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It has often been held that scholasticism destroyed the literary theory that was emerging during the twelfth-century Renaissance, and hence discussion of late medieval literary works has tended to derive its critical vocabulary from modern, not medieval, theory. In *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, now reissued with a new preface by the author, Alastair Minnis asks, "Is it not better to search again for a conceptual equipment which is at once historically valid and theoretically illuminating?"

Minnis has found such writings in the glosses and commentaries on the authoritative Latin writers studied in schools and universities between 1100 and 1400. The prologues to these commentaries provide valuable insight into the medieval theory of authorship. Of special significance is scriptural exegesis, for medieval scholars found the Bible the most difficult text to describe appropriately and accurately.

Alastair Minnis is Douglas Tracy Smith Professor of English at Yale University. His *Fallible Authors: Chaucer's Pardoner and Wife of Bath* is also published by the University of Pennsylvania Press.

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Minnis

Medieval Theory of Authorship

Second Edition

PENN

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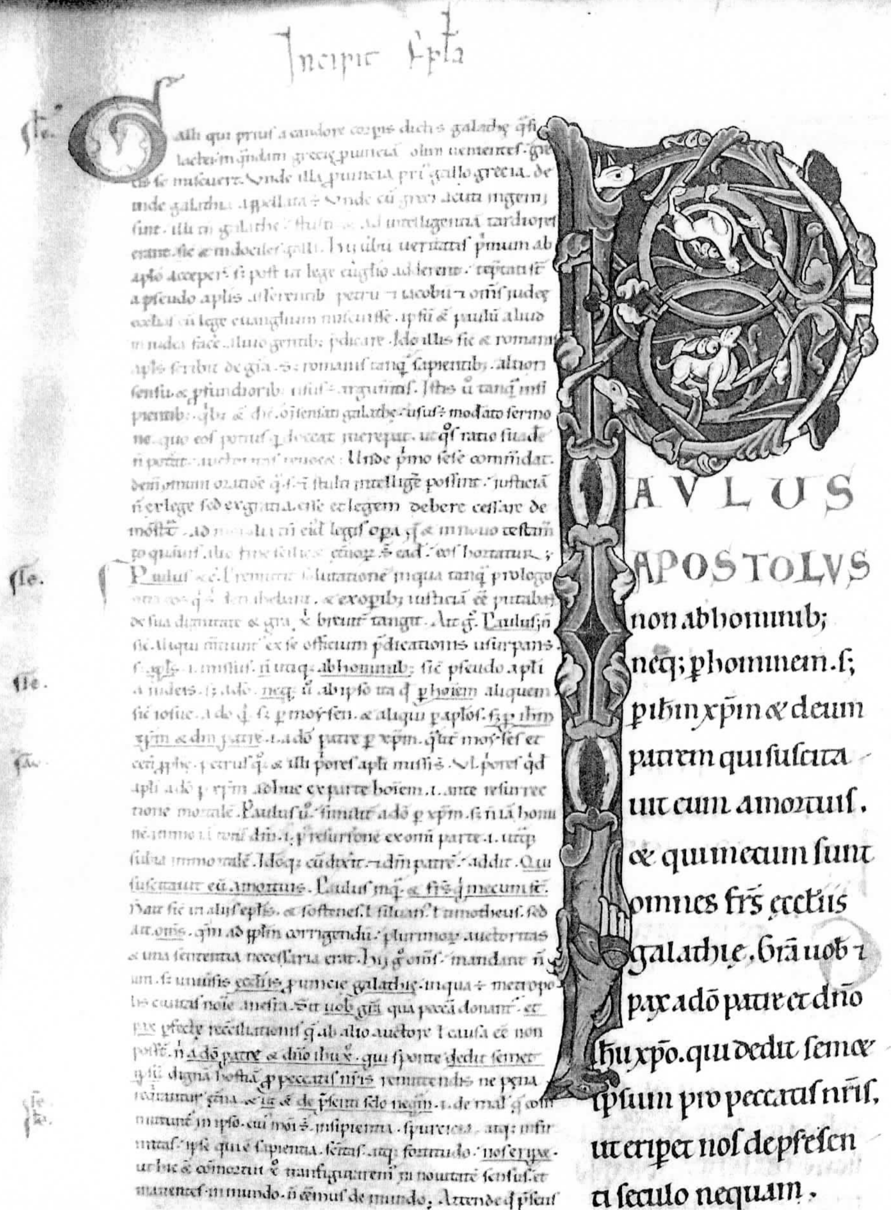
Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages

Second Edition, with a New Preface by the Author

Alastair Minnis



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MEDIEVAL THEORY OF AUTHORSHIP

Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages

Second Edition

with a New Preface by the Author

Alastair Minnis

PENN

University of Pennsylvania Press
Philadelphia

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IN MEMORY OF MY PARENTS

SARAH ELIZABETH MINNIS
ALEXANDER ORR SIMPSON MINNIS

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Notes on Style

Quotations of prose, with the exception of passages of Middle English prose, have been translated from the original language in which they were written. In those cases where the source was an unpublished manuscript, the original has been provided in a note. Verse has always been printed as verse, in its original language, with an English translation immediately following in the text.

Although the text of the *Glossa ordinaria* published in J.-P. Migne's *Patrologia latina* is the most easily accessible, because of its general inaccuracy I have preferred usually to cite the text in the early printed edition of the *Biblia sacra cum Glossa ordinaria* which was available to me, the Antwerp edition of 1634.

Introduction: The Significance of the Medieval Theory of Authorship

IN RECENT YEARS, in discussions of late-medieval literature, it has become fashionable to employ a number of critical terms which derive their meaning from modern, not medieval, literary theory.[1] This practice can to some extent be interpreted as a tacit admission of defeat. There are many major aspects of medieval texts which cannot be discussed adequately in the terminology and framework of those sources of medieval rhetoric and poetic which have to date enjoyed full scholarly attention. For example, the arts of preaching are very specialised, while the arts of poetry offer practical instruction in the use of tropes, figures and other poetic devices. Neither type of source has much to say about the usual preoccupations of literary theory, namely 'the principles of literature, its categories, criteria, and the like'.[2] Faced with such apparent limitations, naturally the scholar is inclined to adopt concepts from modern literary theory, concepts which have no historical validity as far as medieval literature is concerned. Is it not better to search again, in a different range of medieval writings, for a conceptual equipment which is at once historically valid and theoretically illuminating?[3]

I suggest that such a range of writings is provided by the glosses and commentaries on the authoritative Latin writers, or *auctores*, studied in the schools and universities of the later Middle Ages (by which I mean the period extending roughly from 1100 to 1400). In particular, the prologues to these commentaries are valuable repositories of medieval theory of authorship, i.e. the literary theory centered on the concepts of *auctor* and *auctoritas*.

A medieval lecture-course on an *auctor* usually began with an introductory discourse in which the text would be considered as a whole, and an outline provided of those literary and doctrinal principles and criteria supposed to be appropriate to it. When the series of lectures was written down by pupils, or prepared for publication by the teacher himself, the opening lecture became the prologue to the commentary on the text. Thanks to the extensive research on the educational contexts of this textual explication carried out by such scholars as H. Marrou and P. Riché (for the late classical and early medieval periods) and P. Glorieux and M.-D. Chenu (for the later medieval period) I am able to concentrate on the way in which its terminology was developed by successive generations of medieval teachers into a precise and comprehensive 'critical idiom'. Thereby the academic prologue became an important vehicle for the advancement of literary theory relating to *auctores* and *auctoritas*.

It is possible to speak of 'theory' of authorship rather than 'theories' because of the high degree of consistency with which medieval scholars treated the subject and employed its characteristic vocabulary. This is hardly surprising in an age which was obsessed with classification, valuing the universal over the particular and the typical over the individual. Yet medieval theory of authorship was not homogeneous in the sense of being uncomplicated and narrowly monolithic: there was a rich abundance of kinds, degrees, properties and aspects of authorship to describe and relate to not one but several systems of classification. Neither was the theory static: it is best defined in terms of basic literary assumptions, approaches and methods of analysis which altered, sometimes considerably, over the centuries and were applied to many types of writing for many different purposes.

This book is not offered as a comprehensive 'history' of medieval theory of authorship. To attempt such a book would be premature in the present state of our knowledge. My aim has been to illuminate one area of the subject which has largely been ignored, namely the contribution made by several generations of schoolmen who, in the main, were connected with the schools and universities of late-medieval France and England. The Italian contribution is so singular and complex that it merits a study all of its own, and therefore I have confined myself to a brief mention of Petrarch and Boccaccio. Neither has an attempt been made to assess the extent to which the theory of authorship discussed below meets the demands of modern literary critics and theorists. Full historical description of the literary theory produced in the later Middle Ages naturally precedes the comparative analysis of medieval and modern literary theory.

The study of late medieval literary theory is still in its infancy. It is most unfortunate that research on it has been hindered by what I regard as an anachronistic and highly misleading notion, namely the distinction between twelfth-century 'humanism' and thirteenth-century 'scholasticism'. According to a common exposé, by the end of the twelfth century grammar had lost the battle of the seven liberal arts and Dame Logic held the field.[4] Rhetoric and poetic gave way to logic and dialectic; humanism retreated before scholasticism. Orléans, where the songs of the muses had been guarded zealously, became a law school. The pagan *Fasti* (by Ovid) was replaced by a blatantly Christian one, the *Ecclesiale* of Alexander of Villa Dei;[5] the study of grammar—and therefore of 'literature'—was generally impoverished. In such unfavourable conditions, literary theory died or at least went underground.

This view is untenable, as the evidence presented below will attest. It is impossible to square with, for example, the sophisticated literary analyses of texts—particularly Scriptural texts—produced by commentators of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. At a time when the study of grammar had moved a long way from explication of classical *auctores* to speculative analysis of the theoretical structures of language, theologians and Bible-scholars were elaborating a comprehensive and flexible interpretative model for the diverse literary styles and structures supposed to be present in sacred Scripture, and for the diverse roles or functions—both literary and moral—believed to be performed by the human *auctores* of the Bible.

Some recent writers have countered the facile distinction between twelfth-century humanism and thirteenth-century scholasticism with the suggestion that, in many major respects, thirteenth-century scholasticism was a natural growth out of twelfth-century scholasticism. Hence, Sir Richard Southern can speak of 'a process of accumulation and increasingly refined analysis of the deposit of the past' from the twelfth century into the thirteenth century.[6] The scholastic literary theory formulated in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is quite clearly a product of this process of accumulation and refinement. In the twelfth century, certain scholars—notably Peter Abelard and

Gilbert of Poitiers—had in their Bible-commentaries applied the conventions and categories of secular literary theory to sacred literature. Later scholars built on this by, for example, producing an intricate framework for discussion of each and every 'form of literary treatment' *(forma tractandi)* found in Scripture.

Another consequence of the emphasis on accumulation and refinement is that the so-called 'School of Chartres' is not afforded undue prominence on the twelfth-century intellectual landscape. The typical rather than the supposedly unique qualities of this 'school' are emphasised in my chapter on 'Academic Prologues to *Auctores*'. Hence, the standard techniques of Latin literary scholarship current in the twelfth century can emerge clearly, as can, in subsequent chapters, the ways in which these techniques were developed, adapted, and altered in later centuries.

Chapters 2–4 are chronological, tracing the development of this scholarship from the twelfth century to the fourteenth century, with special reference to commentaries on the Bible. As the authoritative text *par excellence,* the 'Book of Life' and the book of books, the Bible was for medieval scholars the most difficult text to describe accurately and adequately. Medieval theologians were eminently aware of both the comparisons and the contrasts which could be made between the Bible and secular texts. On the one hand, they stressed the unique status of the Bible; on the other, they believed that the budding exegete had to be trained in the liberal arts before he could begin to understand the infinitely more complex 'sacred page'. Consequently, in theologians' prologues academic literary theory is at its most elaborate and sophisticated.

The literary analysis in academic prologues was conducted in an orderly fashion, each and every text being discussed under a series of headings. The most popular series of headings employed in twelfth-century commentaries on *auctores* was as follows: the title of the work, the name of the author, the intention of the author, the material or subject-matter of the work, its mode of literary procedure, its order or arrangement, its usefulness, and the branch of learning to which it belonged. This system of textual explication is discussed in Chapter 2 with illustrations from commentaries on classical *auctores,* especially Ovid, and on the various books of the Bible, especially the Song of Solomon and the Psalter.

In the early thirteenth century a different series of prologue-headings came into use as a result of the new methods of thinking and techniques of study which scholars derived from Aristotle. The 'Aristotelian prologue' was based on the four major causes which, according to Aristotle, governed all activity and change in the universe. Hence, the *auctor* would be discussed as the 'efficient cause' or motivating agent of the text, his materials would be discussed as the 'material cause', his literary style and structure would be considered as twin aspects of the 'formal cause', while his ultimate end or objective in writing would be considered as the 'final cause'. In Chapters 3 and 4 this system of textual explication is illustrated with examples from major schoolmen of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, including Hugh of St Cher, Albert the Great, Alexander of Hales, Robert Kilwardby, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Giles of Rome, Henry of Ghent, Nicholas of Lyre, Nicholas Trevet, and Robert Holcot.

As applied in literary analysis, the 'four causes' may seem to us a contrived and highly artificial framework, but in the later Middle Ages they brought commentators considerably closer to their *auctores.* The *auctor* remained an authority, someone to be believed and imitated, but his human qualities began to receive more attention. This crucial development is writ large in the prologues to commentaries on the Bible. In twelfth-century exegesis, the primacy of allegorical interpretation had hindered the emergence of viable literary theory: God was believed to have inspired the human writers of Scripture in a way which defied literary description. Twelfth-century exegetes were interested in the *auctor* mainly as a source of authority. But in the thirteenth century, a new type of exegesis emerged, in which the focus had shifted from the divine *auctor* to the human *auctor* of Scripture. It became fashionable to emphasise the literal sense of the Bible, and the intention of the human *auctor* was believed to be expressed by the literal sense. As a result, the exegetes' interest in their texts became more literary.

Two of the most important concerns which this new interest produced are considered in detail, namely the commentators' preoccupation with authorial role and literary form. The concern with authorial role or function—sometimes termed the author's 'office' *(officium)*—is manifest by two facets of the author's individuality which the exegete sought to describe, his individual literary activity and his individual moral activity. For example, in the prologue to his commentary on

Lamentations, the Franciscan John Lathbury (whose Oxford regency must have occurred soon after 1350) pieced together a life-story of the sacred poet in which all his authorial roles are considered: Jeremiah was a prophet, writer, priest, virgin, and martyr. I have paid special attention to medieval depictions of King David in his many, and apparently contradictory, roles—*auctor* and adulterer, saint and sinner. On the other hand, the preoccupation with literary form is manifest by the two facets of a text's formal cause which the commentators were describing; namely form considered as style and form considered as structure.

The medieval theory of authorship presented in these chapters calls for a qualification of the commonly-held notion that scholasticism was not interested in art in general or poetry in particular. In fact, the influence of Aristotle, far from destroying academic literary theory, enabled it to acquire a new prestige. Such theory was not dead or even decadent, merely different, and this essential difference is the proper object of scholarly inquiry. Thirteenth-century schoolmen produced a critical vocabulary which enabled the literary features of Scriptural texts to be analysed thoroughly, and which encouraged the emergence in the fourteenth century of a more liberal attitude to classical poetry. Something of the new status which had been afforded to Scriptural poetry in particular and to the poetic and rhetorical modes employed throughout Scripture in general, seems to have 'rubbed off' on secular poetry. Scriptural *auctores* were being read literally, with close attention being paid to those poetic methods believed to be part of the literal sense; pagan poets were being read allegorically or 'moralised'—and thus the twain could meet.

Scholastic idioms of literary theory, which received their fullest development at the hands of theologians, became widely disseminated, appearing in works written both in Latin and in the European vernaculars. They influenced the attitudes which many major writers—including Petrarch, Boccaccio, Chaucer and Gower—had towards the moral and aesthetic value of their creativity, the literary roles and forms they had adopted, and the ultimate functions which they envisaged their works as performing.

This is illustrated in the final chapter, entitled 'Literary Theory and Literary Practice', which concentrates on the ways in which two practising poets of fourteenth-century England, Chaucer and Gower, exploited a few aspects of the vast corpus of literary theory indicated in

the previous chapters. Then, in a short Epilogue, by way of contrast we turn to attitudes concerning authorship which are associated with the Italian Renaissance. Certain aspects of the literary theory advocated by Petrarch and Boccaccio can be regarded as imaginative extensions of ideas which had developed in scholastic literary theory. Yet along with these continuities there are new beginnings. The *auctor* is becoming the reader's respected friend.

The tacit assumption behind all these chapters is that medieval theory of authorship provides us moderns with a window on the medieval world of books. To our gaze this window may seem small and its glass unclear and distorting, but these, after all, are characteristic features of a medieval window, indications that it is genuine and historically right. Our standards must change if we are to appreciate what it has to offer. To make the same point in a different way, while we cannot re-experience the past, we can recognise the integrity of past experience and apply the resultant information in evaluating our present experience of the past. In this process of recognition and application, knowledge of late medieval literary theory must play a crucial part: it will help us to understand how major writings of the same period entered into the culture of their time, and it will provide criteria for the acceptance or rejection of those modern concepts and terms which seem to have some bearing on medieval literature.

Of course, I am not suggesting that knowledge of late medieval literary theory is the unique key to definitive understanding of late medieval literature. Literature is not rigidly determined by the literary theory contemporaneous with it. To take the case of one extraordinary writer, Chaucer often reacted against the literary theory of his day, or exploited it in a very unusual way; sometimes his narrators talk like the schoolmaster Holofernes in Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost,* trotting out learned literary cliché which has little apparent relevance to the matter in hand. My point is rather that the strangeness (what some would call the 'alterity') of late medieval literary theory will to some extent free us from that 'blind modernism' which obscures our view of the past.[8] We cannot understand how Chaucer exploited or reacted against the literary theory of his day until we understand what that literary theory was; his extensive 'defamiliarization' (notably of literary convention and of genre) cannot be appreciated until we know what was normal to him and what was not[9]. How valuable would be Ho-

lofernes' reading of Shakespeare? At the very least, it would provide a register with which to measure Shakespeare's originality. More optimistically, it would focus attention on those areas of literary discourse important to him as a man of his age, and illuminate the categories and concepts which informed his thinking about literature in general and his own works in particular. If used with discretion, with what Matthew Arnold called 'tact', late medieval literary theory can serve as a stimulus and a corrective in modern speculation about authorial intention and audience expectancy in the late Middle Ages.

Epilogue: The Familiar Authors

ONE OF PETRARCH'S *Litterae de rebus familiaribus* contains the following assessment of Cicero:

> . . . though nearly everything pleases me in Cicero—a man whom I cherish beyond all my other friends—and though I expressed admiration for his golden eloquence and divine intellect, I could not praise the fickleness of his character and his inconstancy, which I had detected in many instances.[1]

In this short passage are illustrated many of the features of a theory of authorship usually associated with the Renaissance. Cicero is at once someone to be respected and a 'familiar' or friend[2]. Yet, this reverence and assumed acquaintance do not entail uncritical admiration: Petrarch is acutely aware of the sins and shortcomings of his *auctor.*

The precedent for Petrarch's radical approach to authorship was provided, paradoxically enough, by rediscovered authoritative texts, namely, Cicero's letters to Atticus, Quintus and Brutus, which Petrarch himself had recovered in 1345[3]. On reading these 'quarrelsome letters', Petrarch tells us, he was 'soothed and ruffled at the same time': the style was delightful, but the facility with which Cicero shifted from commending illustrious men to condemning them was offensive.

> I could not restrain myself, and, indignation prompting me, I wrote to him as a friend of my own years and time, regardless of the ages which separated us. Indeed, I wrote with a familiarity acquired through an intimate knowledge of the works of his genius, and I pointed out to him what it was that offended me in his writings.[4]

Disregarding the distancing and aggrandising power of time, a 'modern' has claimed a close proximity of relationship, a high degree of

familiarity, with an 'ancient', on the basis of their common literary, intellectual and moral concerns. The style of Cicero's letters provided Petrarch with a new literary form; their content provided him with the new information necessary for the placing of Cicero's life and literature in a genuine historical perspective.

Cicero, for Petrarch, was a model of eloquence and a brilliant thinker, a monotheistic philosopher who 'never wrote one word that would conflict with the principles of Christ'[5]. Nevertheless, he had failed often to practise what he preached, turning a deaf ear to his own doctrines. Both these sides of the author's character are described in the two 'familiar letters' which Petrarch addressed to him: the first censures Cicero's life; the second praises his genius[6]. Cicero's inconstancy is gravely censured, yet Petrarch writes out of 'sincere love' and empathises with his author: 'I feel that I know you as intimately as if I had always lived with you'[7].

> I grieve at your lot, my friend; I am ashamed of your many, great shortcomings, and take compassion on them.[8]

Some aspects of his author's life arouse Petrarch's compassion, although he can rejoice freely in the mental abilities and powers of expression which Cicero possessed in such abundance.

> You indeed, O Cicero (speaking with your leave), did live as a man, speak as an orator, and write as a philosopher. It was your life that I found fault with, not your intellectual powers, nor yet your command of language. Indeed, I admire the former, and am amazed at the latter. And, moreover, in your life I feel the lack of nothing except the element of constancy, and a desire for peace that was to have been expected of a philosopher.[9]

The philosophical wisdom of this *auctor* may be respected, his eloquence may be admired and imitated, and his moral shortcomings may be censured.

But not everyone was prepared to accept this point of view. When debating with an opponent who refused to believe ill of Cicero, Petrarch had regaled him with the two letters to Cicero, but to no avail[10]. The 'venerable gentleman' persisted in admiring everything indiscriminately about Cicero, 'lest he might seem to cast even the slightest aspersions on so praiseworthy an author': his only defence was the 'mere splendour of Cicero's name'. 'Authority had driven out reason', was Petrarch's tart conclusion.

This last statement could well serve as a motto for earlier 'lives' of Cicero. Views similar to those held by Petrarch's 'venerable gentleman' lie behind the eulogistic accounts found in works like the *Speculum maius* of Vincent of Beauvais, the *Compendiloquium de vitis illustrium philosophorum* of John of Wales, and the *Liber de vita et moribus philosophorum* of Walter Burley (*c.* 1275–*c.* 1345). These accounts shall be paraphrased briefly, since they at once recapitulate the attitudes to authorship which have been described in the above chapters, and illustrate the fixed assumptions that Petrarch was up against.

Vincent of Beauvais's contribution consists of a mere *cathena* or 'chain' of *auctoritates* derived from Cicero's works, linked together in a sententious sequence[11]. On the face of it, Burley's compilation looks more promising: the prologue declares his intention of bringing together in one volume the sparse information about their lives which the philosophers and poets recorded in their works[12]. Moreover, he has included many of their 'notable responses and elegant sayings', so that the reader might be consoled and morally informed. However, all Burley tells us about the life of Cicero is that he was the most noble among the Roman consuls: he illuminated the time of Julius Caesar, when he was by far the greatest and most studious philosopher[13]. Having repudiated his wife, Cicero was offered a prince's sister in marriage, whereupon he said that he could not serve both a wife and philosophy together. This trivial anecdote is followed by a list of Cicero's writings and a collection of *sententiae* excerpted from them. Burley, like Vincent of Beauvais before him, seems to have felt that Cicero's true character was revealed by his most sententious statements. The account provided by John of Wales is similarly eulogistic, but at least he could offer two moralistic *exempla* featuring Cicero, one from Seneca and one from Aulus Gellius[14]. This depiction of Cicero is wholly in keeping with the principle, outlined in the prologue to the *Compendiloquium*, that certain gentiles lived a life so good that they put Christians—who ought to know better and do better—to shame. John cites Isaiah xxiii.4, 'Be thou ashamed, O Zidon, for the sea has spoken', then proceeds to paraphrase St Gregory's interpretation of this text, as found at the beginning of the *Moralia in Job* (see p. 37). 'Zidon' signifies the stable New Law under which Christians live, while the 'sea' signifies the life of the gentiles. Well may Zidon be ashamed, for the life of virtuous pagans reproves life under the present regime, and the deeds of secular

men confound the deeds of the religious. For these reasons, John explains, he thought fit to collect the notable sayings of the philosophers and the imitable examples of virtuous men, in order to stimulate the young and put would-be philosophers to shame, to repress arrogance and encourage humility.

These compilers were interested in Cicero mainly as an authority in moral philosophy and rhetoric. By contrast, Petrarch's interest comprised both the achievements and the limitations of his favourite author, the 'ancient' whom he presumed to address—in the most familiar of tones—as his friend. Clearly, there are outstanding differences between the respective theories of authorship held by Petrarch and, for example, Thomas Aquinas[15]. Yet some of Petrarch's attitudes can, as it were, be regarded as imaginative extensions of ideas which had emerged in scholastic literary theory. When coming to terms with the 'literal sense' of sacred Scripture, late medieval exegetes had been obliged to adopt fresh positions concerning the achievements and limitations of Biblical authors (see pp. 103–12). Authors like David and Solomon had on occasion been divinely inspired, but they had sinned as well; yet respect for their authority had come to be regarded as perfectly compatible with recognition of the shortcomings of their humanity. David was esteemed to be the greatest of the prophets: he was also a pattern of penitence, a man whom every sinner was urged to identify with and emulate. In approaching Cicero, Virgil and Seneca with a similar reverence, awareness of faults and sense of common humanity, Petrarch attained a new view of the pagan author.

In the writings of Petrarch, one can see the barriers coming down between various kinds of author, whether between pagan and Christian or 'ancient' and 'modern'. Many of the *Litterae de rebus familiaribus* record the activities and misfortunes of Petrarch and his 'modern' friends among contemporary Italians; for this, he claimed the precedent of Cicero's letters. Petrarch's letters to Cicero were the first in a series of letters to his 'ancient' friends among the classical authors.

In Boccaccio's *Life of Dante,* a 'modern author' is treated with a degree of familiarity similar to that with which Petrarch had treated Cicero. Boccaccio had learnt from Petrarch that one could find fault with an author's life without calling in question his intellectual powers or command of language. The great poet's scholarship and genius are praised while his faults are censured, although it is quite clear that, in

Boccaccio's view, Dante was more sinned against than sinning. Boccaccio demonstrates his awareness of Dante's pride, tactfully remarking that the great poet 'did not deem himself worth less than in truth he was'[16]. When Dante's involvement in petty political squabbles is described, one is reminded of Petrarch's criticisms of the way in which Cicero had demeaned himself in 'wrangles and frays' which could bring no relief to the state but only harm upon himself. Boccaccio is 'ashamed' to record his author's fierce partisanship: 'any feeble woman or child, in speaking of parties and condemning the Ghibellines, could move him to such rage that he would have been led to throw stones if the speaker had not become silent'[17]. Reverence for a great writer cannot blind us to his faults.

I am ashamed to sully the reputation of so great a man by the mention of any fault in him, but my purpose to some extent requires it, for if I am silent about the things less worthy of praise, I shall destroy much faith in the laudable qualities already mentioned. I ask, therefore, the pardon of Dante, who perchance, while I am writing this, looks down at me with scornful eye from some high region of heaven.

One of Dante's main faults, Boccaccio continues, was his licentiousness. Although this vice may be natural, common and even, in a certain sense, necessary, it cannot be decently excused. But what mortal shall be the just judge to condemn it? 'Not I', answers Boccaccio. Women have great power over men, as is illustrated by what Jupiter did for the sake of Europa, Hercules for Iole and Paris for Helen. But these are matters of poetry, which men of little judgment would dismiss as lies. Therefore, Boccaccio turns to more authoritative *exempla,* beginning with Adam and Eve and proceeding to the love-affairs of David and Solomon:

David, notwithstanding the fact that he had many wives, no sooner caught sight of Bathsheba than for her sake he forgot God, his own kingdom, himself, and his honour, becoming first an adulterer and then a homicide. What may we think he would have done, had she laid any commands upon him? And did not Solomon, to whose wisdom none ever attained save the Son of God, forsake Him who had made him wise, and kneel to adore Balaam in order to please a woman?[18]

Dante may not be excused but, at least, he is not alone among authors. Boccaccio has placed him in good company, by bracketing him with authors of sacred Scripture. Similarly, the Dante-commentators

could claim that their 'modern author' shared literary roles and forms with Scriptural authors[19]. If, at the end of the Middle Ages, *auctores* became more like men, men became more like *auctores*.

Equally striking is the way in which, in the writings of Petrarch and Boccaccio, the barriers have come down between pagan and Christian authors. Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas had firmly distinguished between secular poetry and sacred poetry. It was one thing for Scriptural *auctores* to communicate truths in the literal sense by various kinds of figurative language: it was quite another for the pagan poets to communicate their half-truths and lies by apparently similar means (see pp. 139–40). When expounding Aristotle's remark in the *Metaphysica* about the 'theologising poets' who were the first philosophers, Aquinas averred that the philosopher is, in a sense, a lover of myths or *fabulae*[20]. But this opinion was not germane to Aquinas. By contrast, Petrarch and Boccaccio seized upon it eagerly: in it, they found a justification for their comparisons of secular poets with sacred poets in terms of style and, indeed, in terms of subject.

In a 'familiar letter' to his brother Gherardo, Petrarch invoked Aristotle in support of his contention that poetry is very far from being opposed to theology: indeed, 'one may almost say that theology actually is poetry, poetry concerning God'.

> To call Christ now a lion, now a lamb, now a worm, what pray is that if not poetical? And you will find thousands of such things in the Scriptures, so very many that I cannot attempt to enumerate them. What indeed are the parables of our Saviour, in the Gospels, but words whose sound is foreign to their sense, or allegories (to use the technical term)? But allegory is the very warp and woof of all poetry. . . . Why, even the Old Testament fathers made use of poetry, both heroic song and other kinds. Moses, for example, and Job, and David, and Solomon, and Jeremiah. Even the psalms, which you are always singing, day and night, are in metre, in the Hebrew; so that I should be guilty of no inaccuracy or impropriety if I ventured to style their author the Christian's poet.[21]

In Boccaccio's *Life of Dante,* Aristotle's statement is cited in support of the claim that 'theology is simply the poetry of God'[22]. When their subject is the same, Boccaccio explains, theology and poetry can be considered as almost one and the same thing. When their subject is not the same, theology and poetry at least agree in their method of treatment *(forma dell'operare):*

> Holy Scripture—which we call theology—sometimes under the form of history, again in the meaning of a vision, now in the signification of a lament, and in many other ways, designs to reveal to us the high mystery of the incarnation of the divine Word, . . . so that, being thus taught, we may attain to that glory which He by his death and resurrection opened to us. . . . In like manner do poets in their works—which we term poetry—sometimes under fictions of various gods, again by the transformation of men into imaginary forms, and at times by gentle persuasion, reveal to us the causes of things, the effects of virtues and vices, what we ought to flee and what we ought to follow; in order that we may attain by virtuous action the end that they, although they did not rightly know the true God, believed to be our supreme salvation.[23]

Apparently, the end *(fine)* of poetry is not incompatible with the superior end of theology, although it is, of necessity, limited by the pagans' ignorance of Christ and their subsequent failure to understand the nature of our supreme salvation.

Similar views are expressed in Boccaccio's *Genealogia deorum gentilium,* written between 1350 and 1374 under Petrarch's influence. Here it is argued that the 'mode of composing' *(modus componendi)* was the same for pagan and Old Testament poets[24]. Analysing the device of employing figurative forms and epithets to describe mystical and heavenly things, Boccaccio comments that this procedure is found in Scripture as well as in pagan poetry[25]. When he contrasts the poet's appropriate mode *(modus poeticus)* with the philosopher's characteristic mode of syllogistic argument[26], one is reminded of the theologians' stock distinction between the basically affective mode of sacred Scripture and the basically ratiocinative mode of human science (see pp. 119 *et seq.*)

It would seem that, by the time of Petrarch and Boccaccio, both 'ancients' and 'moderns', and pagans and Christians, could freely be compared in terms of styles and structures, of authorial roles and degrees of authority, and of shortcomings and sins. The *auctores* are now 'familiar authors'—'familiar' to the reader and, as it were, to each other. We have come a long way from Albert and Aquinas.