Medieval Engagement with Authorial Intention

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Words, thoughts, things. Here is the stuff that theory is made of. Make these into the three corners of a triangle and you get the classical theory of semantics. Leave out one corner of the triangle and the result is a theory with all the virtues of a straight line, and all the depth as well. It was the so-called Middle Ages of European thought that arrived at a particularly deep account of how thought mediates between word and thing, command and action. Modern theory has been characteristically skeptical about whether anything is gained by attempting to look within the soul behind the words. Medieval theory characteristically thought that nothing mattered more.

Medieval readers seek to engage with the author behind the text because they understand reading to be a form of interpersonal engagement. The text is not simply an impersonal artifact, good for stimulating certain sorts of responses, but is an expression of the thoughts of another mind. Ultimately, it is the value of minds connecting with other minds that causes medieval readers to care about authorial intention.

In what follows, I consider in turn three spheres of medieval engagement with authorial intention: pedagogical, moral, and emotional. My argument is that even when we are interacting aesthetically with a text, we give up a great deal of what matters in literature if we abandon the project of engaging with what the author was thinking and feeling. This conclusion, however, will take some time to emerge. For even in places where we might expect medieval readers to display an uncritical reverence for authorial intention, the situation turns out to be surprisingly complex. In each of the first two spheres of engagement, pedagogical and moral, medieval theory recognizes the need for modes of evaluation that set aside questions of intention. In moments such as this, modern skepticism over authorial meaning finds a precursor in medieval practices of interpretation. The sphere where

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medieval readers find intention to be wholly indispensable is the third, in the emotional connection between reader and author.

The intentional gap

First, some preliminaries. I take it as a given that language is intentional. This is a way of saying that the signs we deploy in using language have a meaning, or that they express something. In terms of theory, it means that the semiotic is inescapably tied to the semantic. In principle someone might deny that the signs of a language have meaning, but in practice this is not an open possibility for those of us who use that language. To use a language, either by making sentences or by consuming them, requires taking the so-called intentional stance. Admittedly, a language severed from its meaning might have other uses—for instance as decoration, to create an exotic visual or auditory experience—but in such contexts the language has lost its principal function.

To assume that language is intentional leaves unsettled the question of how it acquires that meaning. Although we cannot help but take an intentional stance toward a language when we use it, the question of where meaning comes from is extraordinarily complex. One fairly safe assumption about the intentionality of language, however, is that it sometimes conveys information about the thoughts of others. This is the supposed lesson of the semantic (or semiotic) triangle alluded to above, as framed most famously by Aristotle (384–322 BCE) at the start of his *De interpretatione*:

> Spoken sounds are symbols of states of the soul, and written marks symbols of spoken sounds. And just as written marks are not the same for all men, neither are spoken sounds. But what these are in the first place signs of—states of the soul—are the same for all; and what these states are likenesses of—actual things—are also the same.[1]

By tradition this dense passage is depicted as a triangle composed of three points—*spoken sounds*, *states of the soul*, and *actual things*—with *written marks* a side spur that hooks onto *spoken sounds*. Words are "in the first place" symbols or signs (*σημεῖα*, hence *semiotic*) of what is happening in the mind of the speaker, and so the ability of language to connect with "actual things" is, on this account, mediated by the speaker's inner state. Aristotle's account is disputed in every detail, but it rests on a background assumption

that, when suitably qualified, no one should deny: that language (spoken or written) *sometimes* serves to show us *something* about the mind of its author. This communicative function is one aspect of the intentionality of language.

Even if this is one thing we can do with language, it does not follow that this is how language always works. For an example of someone who comes close to that stronger claim, we might consider Augustine, who remarks in *De doctrina Christiana* (396/97 CE) that "we have no purpose in signifying, that is in giving a sign, other than to bring out and transfer to the mind of another that which the giver of the sign has in his own mind."[2] The claim relies on the idea that signs are always signs of something (which is just to say that they are intentional), and that when they are deliberately put forward, the immediate purpose is to express something about the signifier's state of mind. Let us grant that, one way or another, this is the purpose of the speaker. It does not follow (as Augustine realizes) that this is how language is always used by those who are on the receiving end. When my wife tells me something, I may welcome those words as valuable information about what is going on in her own mind. Or I might have no interest in what is going on with her, in which case her words might instead spark thoughts about what is going on with me. I might then redirect the conversation accordingly. Doubtless that was not her purpose, but her intentions do not dictate the meaning that her words come to have. So even though language is inherently intentional, no one person's intention settles its meaning. The semantic triangle may explain the speaker's purpose, but it does not settle the listener's interpretation.

If the speaker's intended meaning does not determine interpretation, then nothing else does either. Sitting across the breakfast table from someone, it may take a contempt bred from decades of familiarity to ignore what someone is plainly trying to tell you. But in other circumstances of communication it is easy enough for meaning to come apart from authorial intention, and the hard part may be to try to hold these two things together. The domain in which what we might call *the intentional gap* looms largest is literature, where the complexities of the language ensure that authorial intention is obscure under even the best of circumstances, and where the passage of time renders the gap ever larger.

Confronted with this circumstance, modern literary theory has tended to offer a striking piece of advice: readers should stop even trying to reach back and grasp authorial intention. As Wimsatt and Beardsley famously maintained, "[T]he design or intention of the author is neither

available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art."[3] In effect, at least in the special domain of aesthetic appraisal, they were urging that the semantic triangle should be flattened into a straight line running from words to things, or even from words directly to ideas in the mind of the reader. The currents of modern criticism led swiftly to more radical statements of the view, as when Roland Barthes proclaimed that "writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing."[4] From an outsider's perspective, such a claim looks absurd in its hyperbole. But for those who had long suffered under the imperative to make that gap-crossing journey back to authorial intention, Barthes's words were received as a declaration of freedom. There is, however, a familiar peril that looms when the pleasures of freedom seduce us into thinking that we ought to do the things that we are free to do. So even if the nature of language allows us to ignore authorial intention, and even if the purposes of literary scholarship are sometimes served by our so doing, still we should be suspicious of those who claim that this is the only proper way to engage in textual interpretation.

To explore what is at danger of being lost in these modern freedoms, I will consider the variety of ways in which authorial intention did and did not matter to medieval readers. My field of inquiry is a very long and wide Middle Ages, running from late antiquity until nearly the Renaissance, across a range of genres, and canvassing both canonical and marginal texts. No doubt, a more focused and systematic treatment would have its advantages, and I make no claim to be describing a unique and essentially medieval perspective. Part of my point, indeed, is to highlight the great diversity of perspectives on the complex question of how best to understand the meaning of a text. Medieval readers recognized the intentional gap just as much as we moderns do, and they propose interesting strategies for interpretation even when the gap seems unclosable. At the same time, they offer a very rich account of why it is worth trying to understand an author's intention, when it can be done. That the Middle Ages would be a fruitful place to look for such insights should be unsurprising, because the problem of what to do with texts is a characteristically medieval concern. In antiquity the issue was far less pressing, at least in Europe, given its largely oral traditions of communication. The situation begins to change around the start of the common era, fueled by the rise of the codex, the canonization of religious, philosophical, and scientific texts, and the circulation of translations.

Hebrew becomes Greek, Greek becomes Latin and eventually Arabic, only to become Latin once again, while Hebrew returns and Latin goes vernacular. Even while authors come and go, these variegated texts endure. For the medievals, then, it is quite natural to consider the relationship between what a dead author meant and what a living text says.

Pedagogical engagement

How do medieval authors engage with texts? The first and most obvious answer is that they seek to learn from them. Seneca (4 BCE–65 CE) attests early on to the growing importance of written culture when he advises Lucilius not to waste time, and then immediately turns to focus on the importance of reading. One should not, he cautions, casually read from a great many sources. Instead, "You must linger among a few authors of genius, and digest their works, if you wish to take away anything that will settle firmly in your mind."[5] This advice was not uncontroversial. Marcus Aurelius (121–180 CE) lodges a warning to himself to resist his thirst for reading, lest he be distracted from his goal of inner self-awareness: "Away with books! Be no longer drawn aside by them; it is not allowed."[6] This old disagreement between Stoics carries on to this day, but Seneca's side of the debate—the assumption that one can learn a great deal from the writings of others—would solidify in the Middle Ages, as religious texts assumed a canonical status and ancient authority became recognized in the secular domains of philosophy and science.

Seneca's advice is telling. One should concentrate on authors of genius, as he puts it, because the goal is to grasp the ideas that they have grasped. To learn from an author, in this sense, involves tracing the semantic triangle along its familiar path. One reads in order to learn what the author thinks, because the author is a person of genius, and so the ideas that the author *intends* to convey are the ideas that we should want to have settle in our own minds. For us, written culture has developed to the point where Marcus Aurelius's contrary advice can hardly be taken seriously. Not even the most intimate dinner is free from the intrusions of textual authority: "What exactly is urfa? A dried Turkish chili pepper, it says so right here on my phone." In complex and important cases, we consult the writings of an expert, and in these cases we very much want to know what the author thinks, because we take the author to be, at least in this domain, a person of genius.

Do these remarks apply to literature? In medieval commentaries on

literary texts, the introduction almost invariably asks about the intention of the author in writing the work and proposes the benefit of the work to the reader. In general, these are yoked together, so that we benefit in the way that the reader intended, whether that be entertainment, moral instruction, or something else. Bernard Silvester's mid-twelfth-century commentary on the *Aeneid* is a telling example: Virgil wrote the work, we are told, in part as an exploration of human nature, and accordingly we benefit from the work inasmuch as we gain that most precious of insights, self-knowledge.[7] Here, understanding the author's intention helps reveal what we might learn from the text. For an example with greater modern resonance, consider the great fourteenth-century alliterative poem *Pearl*. We may read this poem knowing nothing of why it was written, and may not even care about the intentions of its anonymous author. But then again we may care. We may suspect that the poem was written to commemorate the death of the poet's child, and this may be a subject we care about, and we may have come to this poem because we hope to acquire some insight from the author's own wisdom. It is certainly possible to learn from a poem without caring about what the author thinks. We manage to learn from all sorts of things, even from staring quietly into space. But just as we may turn to an expert to tell us about Turkish spices, so we may turn to poets because we think they have a certain kind of genius, and we wish to come to understand how they think and feel about a certain matter.

Such unfashionable humility in the face of supposed genius, the privileging of what Barthes describes as the "Author-God," might seem especially distinctive of the Middle Ages.[8] Looking back over the centuries, the seventeenth-century antiquarian John Aubrey remarked that "till about the year 1649, 'twas held a strange presumption for a man to attempt an innovation in learning."[9] Yet, in truth, it cannot be said that medieval readers were much more prone than we are to defer to textual authority. Consider biblical interpretation. Since the author of the Bible is, ultimately, God, there is no question of the Bible's veracity, and accordingly no doubts about whether we should seek the intention behind the words. Famously, readers of the Bible were encouraged to go beyond the historical sense of the text and discover the various spiritual or allegorical meanings that lie therein. For Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), even these extended meanings can count as part of the "literal sense" provided that they are intended by the author.[10] But medieval readers recognized that there might easily be beneficial readings of the Bible that depart from the intended meaning. Hugh of St. Victor, in his

Didascalicon (ca. 1127), after stressing the possibility of a single passage's containing many meanings (*sententiae*), quotes Augustine on how a reader is to proceed:

> When we read from the divine books in such a vast array of true conceptions extracted from a few words and backed by sound Catholic faith, let us prefer above all what seems certain to have been meant (*sensisse*) by the person we are reading. If this is unclear, then surely let us prefer what the circumstances of writing do not rule out and what is consonant with sound faith. But if even the circumstances of writing cannot be worked out and assessed, let us at least prefer only what sound faith prescribes. For it is one thing not to grasp what the writer most likely meant, another to stray from the rule of piety.[11]

Following the Bible's intention is preferable, of course, but where it cannot be had then one should carry on in accord with sound faith. Even in the context of biblical interpretation, then, it is not possible always to be bound by authorial intent.

What if a reader arrives at a pious reading that departs from the known sense of the text? In *De doctrina Christiana*, Augustine imagines such a case and judges it a nonpernicious error: "he is deceived in the same way as a man who leaves a road by mistake but passes through a field to the same place toward which the road itself leads."[12] The reader got to the right place, even if it might have been more advisable to stay on the main road. Peter Abelard (1079–1142) quotes from this passage, in the prologue to his *Sic et non*, in order to explain why he has taken up the rather audacious project of assembling a collection of conflicting texts from various authorities. He intends neither to rebuke these venerable authors nor to breed scandal or confusion. On the contrary, the goal is "to encourage inexperienced readers to engage in that most important exercise, inquiry into truth, and through that inquiry to render them more acute."[13] One might have supposed that the proper way to resolve these clashes of authority would be to dig deeper into the intentions of the authorities in question. But Abelard treats the clash of opinion not as the occasion for more careful exegesis, but as a goad to get readers to think for themselves. He seeks, as he puts it, to provoke within the reader "the assiduous, frequent questioning that is defined as the first key of wisdom."[14] Again, the reader cannot count on authorial intention to mark out the path ahead.

Abelard's attitude toward textual authority helped shape the character of the scholastic method soon to emerge within the medieval university. The essence of the method was to pit authority against authority, argument against argument, and let long and assiduous questioning bring teacher and students to the truth of whatever is in dispute. From the start, universities based themselves on a well-defined textual curriculum, focused on Aristotle, but the point of a philosophical education was never to understand what earlier philosophers themselves thought. Aquinas, for instance, concludes an extended discussion about rival interpretations of Plato with this peremptory remark: "Whichever of these is so makes no difference to us. For the study of philosophy is not about knowing what individuals thought, but about the way things are."[15] In this spirit, Aristotle was read during the later Middle Ages through the lens of any number of Greek or Arabic commentators, via one Latin translation or another, without any great fastidiousness about doing justice to exactly what he thought. Thomists read him as if he were a Thomist, nominalists as if he were a nominalist, and no one seemed very bothered by the idea that he might have been neither nor. When the Aristotelian commentaries of Ibn Rushd (or Averroes, 1126–1198) proved as useful as Aristotle's original texts, they themselves began to achieve canonical status (in virtue of their appearance in the university curriculum), and among Jewish authors a tradition of supercommentaries even arose: commentaries on Ibn Rushd's commentaries.[16] It was only with the more delicate sensibilities of the Renaissance that this all came to seem rather appalling, and weight began to be put on the study of Greek and Hebrew, the production of careful editions in those languages, and the stripping away of medieval accretions so as to discover the original intent of classical authorities.[17]

Even the very idea of authority came under withering fire from those who were unhappy about where that authority was leading the debate. Peter John Olivi (1248–1298), arguing over what might seem a fairly inconsequential question—whether angels contain any sort of matter—lashed out against the practice of bowing down to the authority of Aristotle and his Muslim followers:

> Aristotle does not seem to mean this in that passage, although I don't care what he meant here or elsewhere. For his authority and that of any infidel and idolater counts for nothing—especially in the case of matters that belong to the Christian faith or are very near to it.[18]

Nicholas of Autrecourt made similar complaints in the prologue to his *Tractatus* (ca. 1335), urging philosophers to cease their obsessive focus on texts and turn toward the things themselves:

> I saw that almost no certainty about things can be reaped from natural appearances, and that what can be had will be had in a short time if people turn their intellects directly to things in the way they have been turning them to the intellects of men, Aristotle and his commentator Averroes.[19]

Instead of thinking about reality itself, scholars "consume the whole length of their lives in discussions of logic, or in distinguishing obscure propositions of Aristotle, or quoting from the commentaries of Averroes."[20]

These were radical claims, and it is hardly a coincidence that the church condemned both Olivi and Autrecourt for their cavalier attitude toward orthodoxy. Even so, their complaints reflect the suspicion of authority that runs all through the later Middle Ages. Autrecourt's own way of advancing this complaint—set aside authority and turn directly to the things themselves—would not be widely embraced until the seventeenth century, when this became the central precept of Baconian science and Cartesian philosophy, and arguably the defining feature of this period's "modernity." But premodern thought, far from being slavish in its respect for authority, takes surprising liberties with the authorities it recognizes and the texts it exploits. To be sure, the forms of scholarly practice during this period invariably take on the façade of authorial dependence. The main literary genres of the university were commentaries, on the Bible, on Aristotle, and on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. But even while the Bible's veracity was unimpeachable, merely human authority served primarily as an opportunity for assiduous and frequent questioning.

Among the most creative of later medieval authors, and particularly within vernacular literature, one finds this same sort of anxiety regarding authority, manifested by a tendency to invoke it with one hand while resisting it with the other. William Langland, for instance, sends the protagonist of *Piers Plowman* (ca. 1380) on a journey to moral enlightenment in which nearly every authoritative figure proves at best unhelpful and often positively mendacious. Chaucer gathers a worthy group of pilgrims to tell an assortment of tales on their way to Canterbury (ca. 1390), and he systematically calls into question the authority of the tale tellers as he goes. No one fares worse, indeed, than his own namesake in the poem, whose poor attempt at

the "Tale of Sir Thopas" suffers the unique indignity of being cut-off in midverse, and subject to the memorable dismissal, "Thy drasty rymyng is nat worth a toord!"[21] Here as elsewhere in the later Middle Ages, the authority of an author serves less as a constraint and more as a provocation.

In all, then, the sphere of pedagogical engagement makes at best a mixed case when it comes to the importance of authorial intention. Where it can be had, medieval readers are quick to claim it as a mark of authority. But where it is unknown, elusive, or of doubtful value, other strategies of interpretation come quickly to the fore.

Moral engagement

Let us pass on, then, to a second sphere of influence: authorial intention as critical to one's moral engagement with a text. Consider again, to start, the elusive case of Chaucer. He seemingly tells us about his intentions in his much discussed "retraccioun" to the *Canterbury Tales*, where he retracts those tales that "sownen into synne." Offering his own retrospective commentary, he writes:

> [I]f ther be any thyng that displese hem, I preye hem also that they arrette it to the defaute of myn unkonnynge and nat to my wyl, that wolde ful fayn have seyd bettre if I hadde had konnynge. For oure book [Rom. 15:4] seith, "Al that is writen is writen for oure doctrine," and that is myn entente.[22]

The reader who has come this far in the *Canterbury Tales* might be excused for wondering whether this passage is entirely ingenuous. Does this show us the author's true "entente" any more than does the "Tale of Sir Thopas"?[23] Be that as it may, the passage depends on a complex set of background expectations. First, there is the aforementioned convention of fixing authorial intent, and using that to determine a work's benefit to the reader. Having declared his own intention, and made a confession of his errors, Chaucer effectively shifts responsibility onto his readers, who must themselves now choose in what way they will seek to benefit from his poems.

A second assumption at work in Chaucer's retractions is that an agent's intentions should influence one's ethical evaluation of an action. The question of why a work was written thus tells us not only what we might hope to learn from it, but also how we are to assess its moral standing. To know how to judge the value of a work of Ovid, for instance, we need to

know what to think about it from a moral point of view, and that requires understanding why Ovid wrote it.[24] Such declarations of intention appear not only in commentaries but also, very often, in an author's own prefatory remarks. Nicholas of Autrecourt begins his *Tractatus* with the remark that "[t]he correct order of proceeding requires that I should mention at the start what motive led me to compose this treatise, lest the legitimate reason for such a project remain hidden." This leads to an extended discussion of his complex motivations, followed by this cautionary concluding remark:

> I declare that neither in this treatise nor elsewhere do I want to say anything against the articles of the faith, against the determination of the Church, against articles the opposite of which was condemned in Paris, and so on. I want only to inquire, setting aside all positive law, into what certainty can be had about things, and whether the pronouncements of Aristotle have been demonstrated.[25]

Such professions of intent—what authors "want to say"—are commonplace in theological and philosophical treatises, and as a rule the more an author feels at risk of censure, the more prominent these volitional attestations become.

Autrecourt tells us the content of his will because this is what fixes his intention, and the intention is critical to the moral evaluation of the action. In the medieval context this idea has come to be particularly associated with Abelard, whose *Ethics* (ca. 1138) insists that a sin lies in one's inward intention—our scorn for God—and that "adding on the performance of the deed doesn't add anything to increase the sin."[26] But, as Abelard himself points out, the idea has roots in Augustine, who writes in *De libero arbitrio* (ca. 390),

> In order to understand that the evil in adultery is the desire (*libidinem*), consider that if a man fails to have the ability (*facultas*) to sleep with someone else's wife, but it is somehow clear that he would like to (*cupere*), and would do so if he were able, then he is no less guilty than if he were apprehended in the very deed.[27]

Augustine, in turn, is drawing on the authority of the Gospel: "You have heard that it was said to them of old: Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say to you, that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath

already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:27–28, Douay-Rheims). Jesus's gloss on the old commandment is subject to various interpretations. The strict Augustinian reading, however, quickly became commonplace. Here is the influential sixth-century penitential manual of Finnian:

> If anyone has had the thought and wanted to do it and could not, the ability (*facultas*) having been denied him, it is the same sin but not the same penance. For example, if he willed fornication or murder, though he did not achieve the results, he has already, through his will, sinned in his heart. Still, if he quickly does penance, he can be helped. His penance is this: he shall do half a year of penance on an allowance of bread and water, and he shall abstain from wine and meat for a whole year.[28]

From this strict Augustinian perspective, the locus of moral responsibility is internal to such a degree that to intend to commit the sin is as sinful as actually doing it. This sort of inwardly directed conception of morality runs all through later medieval thought, both in theological contexts and more widely, as in this misogynistic screed that Jean de Meun gives the Jealous Husband in the *Romance of the Rose* (ca. 1275):

> All of you are, will be, and have been,
> either in deed or in will, whores.
> For, though one might eliminate the deed,
> no one can constrain the will.[29]

The implication here, again, is that to intend an action is as bad, morally speaking, as to do it. Noxious as this last text may be, the underlying philosophical thesis was not particularly controversial in the Middle Ages.[30]

Modern readers, ostensibly disinclined to such moralizing, are not likely to be moved by these appeals to authorial intention. But even medieval readers at their most moralistic give far less weight to intention than the strict Augustinian perspective might suggest. After all, when in 1346 Nicholas of Autrecourt was condemned, his works burned, and he himself exiled from Paris, no one cared what his intentions were. The problem was what he had said and written. And when Marguerite Porete was tried and then burned at the stake in 1310, it did not matter that she claimed to be simply following the will of God. What mattered is that she refused to disavow what she had written, and even continued to share her ideas with others. Here, and in countless other such cases, authorial intention mattered hardly

at all to the moral standing of an author. What mattered was the *content* of the author's claims, not the intention behind that content.

Is there a censorious double-standard at work here? Did the medieval inquisitor not respect the theological niceties found in Augustine and the later tradition? Or was the censor simply recognizing the obvious limitations of human judgment? The hiddenness of intentions was commonly recognized and routinely said to be a matter best left to God. As Guibert of Nogent remarks in the preface to his history of the First Crusade (ca. 1108), "What surprise is it if we make mistakes in describing the deeds of others, when with respect to our own thoughts and actions we are unable not just to express them in words but even to gather them silently within our mind? What is there to say about intentions, which are known to be often so hidden as to be scarcely discerned by the insight of the inner man?"[31] So too, the moral inquisitor might reason, if our thoughts and intentions are obscure even to ourselves, then we have no hope of judging the intentions of others. Best to judge an author by her works.

It is not mainly scruples such as these, however, that explain why authorial intention mattered so little to the medieval censor. Not even the coldest inquisitor could have doubted that Marguerite Porete was quite sincere in her beliefs, and the same might be said for the many philosophers and theologians who came under similar suspicions (even if they recanted before paying the ultimate price that Porete was willing to pay). It was not, however, the sincerity of Porete's intentions that were at issue, but the facts about what she did. And to judge the situation in this way required no double-standard or retreat from the strict Augustinian tradition. For what was uncontroversial in that tradition was this thesis: (a) the intention to do a bad act is sufficient for being fully blameworthy. That specific claim should not be confused with the superficially similar but quite distinct claims that (b) the intention to do a bad act is *necessary* for being blameworthy, or (c) the intention to do a *good* act is sufficient for escaping all moral blame. It was (a) that was widely held and biblically attested, to such a degree that no one would have associated this old idea with Abelard, a disreputable and little discussed figure. To the extent Abelard was known at all in this context, it was for holding (b) and (c), and thus he was condemned at the Synod of Sens (1140) for the thesis that "[s]omeone is made neither better nor worse on account of his deeds."[32] This is a much stronger claim than (a), because it suggests that the intention is both sufficient and necessary when it comes to moral judgment—that it is *all* that matters—and suggests that this is so with respect to both blame and praise.

From this radically inward Abelardian perspective, Porete would have been blameworthy if and only if her intention were bad, and so the task of the censors—if they truly aimed to judge the moral quality of action—would turn entirely on discerning her intentions. A bad action might be *wholly* excused by the intent of the agent. Abelard clearly did think this, as can be seen from his deliberately provocative example of how we ought to judge those who crucified Jesus. Inasmuch as their intentions were good—they believed that this is what they *ought* to have been doing—they in no way were morally at fault, and indeed Abelard argues that they would have been *more* at fault, given their beliefs, if they had spared Jesus.[33] If the censors had taken Abelard's view, then there might never have been an author condemned for proposing doctrines that are scandalous, temerarious, heretical, and the like. After all, even the worst of heretics can be counted on to have the best of intentions. But the radical Abelardian perspective was never widely embraced, and accordingly this is not how the censors proceeded. They judged authors on the basis not of their intentions but of their works, written and otherwise, and although opportunity was always afforded for authors to correct themselves, in the end one's good intentions could be no defense against works whose badness was manifest.

What is all of this to us? We too live in a censorious age, and as much as we might disavow the moralism of earlier centuries, in truth we have only shifted moral grounds. The sins an author might commit in the eyes of the modern reader are legion, and although we do not cancel quite as thoroughly today as we did in the age of Marguerite Porete, the spirit of inquisition is still very much alive. What the medieval perspective suggests is that—unless we are tempted by a radical perspective like Abelard's—we ought not to suppose that the moral standing of an author rests very much on authorial intention. We appropriately condemn a text—be it a poem or a tweet—based on its content, and we do not and should not regard the author's intention as sufficient for escaping moral censure. In cases such as this, moral engagement with a text does not run through authorial intention. Once again, the nuances of medieval theory undermine easy assumptions about the distance between medieval and modern readers.

The situation shifts quite a bit, however, if we turn from moral opprobrium to praise. When Abelard was condemned for maintaining (c) above—that a good intention is sufficient for escaping blame—the complaint was not that good intentions are irrelevant to praiseworthiness, but that they are not sufficient. Aquinas's view in this regard is characteristic: whereas he thinks that an act should be morally condemned if it is bad in

any respect, he thinks that it should be morally praised only if it is good in *every* respect.[34] This means that although a good intention is not sufficient for moral goodness, it is entirely necessary. We find this perspective reflected in the attitudes of medieval readers. Consider, to take an extreme case, Guiard of Cressonessart, who spent a year and a half imprisoned on the charge of "aiding and defending" Marguerite Porete.[35] Guiard had his own ideas about his mission—he described himself as an "angel of Philadelphia," commissioned by God to defend the faithful—but what put him in the clutches of the Paris inquisitors was his commitment to Porete. Evidently, *he* didn't regard her book as a bad one, even if in the end he recanted rather than sacrifice his life. But could he have sacrificed as much as he did—"exposed himself," in his words—if he had not also believed in Porete's intentions?

Or, looking back to the Roman Empire, consider Titus Labienus, who seems to have been the first person to have his works burned as an act of censorship (ca. 8 CE). Labienus expressed the purity of his own intentions by killing himself in response. But more striking for our purposes is the case of his great enemy, Cassius Severus, whose public response to this incident was to remark, "They will have to burn *me* alive now, since I know those books by heart."[36] The price Severus in fact paid was exile, and he was willing to do so not based on the *content* of those works, but based on respect for the intention behind them. Could one sacrifice so much without a deep respect not just for the work but for the person behind the work?

A modern reader who follows Barthes in thinking of a text as an "oblique space where our subject slips away" loses the capacity for this sort of moral engagement. The loss involved, moreover, goes behind cases of grand sacrifice. Consider something as mundane as a personal letter. Even here, will the subject be allowed to slip away, leaving us with just an oblique space? Consider the greatest of all medieval letter writers, Heloise, writing to Abelard:

> Entirely guilty though I am, I am also, as you know, entirely innocent. It is not the actual effect but the affect of the actor that makes the crime, and fairness should weigh not what was done but the spirit (*animo*) in which it was done. What my spirit towards you has always been, you alone who have known it can judge. I submit all to your scrutiny, yield to your testimony in all things.[37]

Heloise of course knows her audience, and so she confronts Abelard with his own moral theory. What was the spirit—or state of mind—behind her

actions? What are the thoughts that motivate her present words? What does she mean by "entirely guilty" and "entirely innocent"? If Abelard cares about her at all, he must consider these questions.

To the modern reader, in a literary context, this sort of moral engagement may easily look naïve. But the medieval example should lead us to rethink that assumption. The engagement will be most easily felt when reader and author are contemporaries. In these circumstances, readers are most likely to feel as if an author is speaking to them, and that to read a text is to take part in a larger project of engagement with the world. Here it can feel like a betrayal to discover that the author is not who one thought he was, or does not share the moral commitments one took his text to express. This sort of engagement with an author is one of the important ways in which people engage with literature, and it requires a sense of connection with the mind of the author. This need not, however, occur only between contemporaries. It would be quite natural for the reader of Chaucer to care deeply about why he wrote the retractions to the *Canterbury Tales*. Take these words naïvely, as the guileless intention to "revoke" his greatest works, and we risk being left with an author whose moral standing is so damaged as to make these retractions an act of supreme artistic self-sabotage. The way forward here, for the reader who is morally engaged with the work, is not to set aside the whole question of intention. To engage with Chaucer's text in all of its moral complexity requires that we recognize, and celebrate, the fascinating maze of authorial ambiguity that runs through his work.

Emotional engagement

In these two previous spheres of engagement, we have found a qualified case for the value of authorial intention. To the extent we seek to learn from a text, we have reason to consider what its author means. Insofar as we find ourselves morally engaged with a text, we have reason to engage with the author's intentions. When it comes to literature, however, the most important sphere of engagement with authorial intention is my third and last, the domain of emotion. This, after all, has traditionally been understood to be the principal goal of poetic discourse. As Ibn Rushd explains at the very start of his epitome of Aristotle's *Poetics*,

> Poetical statements are rhythmically balanced statements. With them, one strives for an imaginary representation or exemplification of something in speech so as to move the soul to flee from

> the thing, or to long for it, or simply to wonder at the delightfulness of what is imagined.[38]

To "move the soul" in one of these ways is, precisely, to give rise to an emotion. Among Christian readers, this was understood to be especially true of the Bible. According to Giles of Rome (ca. 1245–1316), "Love is the ultimate goal of all holy scripture," and he goes on to explain of biblical exegesis that "this science is described as promoting love of and affection for God."[39] In cases of this sort we can speak of a reader's emotional engagement with a text. Even if this is not the only function of literature, it is central to the aesthetic experience.

Just as in the moral case, it is easy to imagine an emotional engagement that lacks any reference to authorial intention. A text can stand by itself, producing aversion, longing, or delight, without the need for instructions on the side. Indeed, a text can move the soul in ways quite contrary to what we might surmise the author intended, provoking laughter, horror, or just sadness. But even if these are forms of emotional engagement, they are shallow forms, in which the triangle of meaning has been flattened in a way that precludes a genuine personal connection. Readers who proceed in this way interact with the text in the way one might interact with a reliable machine or drug, achieving the desired effect without the messy complexities of a personal connection.

To see the difference it makes when the author is not allowed to slip away, consider again the most intimate forms of communication. When Heloise begged Abelard for a letter, she quoted Seneca on the way in which receiving a letter from a friend is far better than receiving a picture, because upon its receipt "we are immediately together." No matter what you might write, Heloise tells Abelard, a letter will gladden her community because at least "you will prove that you have us in mind."[40] In a case like this, the author's intentions count for everything. Shifting to a slightly less intimate example, consider the sermon. In Gregory the Great's treatise *On Pastoral Care* (ca. 590), the central assumption is that effective preaching requires an understanding of the mind of one's audience. So chapter 1 begins,

> No one presumes to teach an art unless he has first, with intent meditation, learned it. What rashness is it, then, for the unskillful to assume pastoral authority, when the guidance of souls is the art of arts. For who is unaware that the sores of a person's thoughts are more hidden than the sores of his bowels?[41]

Caring for the soul is the most difficult of all arts, more obscure than the most intimate art of the physician, because it requires insight into that most secret part of a person's self, one's inner thoughts.

In principle, this sort of psychological insight might be a one-way street, with the preacher understanding the souls of others and guiding them accordingly, while the audience grasps nothing of the preacher's own state of mind. In practice, however, it was understood that the best preaching involves a two-way engagement. Augustine provides the exemplary case. The intimate self-display of his *Confessions* (ca. 396–400) remains a constant throughout his letters and sermons, as he seeks both to understand his audience and to be himself understood. Guibert of Nogent, around the turn of the twelfth century, describes the method as first requiring the ability to show others how they truly are:

> No preaching seems to me more profitable than that which reveals someone to himself, and replaces in his inner self, that is in his mind, what has been projected outside; and which convincingly places him, as in a portrait, before his own eyes.

The next step is to invite this inner access in the other direction, showing one's audience how the challenges of life have left their mark on the preacher:

> Whoever has the duty of teaching, if he wants to be acutely equipped, can first learn in himself, and afterwards profitably teach to others, what the experience of his inner struggles has taught, which is much more abundant than we can express, according to the way the successes and failures he has gone through have impressed themselves on his memory.[42]

As Augustine saw so clearly, and as Guibert makes explicit, an effective pastoral relationship—the guidance of souls (*regimen animarum*) that Gregory describes—involves more than a mechanistic control of one's congregation, the sort of thing that inspired Michel Foucault's category of "pastoral power."[43] What Guibert describes is a personal relationship, in which the audience is not only moved in predictable ways by the speaker's words, but *understands* the speaker in virtue of understanding the thoughts and emotions that lie behind the words. Effective preaching requires not just an insight into the minds of others, yielding an ability to control them, but a willingness to expose one's own inner self to the congregation. Do as I do, and feel as I myself feel.

Peter Abelard, in effect, argues that the central purpose of the Gospel is to achieve this result in a systematic way, elevating the minds of sinful human beings through the sacrifice of Christ's crucifixion. On Abelard's theory of the Atonement, the point of the Gospel story is to bring us into a state of emotional engagement with God, so that we understand his love for us, through the sacrifice that he made, and thereby respond with a deeper and truer love of our own. Here he how he puts it:

> It seems to us that we have been justified by the blood of Christ and reconciled to God in this way: that through this unique grace exhibited to us—that his Son has taken up our nature and persevered therein in teaching us by word and example even unto death—he has more fully bound us to himself through love so that, with such a gift of divine grace enkindled, there is now nothing that true charity fears to endure for him.[44]

Soul-guidance here works much the same, albeit on a larger scale, as it does in the case of an effective sermon. God seeks to shape our inner thoughts—more precisely, our inner will, installing charity within it—and he does so by giving us insight into his inner thoughts and desires. For such "true charity" to be enkindled within us, it is critical not just that we have the Gospel story, but that we understand the point of it, understanding why Christ was crucified and why the texts of the Gospel have assumed their canonical status as the unique witness to the Christian message. The requisite engagement here works only when those who hear that message understand the intention behind it.

Abelard bolsters his account by citing John 15:13, "Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends." The connection of the Atonement to friendship is apposite, given Abelard's theory, because the relationship he describes between author and reader (God and creatures, preacher and congregation, pastor and penitent) is like the relationship that has classically been described between friends. On the account of Cicero (106–43 BCE), "friendship is nothing other than a mutual accord (*consensio*) in all things, divine and human, with benevolence and charity, and I scarcely know whether, with the exception of wisdom (*sapientia*), anything better has been given to humans by the immortal gods."[45] Human friendships are, in large part, mediated by language, which means that the *consensio* Cicero describes is a product of a shared *intentio*, a mutual accord regarding how words make their way around the semantic triangle, from

thoughts to the things themselves. Where a friendship cannot be enjoyed in person, written communication takes on paramount importance, and in medieval literary culture the letter becomes a primary vehicle of friendship.[46] As we saw in Heloise's importuning of Abelard, the letter offers the hope of an enduring emotional engagement between people whose lives have otherwise parted ways.

These cases of intimate engagement apply to the case of literature. We cannot be friends with Chaucer, if only because the required mutuality is no longer available.[47] But, despite the temporal distance, we can enjoy Chaucer's texts as an opportunity to spend time with another person—not with the fictional Troilus and Criseyde, but with Chaucer himself, the real person. Since the goal is not friendship, we should not expect or even necessarily want *consensio*. An author may inspire feelings of approving assent, but may be just as likely to provoke dissent or just puzzlement. Indeed, contrary to the Ciceronian expectation, this sort of intellectual clash may be just as likely to produce emotional sympathy as is the more straightforward case of mutual accord. As the anonymous twelfth-century *Libellus de diversis ordinibus* advises, "Love in others what you yourself do not have, so that another shall love in you what he does not have, so that what either one does shall be good for the other and those shall be joined in love who are separate in works."[48] This prescription for monastic life might serve just as well as advice to readers who wish to engage emotionally with the works that they read.

Unlike the other forms of engagement I have considered, a robust emotional engagement with a text makes engaging with the author's intention mandatory. As we have seen, one can learn from a text apart from any concern for its original intent, and one can, and should, subject a text to moral scrutiny in ways that go beyond intentions. But to engage emotionally with a text in a rich and complex way requires a personal engagement, and that means attempting to connect with the person behind the text, the author of the text.

Must one read in this way? Of course not. We often do not, and perhaps some will find the whole exercise distasteful. Some modern critics, in particular, seems to have no need for this particular form of engagement. According to Wimsatt and Beardsley, "judging a poem is like judging a pudding or a machine."[49] No doubt it can be like that, if that is what one wants from the experience. But others may find that the activity of reading is enriched by conceiving of it as an attempt at interpersonal understanding, an activity less like engineering and more like the formation and sustenance of a friendship.

The question here is not whether reading should yield an emotional response. All sorts of machines are designed to elicit emotions, and a text can be understood as just another such instance. The question is what shape those emotions should take. Is the text simply a tool that we use to get ourselves into a certain edifying state of mind? My suggestion instead is that one important kind of aesthetic response is an emotional engagement *with* a text. This means not simply using it as a vehicle for our own thoughts and feelings, but attempting to think and feel with it. To think and feel with a text, however, is to attempt an interpersonal connection with the author behind the words. The result may be that we can aptly speak of loving a text, or hating one, or responding with all manner and shades of emotional response in between. One way or another, if literature is to have more meaning in our lives than does a pudding or a machine, it will be because it is not just a tool for our emotional stimulation, but is itself a suitable *object* of our emotional responses. What makes it a suitable object, however, is precisely the presence of a person, the author, with whom we are engaged.

The choice here is not between interpersonal engagement and solipsistic, mechanical stimulation. Puddings, after all, have a way of bringing people together in convivial ways.[50] What is at issue is whether the authors themselves are permitted to have a live voice in the conversation. "Death to the author!," cries the modern critic, lest the author come to play a God-like, oppressive role, constraining our freedom to make what we like from the words that surround us. Even to have this worry, however, is already to understand that authors are not yet dead, inasmuch as they will—if we are not ever vigilant—seek to reach out to us through their words, impressing upon us their own thoughts and feelings. Readers are indeed free not to want that. But one role for literature, among its many roles, is to enrich our lives with other voices and other perspectives. Reflecting on the various forms of medieval reading gives us reason to think that engaging with authorial intention has rewards that should not lightly be surrendered.

Notes

I am much indebted to James Simpson's unstinting enthusiasm, to an anonymous reader's salutary criticisms, and to Elizabeth Robertson's generous supply of both.

1 Aristotle, *De interpretatione*, 16a3–9, in *Aristotle's "Categories" and "De Interpretatione,"* trans. and ed. J. L. Ackrill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 43. Throughout I cite English sources where available, but the translations are generally my own.

2 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, II.3, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 43. For Augustine's theory of signs, see Phillip Cary, *Outward Signs: The Powerlessness of External Things in Augustine's Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

3 W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," in Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), 3–19, at 3.

4 Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in Barthes, *Image—Music—Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142–49, at 142.

5 Seneca, *Epistles to Lucilius*, 2.2, in *Epistles*, 3 vols., trans. Richard M. Gummere (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1917–25), 1:7. See Brian Stock, "The Self and Literary Experience in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages," *New Literary History* 24, no. 4 (1994): 839–52.

6 Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 2.2, in *The Communings with Himself of Marcus Aurelius Antonius, Emperor of Rome*, trans. C. R. Haines (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1916), 27.

7 Bernard Silvester, *Commentary on the First Six Books of the "Aeneid,"* translated in A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c. 1100–c. 1375: The Commentary-Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 152–53. See more generally Minnis's foundational study of the subject in *Medieval Theories of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Scolar Press, 1984).

8 Barthes, "Death of the Author," 146. See, too, Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?," in *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, ed. J. D. Faubion, 3 vols. (New York: New Press, 1997–2000), 2:205–22.

9 John Aubrey, *The Natural History of Wiltshire* (London, 1847; repr. New York: A. M. Kelley, 1969), 18. On the difference of attitudes in the seventeenth century, see Robert Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes, 1274–1671* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), sec. 20.2 (433–42). On the complexity of medieval attitudes, see Patricia Clare Ingham, *The Medieval New: Ambivalence in an Age of Innovation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

10 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1a, 1.10c, in *Basic Works*, trans. J. Hause and R. Pasnau (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 2014), 47–49. For discussion see Jon Whitman, "The Literal Sense of Christian Scripture," in *Interpreting Scriptures in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Overlapping Inquiries*, ed. M. Z. Cohen and A. Berlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 133–58. See, more generally, Alastair Minnis, "Scholastic Literary Theory: Intentionalism and the Desire for Stable Sense," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 53, no. 3 (2023): 467–92.

11 Augustine, *Literal Commentary on Genesis*, I.21.41, as quoted in Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, VI.11, trans. Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 86.

12 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, I.36.40–41, trans. Green, 27–28. See Abelard, *Sic et non*, prologue, lines 221–27, trans. Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 95.

13 Abelard, *Sic et non*, prologue, lines 332–33, in Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 99.

14 Abelard, *Sic et non* prologue, lines 333–34, in Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 99.

15 Aquinas, *Exposition of Aristotle's Treatise "On the Heavens,"* I.22, trans. R. F. Larcher and Pierre H. Conway, 2 vols. (Columbus, Ohio: College of St. Mary of the Springs, 1963–64), 1:164.

16 See, for instance, Ruth Glasner, "The Evolution of the Genre of Philosophical-Scientific Commentary: Hebrew Supercommentaries on Aristotle's *Physics*," in *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, ed. G. Freudenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 182–206.

17 For a careful recent study of the gradual supplanting of Arabic authorities, see Dag Nikolaus Hasse, *Success and Suppression: Arabic Sciences and Philosophy in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016).

18 Peter John Olivi, *Quaestiones in secundum librum Sententiarum*, qu. 16, ad 6, ed. B. Jansen, 3 vols. (Quaracchi, It.: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1922–26), 1:337. For further passages and discussion, see David Burr, "Peter John Olivi and the Philosophers," *Franciscan Studies* 31 (1971): 41–71.

19 Nicholas of Autrecourt, *The Universal Treatise*, trans. L. A. Kennedy, R. E. Arnold, and A. E. Millward (Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 1971), 32.

20 *Universal Treatise*, 32.

21 Geoffrey Chaucer, "Tale of Sir Thopas," VII. 930, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed., ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 216.

22 Chaucer, "Retraction," in *Riverside Chaucer*, X.1082–83 (328).

23 On the relationship between Chaucer and his characters, see Eva von Contzen, "Who Has Intention? Chaucer Studies and the Search for Meaning," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 53, no. 3 (2023): 597–622. For a classic study of the "Retractions," see Olive Sayce, "Chaucer's 'Retractions': The Conclusion of the *Canterbury Tales* and Its Place in Literary Tradition," *Medium Aevum* 40 (1971): 230–48. Although I am sympathetic to Sayce's general approach, I would dissent from her remark that "the idea of literature as the expression of the individual and personal is one that has only been current since the mid-eighteenth century" (231).

24 See the examples in Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 20–30; and Minnis, *Medieval Theories of Authorship*, chap. 1.

25 Autrecourt, *Universal Treatise*, 31.

26 Peter Abelard, *Ethics*, I.30, in *Ethical Writings*, trans. Paul Vincent Spade, with introduction by Marilyn McCord Adams (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1995), 7.

27 Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, I.3.8, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1993), 5–6.

28 Ludwig Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1963), 74–75. A similar formulation appears in the Penitential of Columban (96–97).

29 Jean de Meun and Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance of the Rose*, lines 9155–58, trans. Charles Dahlberg (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), 165–66.

30 Prominent studies of the role of intention in medieval ethics include Peter King, "Abelard's Intentionalist Ethics," *Modern Schoolman* 72, no. 2/3 (1995): 213–31; Jean Porter, "Responsibility, Passion, and Sin: A Reassessment of Abelard's *Ethics*," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 28, no. 3 (2000): 367–94; Ian Wilks, "Moral Intention," in *Oxford Handbook of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. John Marenbon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 588–604.

31 Guibert of Nogent, *The Deeds of God through the Franks*, preface, lines 86–90, trans. Robert Levine (Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell Press, 1997), 25–26. For broader discussion, see Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050–1200* (London: SPCK, 1972); and Susan Kramer, *Sin, Interiority, and Selfhood in the Twelfth-Century West* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2015).

32 Heinrich Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, ed. Peter Hünermann, Robert Fastiggi, and Anne Englund Nash, 43rd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), no. 733 (243).

33 Abelard, *Ethics*, I.110–31 (24–29).

34 See *Summa theologiae*, 1a2ae, qu. 18, in Aquinas, *Basic Works*, 459–74.

35 See Robert E. Learner, "An 'Angel of Philadelphia' in the Reign of Philip the Fair: The Case of Guiard of Cressonessart," in *Order and Innovation in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honor of Joseph R. Strayer*, ed. W. C. Jordan et al. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), 343–64.

36 The story is reported in Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* 10, pref. 4–8, in Seneca the Elder, *Declamations*, trans. Michael Winterbottom, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), 2:359.

37 *Epistle* 1, in *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, trans. Betty Radice (New York: Penguin, 1974), 115–16.

38 *Averroës' Three Short Commentaries on Aristotle's "Topics," "Rhetoric," and "Poetics,"* trans. Charles E. Butterworth (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1977), 83, 203.

39 Giles of Rome, in Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 246, 247; and compare Bonaventure (1254/57): "this doctrine exists in order that we should become good and be redeemed, and this is not achieved by deliberation alone, but rather by a disposition of the will" (235).

40 *Epistle* 1, in *Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, 110, quoting *Epistles to Lucilius* 40.1.

41 Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Care*, trans. Henry Davis (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1950), 21.

42 Guibert of Nogent, *Commentary on Genesis*, prologue, in Morris, *Discovery of the Individual*, 67. See, too, Morris's account of how Bernard of Clairvaux effectively used this approach (67).

43 See, for instance, Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 777–95.

44 Abelard, *Exposition of Romans*, II.3.26, in *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, ed. and trans. Eugene R. Fairweather (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 283–84. Although Abelard's account of the Atonement is heterodox, it has had its recent enthusiasts. See, e.g., Philip L. Quinn, "Abelard on Atonement: 'Nothing Unintelligible, Arbitrary, Illogical, or Immoral about It,'" in *Reasoned Faith: Essays in Philosophical Theology in Honor of Norman Kretzmann*, ed. Eleanore Stump (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 281–300.

45 Cicero, *On Friendship*, 6.20, in *De senectute, De amicitia, De divinatione*, trans. William Armistead Falconer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1923), 131.

46 On the importance of medieval epistolary friendships, see Morris, *Discovery of the Individual*, 97–107.

47 On the persistent efforts of readers through the ages to form a personal attachment to Chaucer, see Stephanie Trigg, *Congenial Souls: Reading Chaucer from Medieval to Postmodern* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

48 *Libellus de diversis ordinibus et professionibus qui sunt in aecclesia*, ed. Giles Constable and Bernard S. Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 15, as quoted in Caroline Walker Bynum, "Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?," in her *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 82–109, at 94.

49 Wimsatt and Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," 4.

50 On the communal character of modern criticism, against the charge of solipsism, see the effective response in Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 320.