking of the difference between a rate of production that leaves about thirty manuscripts and one that leaves extant about six hundred’ (A.S.G. Edwards and D. Pearsall, ‘The Manuscripts of the Major English Poetic Texts’ in J. Griffiths and D. Pearsall (eds), Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375–1475 (Cambridge, 1989) p. 257. Of the six hundred, Kathleen Scott calculates that ninety-eight are illustrated vernacular works: K. Scott, ‘Design, Decoration and Illustration’ in J. Griffiths and D. Pearsall (eds), Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375–1475 (Cambridge, 1989) p. 32. However, as noted by M. Hilmo, Medieval Images, Icons, and Illustrated English Literary Texts: From Ruthwell Cross to the Ellesmere Chaucer (Ashgate, 2004) pp. 4–5, Scott’s count is low. Additionally, since Scott’s catalogue was published, numerous other illustrated Middle English manuscripts have come to light.


8 The amount of literature on author portraits has increased over the past several years. The most recent and comprehensive accounts for the period of interest can be found in: C. Meier, ‘Ere actur. Beiträge zurikonographie literarischer Urheberschaft im Mittelalter’ Frühmittelalterliche Studien 34 (2000) pp. 338–92; and especially U. Peters, Das Ich im Bild: die Figur des Autors in volkssprachigen bilderschriften des 13. bis 16. Jahrhunderts (Cologne, 2008).


11 London, British Library, MS Cotton Nero D.iv. The manuscript is typically dated to the late seventh or early eighth century.


14 An example of this alternative can be seen in the Evangelists surrounding Christ in Majesty in the De Lisle Psalter (London, British Library, MS Arundel 83, fol. 130r).


17 See n. 13, above.


19 ‘It would appear that the influence of Aristotle’s theory of causality as understood by late medieval school men helped to bring about a new awareness of the integrity of the individual human auctor. Henceforth each and every inspired writer would be given credit for his personal literary contribution’ (Minnis, Medieval Theory of Authorship p. 84).

20 The original Latin reads as follows: ‘Quadruplex est modus faciendi librum. Aliquis enim scribit aliena, nihil addendo vel mutando; et iste mere dicitur scriptor. Aliquis scribit aliena, addendo, sed non de suo; et iste compiler ant. Aliquis scribit et aliena et sua, sed aliena / tamquam principalia tamquam principiala, et sua tamquam annexa ad evidentiam; et iste dicitur commentator, non auctor. Aliquis scribit et sua
et aliena, sed sua tanquam principalia, aliena tamquam annexa ad confirmationem; et talis debet dici auctor. Talis fuit Magister, qui sententias suas ponit et Patrum sententias confirmat. Unde vere debet dici auctor huius libri.' (In primum librum sententiarum in Bonaventure, Opera omnia (Quaracchi, 1882–1902) i, proem, q. iv).

Translation from Minnis, Medieval Theory of Authorship p. 94. I have altered one word in his translation (mere, which I have translated as 'purely' as opposed to the cognate 'merely' as it is in Minnis, for reasons explained in note 20, below).

21 This passage (et iste non docit scriptor) is almost universally translated as 'and he is merely the scribe'. However, based on Bonaventure's language of mixture and combination it is more likely that the sense is one of purity; since the scribe adds or changes nothing (nihil addendo vel mutando), Elisabeth J. Bryan has made a similar argument and noted the lack of valuation in this passage, remarking, 'Bonaventure's Latin does not praise any one act of writing more than any other' See: E.J. Bryan, Collaborative Meaning in Medieval Scribe Culture: The Otho Layamon (Ann Arbor, 1999) p. 19.


23 The principal apparatus of academic texts of the twelfth century was the gloss, which included auctoritates in the margins as commentaries on the central text. The incorporation of a larger amount of textual material required that the page accommodate these glosses. Subsequently, as students' need to engage mentally with the dicta and arguments of these glosses increased, so too did the need to organize and accommodate them visually on the page: systems of glossing became more elaborate, consisting of headings, sub-headings, running titles, rubrication, and consistent symbolic notations for sources. By the mid-twelfth century ordinatio—or organization of the text—became a deliberate, coherent, and highly-organized manner of arranging academic texts. In response to the rediscovery of Aristotle and Aristotelian logic in the thirteenth century, these systems became even more precise, incorporating hierarchical and thematic organization that corresponded to redefined organizations of knowledge. Upon permeation of Aristotelian logic into the textual design of literary work, 'ordinatio [came to] involve “subordination”: the parts of doctrine are “subordinated” to chapters, chapters are “subordinated” to books, and individual books are “subordinated” to the complete work' (Minnis, Medieval Theory of Authorship p. 148). Consequently, ordinatio qualitatively influenced processes of reading, as subordination, by definition, confers less value upon that which is subordinated. Thus, to impose a new order upon a pre-existing work was to make a significant intellectual contribution to that work. This condensed account is taken largely from the seminal work by Alastair J. Minnis and Malcolm B. Parkes. See: Minnis, Medieval Theory of Authorship; M.B. Parkes, 'The Influence of the Concepts of Ordinatio and Compilatio on the Development of the Book' in J.G. Alexander and M.T. Gibson (eds), Medieval Learning and Literature: Essays Presented to William Hunt (Oxford, 1976) pp. 115–40.

24 Minnis, Medieval Theory of Authorship pp. 73–117, explores this transition. His work was significantly supplemented by J. Wogan-Browne, N. Watson, A. Taylor and R. Evans (eds), The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280–1520 (Pennsylvania, 1999) a volume that assembles prolegomes expressing vernacular authors’ notions of authorship.

25 Maidie Hilmo discusses the portrait of Layamon in Icons, Images, and Middle English Literary Texts pp. 102–12. Hilmo links the portrait to the nationalist concerns heavily present in the Arthurian narrative within the text, which promises Arthur’s imminent return to aid the Britons, an allusion to contemporary Anglo-Norman rule over the indigenous Anglo-Saxons. She argues that the image of Layamon, 'in providing a personal link to the narrative of the dynastic past, authenticates the truth of Arthur’s promise and encourages its audience to read this history with a view to projecting past glories into the future' (p. 111). While the overarching sentiment to her argument is sound—i.e. that in depicting a Middle English author, the portrait sanctions the truth present in native English culture and words—a more persuasive foundation for such a claim is the image’s visual origins in portraits of the Evangelists.

26 Kathleen Scott lists many of these in her ‘Representations of Scribal Activity in English Manuscripts c.1400–c.1490: A Mirror of the Craft?’ in M. Gullick (ed.), Medieval Scribal Portraits, Colophons and Tools (Walkern, Herts., 2006) pp. 115–49. At the beginning of the essay, she remarks upon the increased number of author images produced during this period: A count that does not pretend to be inclusive has produced ninety-seven miniatures in which a person, usually male, is writing, apparently writing, or in an act closely associated with writing’ (p. 115).

27 C. Meier, ‘Ecce auctor’ pp. 351–3, notes the appearance of these images, associating them with the desire to display the author’s knowledge.


29 Malcolm B. Parkes, the pre-eminent scholar of medieval English paleography, thus concludes his most recent book: ‘In the middle ages the copying of books was not regarded as a menial task … the art of handwriting was developed in books, where the versatile nature of the medium not only recorded texts but also reveals the individuality, as well as the skills, of those who handled a pen’. See M.B. Parkes, Their Hands Before Our Eyes: A Closer Look at Scribes. The Lyell Lectures Delivered in the University of Oxford 1999 (Aldershot, 2008) p. 145.


31 San Marino (Calif.), Huntington Library, MS HM 268. The Fall of Princes is a translation of Laurent de Premierfait’s Des cas des nobles hommes et femmes (c.1409), which is itself a translation of Boccaccio’s De casibus virorum illustrium (c.1355). All three are compilations of biographies of luminaries throughout history who have suffered disastrous fates. For an edition, see: John Lydgate, Fall of Princes, ed. Henry Bergen, Early English Text Society, e.s. 121–4 (Washington, 1923–27). For the manuscript, see: K.L. Scott, Later Gothic Manuscripts ii, no. 79.

32 Lydgate, Fall of Princes 4.220,1–7.


35 Scott, ‘Representations of Scribal Activity’ pp. 120–1.

36 London, British Library, MS Royal 14.E.i. The manuscript was produced in Bruges
The idea for this term came to me from the illustration of a set of bookshelves built at 224.

The most thorough study to date of medieval model books is: R.W Scheller A similar change in the iconography of reading occurred 41.

This miniature is reproduced in numerous volumes, but only recently has the whole reworkings of exempla from various sources, including scriptures, mythology, and opera
ei of Seville, Gregory the Great, and Hugh of 82.

Iours see: C. Harbison 'Visions and Meditations in Early Flemish Burgundy' (Burgundy, c.1467–80), Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS Vindobonensis 1857, fol. 14v. On the depiction of 'meditative visions, see: C. Harbison 'Visions and Meditations in Early Flemish Painting' Simi
erth to date of medieval model books is: R.W Scheller Exemplum: Model Book Drawings and the Practice of Artistic Transmission in the Middle Ages (ca. 900–ca. 1450) (Amsterdam, 1995).

The idea for this term came to me from the illustration of a set of bookshelves built into an enormous wheel, in the techno-fantastic manual by Agostino Ramelli, Le diverse et artificiose machine del Capitano Agostino Ramelli Dal Ponte Della Tesia Ingneggero del Christianissimo Re di Francia et di Polonia: nelle quali si contengono varj et industriosi Mouimenti, degni dignissimma speculatione, per caurare beneficio infinito in ogni sorte d' operazione (Paris, 1588).


New York, Morgan Library and Museum, MS M.126. The manuscript was produced in London c.1472, and it contains a poem comprised of over 140 translations and reworkings of exempla from various sources, including scriptures, mythology, and folklore. On this manuscript, see S. Drimmer 'The Visual Language of Vernacular Manuscript Illumination: John Gower's Confessio amantis (Pierpont Morgan MS M.126)' Ph.D. diss. (Columbia Univ, 2011).

66 M. Cole and M. For the most in-depth discussion of illuminator portraits, see: J.J.G. Alexander, *Medieval Illuminators and Their Methods of Work* (New Haven, 1992) pp. 9–34. VW. Egbert, *The Medieval Artist at Work* (Princeton, 1967) contains no images of illuminators at work from this period, although it contains images showing the figures Marcia and Thamyris painting from manuscripts of *Des clers et nobles femmes*. Naturally, images of Marcia and Thamyris have received abundant attention for their working conditions: that is, their invention from barbares. Des lecteurs placés sur les tables de nos bibliothèques pluraux seraient, nous le croyons, fort appréciés par les personnes qui obtiennent la permission de consulter à la fois plusieurs ouvrages. Les lecteurs y trouveraient moins de fatigue et les livres seraient préservés des taches d'encre. (Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné du Mobilier* p. 166; my translation).

60 Clark, *The Care of Books* p. 317.
63 For the most in-depth discussion of illuminator portraits, see: J.J.G. Alexander, *Medieval Illuminators and Their Methods of Work* (New Haven, 1992) pp. 9–34. VW. Egbert, *The Medieval Artist at Work* (Princeton, 1967) contains no images of illuminators at work from this period, although it contains images showing the figures Marcia and Thamyris painting from manuscripts of *Des clers et nobles femmes*. Naturally, images of Marcia and Thamyris have received abundant attention for what they reveal of the fifteenth-century working conditions of the painter. Stephen Perkinson complicates this view, noting that what makes the two women 'clerks', or notable, is the exceptionality of their working conditions: that is, their invention from memory rather than from models. See: S. Perkinson, 'Engin and Artifice: Describing Creative Agency at the Court of France, ca. 1400' *Gesta* 41 (2002) pp. 51–67.
64 Early images explicitly portrayed illuminators as letter-painters. Of one such early image, depicting the self-described 'pictor' Hugo, Alexander writes: 'It is significant that [Hugo] represented himself dipping a pen in an inkwell and holding a knife in his other hand—that is, as a scribe. This may partly be explained in terms of the power of the scribal image so often shown in early medieval art. It also emphasizes how the two activities have now drawn together, are complementary, and in practice are often done by the same person' (Alexander, *Medieval Illuminators* p. 10).
65 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 4915 (France, 1448–49). I am unaware of any scholarship on this particular manuscript, although the image appears on the cover of and is discussed briefly in Alexander, *Medieval Illuminators* p. 32.