

Robert R. Edwards, *Invention and Authorship in Medieval England*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 2017, 280 pp. \$105.95.

The Ohio State University Press series 'Interventions: New Studies in Medieval Culture' seeks to publish 'theoretically informed work in medieval literary and cultural studies'. Notable publications in this series relevant to authorship studies include the essay collection *Answerable Style: The Idea of the Literary in Medieval England* (2013), Steele Nowlin's *Chaucer, Gower, and the Affect of Invention* (2016), and, most recently, Robert R. Edwards's *Invention and Authorship in Medieval England* (2017). Building upon Edwards' previous work, primarily *Chaucer and Boccaccio: Antiquity and Modernity* (2002), this text aims to reconstruct how 'literary authorship develops in medieval England from discrete acts of invention' through analyses of seven writers active from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries (xi). Discerning consistencies and evolutions in the role of the author as it consolidated itself during this period, Edwards divides his discussion into three sections. The first, entitled 'Inventions', discusses early instances of authorial identity in relation to Bede, Walter Map, and Marie de France. The second, 'Authorship Direct and Oblique', focuses on Chaucer and Gower, two figures inherently associated with the establishment of the English author, and the final section, 'Constructing a Canon', investigates the late-medieval Lydgate and Hoccleve.

Edwards' introduction announces how his book will discuss 'the emergence of the author as a visible figure in literary practice' (xi) and takes care to define terminology associated with the emergence of the English author. Edwards impressively negotiates the pitfalls and considerations that are associated with work on this subject:

It will be immediately clear that my inquiry involves, in every instance, essentially contested terms – authorship as a concept and practice, the literary as a discursive mode, and medieval England as place, nation, and period (xi).

Two writers selected for analysis in Chapter One, Walter Map and Marie de France 'put immediate pressures on what authorship in medieval England might mean' (xiii), and Edwards ably assesses the impact and meaning of their inclusion within this work. One strength of this study is its openness towards including works in a variety of languages, form, and genre. The theoretical introduction may however be overly reliant on late-twentieth-century scholars such as Minnis, Foucault, and Barthes, and it could be argued that more recent, interdisciplinary, writings (see below) could have bolstered the critical background.

A 'Prelude' to the book highlights Bede's simultaneous embodiment and rejection of the classification 'author', with Edwards labelling him 'a figure who performs all the functions associated with medieval textual production' (5). The Prelude teases out connections between the story of Caedmon and Bede's own views of authorship and literary production, and ultimately presents a sure footing on which analysis of later writers will be

Laidlaw, Martin M. "Robert R. Edwards, *Invention and Authorship in Medieval England* (Ohio State University Press, 2017)." *Authorship* 7.1 (2018): <https://doi.org/10.21825/aj.v7i1.8616>

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founded. The opening chapter, focusing on Walter Map's 'Authorship and Counter-Authorship', admirably describes Map's position as that of one who created 'one of the earliest efforts to devise literary authorship in medieval England' (9). The portrayal of Map as an unwilling author who employs the humility topos to great effect is outlined well by Edwards, as is the terminological friction between the roles of translator, compiler and creator. References to Map's work in relation to postmodernism and modernity, namely that 'self-conscious and ambivalent, Map is a post-modernist' (12), create an interesting parallel for analysis that could have been further explained or explored with reference to authorial classification and literary genre. The description of Map as creating 'a theory of authorship based on a consciously decentred writer' (27) is, however, particularly well expressed.

Edwards's analysis of Marie de France in the second chapter 'Authorship and Identity' presents interesting commentary on the formation of the author, and the note that 'she remains an authorial signature made present through the self-inscriptions she leaves in her works' (33) an enticing classification of her image crafting. This section further showcases Edwards' aptitude in negotiating questions of nationality, language, and their role within medieval England. Marie's ambiguous biography and her identification as '*si sui de France*' ['and I am of France'] are coherently explained and situated within the literary culture and broader historical background of medieval England. Edwards analyses the use of prologue and epilogue within her creation of an authorial identity, and the notion that, in naming herself, 'Marie challenges contemporary court writers who might seek to appropriate her work; her claims to authorship mark literary ownership' (36). Further analysis of gender and the environment in which Marie wrote these texts could have contributed to the argument, but this does not detract from the interest of Edwards's analysis of the role of Marie de France's works in the formation of the 'English author'. Edwards's description of Marie as one who 'styles herself as the compiler, composer, and translator of official and recovered sources' (60) delivers insight both into the literary and the religious culture of the period, and the place of women within these paradigms.

The second section focuses on Gower and Chaucer. Edwards impressively navigates differences in structure, language, and genre within Gower's most famous works *Mirour de L'Homme*, *Vox Clamantis*, and *Confessio Amantis* in relation to the 'complex relationship between counsel and authorship' (67). Gower's narrative voice is explored in relation to the moral tone of his works, and he is described as 'a moralist speaking to private conduct and the social order' (65). The distinctions between the voice of the author and the characterisation of the narrator(s) could have been more clearly defined, but descriptions of his employment of source material and the positioning of himself as the compiler, selector, and author of his works aptly allude to Gower's authorial assertiveness. There is a degree of conjecture in Edwards's statement that 'the fictional moment in which Gower first presented himself as an author probably occurred in the missing stanzas that originally opened his earliest major poem' (66), but this does not detract from an impressive appraisal of Gower's strategies in the creation of the authoritative persona through which he narrates his works.

Chapter Four tackles head-on Chaucer's 'sustained engagement with the questions and problems of authorship' (105). Edwards explains how Chaucer 'declines the title of poet and presents himself as an artisanal *maker*' (105), although the question remains

whether we should accept the author's own claims at face value, declining the opportunity to view them as part of the aforementioned humility topos, that operates on multiple levels within Chaucer's writing. Edwards also omits bringing in the literary culture that Chaucer would have encountered on his journey to Italy, particularly the veneration of writers such as Petrarch and Dante. Chaucer, indeed, 'engages the formal machinery of authorship' (106), perhaps more covertly (or even comprehensively) than even Edwards' analyses suggest. What is impressive in this chapter, is Edwards' analysis of how *The Legend of Good Women*, the prologue to 'The Man of Law's Tale', and the 'Author's Retraction' demonstrate Chaucer's intention to create a 'link between a named writer and a corpus of writings organised by the titles of works' (110) through self-citation. The description of how *The Canterbury Tales* 'in effect compiles a work using fictional characters as the *auctores* who provide materia for arrangement' particularly stands out (106). Edwards' analysis of characters such as the Wyf of Bath and the Pardoner shows that these fictional characters replicate theories and strategies of authorship relevant at the time. As Edwards writes of the Wyf, she is 'emphatically the author of her own narrative and the exemplary force of narrative' (139). Deschamp's *Ballade*, Usk and Gower represent Chaucer's 'contemporary reception' and ably elucidate his reputation during his lifetime. This chapter could perhaps have benefitted from reference to the extant manuscripts of Chaucer's works from the early fifteenth century, although not strictly 'contemporary', and the additional evidence that they may provide on this subject.

The book's final section is focused on Lydgate and Hoccleve. The opening paragraphs of the chapter on Lydgate contains various interesting notions of patronage and literary production, although the proposed binary distinctions between the works requested by male and female patrons respectively may appear slightly reductive. Edwards's description of Thomas Hoccleve as 'the sum of the doctrine' allows us to assess the ways in which this author 'fills all the positions conventionally associated with medieval authorship', and the focus on 'the distinctive approach [he] takes to stimulating authorship' (163-4) acts as a masterful summary on the tropes and techniques outlined in the preceding chapters. Glances within Edwards's 'Afterword' at sixteenth-century authors and printers illuminate the discussion, but perhaps overlook an opportunity to discuss early printed works by earlier authors, those of Chaucer in particular potentially containing uses of biography and paratext relevant to the establishment of his authorial identity.

Edwards' study provides a nuanced and insightful overview of literary strategies employed in the invention and creation of the author in medieval England. The controlled navigation through the variety of languages and milieus in which the primary texts were written delivers a cohesive and coherent representation of the evolving models and methods of authorship and authority throughout the Middle Ages. The scope of the work is particularly impressive and, by not attempting to provide a unifying theory of authorship, or a distinct series of classifications that could be applied to all of the writers studied, the text succeeds in sustaining a multi-faceted and nuanced approach to its subject.

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