Chaucer and the Death of the Father as a Figure of Authority

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> *"Of thilke Fader – blessed moote he be! –*
> *That for us deyde."*
> *Geoffrey Chaucer,* The Clerk's Tale

I had better begin by saying that I hope my title does not raise any false expectations. I am not, that is, going to claim that authority, as personified in the figure of the father, is a sham for Chaucer, or that he systematically made a programme of the deconstruction of paternal authority in his works. As a matter of fact, this is oftentimes more far from the truth than not. I am aware, alas!, that medievalists construct their own Middle Ages in accordance with their own span of interests in the twentieth century (or should I say twenty-first?) and, hence, this deconstruction would be mine, rather than Chaucer's. I cannot help feeling, however, that ever since Hoccleve's apostrophe as "mayster dere and fadir reverent" and down to Dryden's definitive formulation, "the father of English poetry," the institution of Chaucer's fatherhood has been seen as a 'phenomenon of subjection'. Seth Lerer, to take an example, categorically states that Chaucer "creates the persona of the subjugated reader" who is always at the mercy of unquestionable *auctores*," and that the poet sets himself up by finding a strategy to "direct and delimit the interpretative activity of his audience," whose possibilities he always keeps under control.[1] I cannot convince myself that such is the case. Like all originary authors, Chaucer creates the discursive space for his successors to write their era in and this involved the introduction of a less 'totemistic', if not almost sacrilegious, attitude towards the paternal *auctores* than had been the standard practice. In this paper, I will argue that an important strand in Chaucer's poetics is a depreciation of the figure of the father: as such, as the figure of heavenly benevolence and as a literary precursor. This enabled him to conceive of poetry as disentangled from two 'theological' burdens – first,

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the iconolatry of following a consecrated (literary) authority, and, second, the need to convey 'beneficial' meanings of 'intrinsic value', both of which were indispensable components of medieval literature. Central to this programme was a gesture to polyvocal open-endedness which engages readers in active interpretation and demands their interaction as a staple of the game of poetry.

Derek Brewer's are the thought-provoking remarks that "Chaucer's poetry shows no sign of an imagination bothered by a dominating father-figure." Especially on Troilus, Brewer comments that the hero "is not in the least hampered by his father, King Priam, who is barely mentioned" and in Criseyde's case, it is "the absence, the *loss* of a father-figure, of protective authority, which is so disturbing" (43). Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to find a father in Chaucer who is always present, good, wise and benevolent. An example would be Symkyn the miller in *The Reeve's Tale*. Absurdly arrogant, he vaunts his husbandly and paternal authority, bristling with phallic symbols:

> Ay by his belt he baar a long panade,
> And of a swerd ful trenchant was the blade.
> A joly poppere baar he in his pouche;
> Ther was no man, for peril, dorste hym touche.
> A Sheffeld thwitel baar he in his hose.
> (I. 3929-33)

Ever ready to protect his honour, he will counter any threat to his womenfolk "With panade, or with knyf, or boidekyn" (3960). All he manages to bequeath his daughter is his "camus" nose (3934 and 3974), and yet he is determined to protect her virginity and arrange a marriage for her in accordance with the standards of social dignity he arbitrarily takes upon himself to fulfil. Little can, however, avert a resounding failure: unable to assert his paternal and husbandly authority, he will preserve neither his daughter's maidenhood nor his wife's fidelity, reduced to impotence by the two young men from Cambridge.

The Canterbury pilgrims feature one prominent father, the Knight. Objections may be raised that his is a belittled portrait, inasmuch as he does exercise a benevolent paternal authority over the pilgrimage: to give an example, he will majestically retain social cohesion by dint of asking Harry Bailly the Host and the Pardoner to kiss and make up after their quarrel and, thus, avoid any breaches in the fellowship. But it is not without significance, I think, that his relationship with his physical son, the Squire, is dwindled to the impersonality of the social aspect of a squire serving in his lord's household: any warmth in their relationship is absent and all we hear is that the son "carf biforn his fader at the table" (I. 100).[2]

These are literal fathers. The absence of the fatherly figure could also be ascertained in the marked departure of the authoritative informant in Chaucer's *oraculum*, *The Parliament of Fowls*. Macrobius defined the genre as a dream in which "a parent, or a pious or revered man, or a priest, or even a god appears and offers advice or information" (90). Chaucer tells of how he read the *Somnium*

Scipionis, the exemplary work of the genre, and then had a dream, in which Scipio Africanus the elder, its father-figure, appeared to him. Africanus promises Chaucer a reward for the labours he will undertake, and shows him a double gate which leads both to a "blysful place" and "the mortal strokes of the spere" according to the inscriptions above it. He pushes him firmly in, comforts him in his indecision and fear by leading him by the hand, and then vanishes never to be mentioned again. Bereft of paternal guidance, Chaucer is left to deal with the uncertainties of the dream on his own.

A. C. Spearing very interestingly argued that Chaucer's *oracula* might best be seen as 'anti-*oracula*': as such they may typify the general tendency of Chaucer's age to question the patriarchal and authoritarian bent of the culture it inherited (Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, 11). The argument seems to be particularly convincing. Events like the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 and the emergence of the Lollard movement at the end of the fourteenth century are but examples of a strong anti-hierarchical tendency in public life. Literature displays equally colossal subversions: *Piers Plowman*, with the reduction of Holy Church from an awe-inspiring figure to a crumbling barn, and *Pearl*, with that extraordinary reversal of expectation, the only instance in medieval English literature, to my knowledge, that renders the father the pupil and the child the teacher.[3] But Chaucer is singular, I would still think, not only in the persistence with which he presents paternal authority as cruel but also in that he goes further than most of his contemporaries in implicating an increasingly complex cluster of paternal figures – the divine is one.

A case in point is *The Clerk's Tale*, where King Walter spends a lifetime putting his wife Griselda to trials of utmost severity. To test her loyalty to him, he takes away their newborn children, first one, then the other, and has Griselda believe he executes them. Later he sends her away in order to get married to a younger woman, in fact their daughter, only after having asked Griselda to serve at his wedding table. Her love and obedience proved unwavering, Walter finally reinstates his wife, and the tale will conclude in a long parallelism of Griselda's position in relation to her husband with the human position in relation to God (IV.1149-62). But Walter's cruelty is so recent that Griselda's faith in him as a "benygne fader" is rendered an impossibility calculated to be striking. The difficulty of maintaining a belief in the paternal figure raises a silent disquiet with religious resonance:

> O tendre, o deere, o yonge children myne!
> Youre woful mooder wende stedfastly
> That crueel houndes or som foul vermyne
> Hadde eten yow; but God of his mercy
> And youre benyngne fader tendrely
> Hath doon yow kept (...).
>
> (IV. 1093-8)

The most moving presentation of father-son relationship is undoubtedly the Monk's "tragedie" of Erl Hugelyn of Pyze (VII. 2407-62), who was imprisoned with his children by his enemy "Roger, which that bisshop was of Pize" (2416), and left to die of starvation.[4] Chaucer acknowledges Dante as his authority for this story (2459-62) and his choice of a source cannot be fortuitous. The association with the heavenly father seems to have been Dante's intention. A desperate son turns helpless to Dante's Ugolino: "Padre mio, ché non m' aiuti?"[5] – an apostrophe disconcertingly reminiscent of "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). As Piero Boitani suggested (60), the way Ugolino's children beg him for bread, "i miei figliuoli / ch' eran con meco, e dimandar del pane" (33: 38-9), echoes the prayer addressed to the heavenly father, "give us our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). Chaucer will further the ominous effect. He gives the prayer to the most innocent son, a three-year-old child, and expands it to stanza length. What is pronounced is the unwarranted bodily pain to be inflicted at the father's will: after intensifying the rather placid Dantean "Padre, assai ci fia men doglia / se tu mangi di noi" (61-2) to "Fader, do nat so, allas! / But rather ete the flessh upon us two. / Oure flessh thou yaf us, take oure flessh us fro" (2449-51), he adds the poignant, "And ete ynogh" (2452).[6] Much more than in Dante, the potential horror is alarming: Chaucer suggests that the power of the father over his children may extend to a right to devour them. More disturbingly, such a power is associated with God, daily addressed as "Our Father." As Jill Mann commented, "the Christian God threatens to transform himself into the pagan god Saturn, the god who devoured his own children."

Chaucer will manage to give this a subtler spin. In *The Man of Law's Tale* he will not hesitate to articulate a reverberating indignation at God's cruelty. Constance prays to the Virgin Mary:

> 'Mooder,' quod she, 'and mayde bright, Marie,
> Sooth is that thurgh wommanes eggement
> Mankynde was lorn, and damned ay to dye,
> For which thy child was on a croys yrent.
> Thy blisful eyen sawe al his torment;
> Thanne is ther no comparison bitwene
> Thy wo and any wo man may sustene.
> Thow sawe thy child yslayn bifore thyne yen,
> And yet now lyveth my litel child, parfay!
> Now, lady bright, to whom alle woful cryen,
> Thow glorie of wommanhede, thow faire may,
> Thow haven of refut, brighte sterre of day,
> Rewe on my child, that of thy gentillesse
> Rewest on every reweful in distresse.'
>
> (II. 841-54)

It is precisely Constance's parallel experience to Mary's (even greater) suffering that renders her piteous question to her child, "Why wil thyn harde fader han thee spilt?" (857), one that could potentially have been addressed to Jesus by Mary at the crucifixion. And if the cruelty of Alla (the father in the tale) is, as we know, only apparent, since he has not in fact ordered the death of his child, God is strikingly seen in the light of a father who actually did slay his son.[7] The theme of indignation against the divine Father is woven even more ingeniously in *The Prioress's Tale*, where the devout seven-year old son of an unprotected widow is abducted, murdered and cast in a privy by the usual instruments of the fiend in the Middle Ages, the "yvele" Jews. The case could be made that it is the absence of the father, human or divine, which indeed allows the narration to build a world of tenderness between mother and son. Nonetheless, a major effect of this absence is that it raises a yearning for the strong, protective father who could decisively put an end to the ordeal caused by Satan and his despicable "Jewerye" – a yearning bordering on indignation against the father who forsakes mother and child. Very much as in *The Man of Law's Tale*, there exists the same disconcerting questioning of the Father's benevolence.

This questioning is not limited to the divine. My contention here is that Chaucer extends the casting of doubt onto secular authority as well. Constance of *The Man of Law's Tale* is bound to be subject to the will of her father. Her lament on the destiny of women,

> 'Allas, unto the Barbre nacioun
> I moste anoon, syn that it is youre wille;
> But Crist, that starf for our redempcioun
> So yeve me grace his heestes to fulfille!
> I, wrecche womman, no fors though I spille!
> Wommen are born to thraldom and penance,
> And to been under mannes governance'
> (II. 281-7)

appears to be based on a clearly 'female' subject, God's decree that after eating the apple, Eve and her daughters will be doomed to pain. To remember Genesis (3:16):

> Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children; and thy desire *shall be* to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

And yet, her lament is larger than female subjection. The words that carry the most weight are "thraldom" and "governance", which combine submission of *humankind in general* to a benevolent God with bondage to social hierarchy.[8] Constance's very helplessness before the paternal / husbandly authority may start as poignancy towards the (divine) father but culminates in investing the concept of "subjeccioun" to "governance" with a sense of bewilderment.[9]

I will now turn to Chaucer's attitude to his literary precursors. In sharp contradistinction to medieval practice, Chaucer displays a pronounced unwillingness to acknowledge the authority of his sources as paternal. Indeed, in doing this he has no qualms about going against the grain: there is ample precedence for seeing the authority of the literary progenitors over their successors as analogous to the authority of the father over his son. To mention but just a few examples from writers of late antiquity widely popular in the Middle Ages, Lucretius calls Epicurus a father; Horace and Propertius refer to Ennius as father; Cicero calls Isocrates a father of eloquence and Herodotus the father of history.[10]

Throughout his career Chaucer is in fruitful dialogue with established literary sources. He often discloses that he is indebted to other writers, either by means of a vague reference, as in *The Knight's Tale* – "Whilom, as olde stories tellen us" (I. 859) – or a little more specifically, as in *The Wife of Bath's Tale* – "The remenant of the tale if ye wol heere, / Redeth Ovyde, and ther ye may it leere" (III. 981-2) – and in *Troilus and Criseyde* – "In Omer, or in Dares, or in Dite, / Whoso that kan may rede hem as they write" (I. 146-7). What is striking in many of his acknowledgements is an 'irreverent' transcendence of authorities. Dido's life (lines 924-1367 in *The Legend of Good Women*) begins with the famous invocation to Virgil and the statement that Chaucer wishes to "take / The tenor" (928-9) from him and follow his lantern.[11] We realise immediately, however, that Chaucer has ingeniously switched his *exempla* and identified his subject not as "*arma virumque*," as is Virgil's massively renowned one, but as "How Eneas to Dido was forsworn" (927), that is, the theme of Ovid's *Heroides*.[12] Further, the poem is scattered with the devices of *praecisio* and *occupatio* – cutting short and passing over – with a frequency that verges on parody. He shuns, for example, Virgil's explanation of how Dido came to "Libie:" "It nedeth nat, it were but los of tyme" (997), and "I coude folwe, word for word, Virgile, / But it wolde lasten al to longe while" (1002-3). The legend will close with an insolent throw-away suggestion along the lines of 'if you want to hear more, go to Ovid' (1366-7). Elsewhere, with heavy-handed excuses of length (or the modesty topos), he will leave out aspects of his source. In *The Clerk's Prologue*, talking of Petrarch's descriptive prologue to his Latin story *De obedientia ac fide uxoria mythologia*, Chaucer runs the sacred forefather down:

> The which a long thyng were to devyse.
> And trewely, as to my juggement,
> Me thynketh it a thyng impertinent,
> Save that he wole conveyen his mateere.
> (IV. 52-5)

Each *aposiopesis* reverberates with dismissal: Chaucer simply refuses to approach the revered *auctor* in the expected and hallowed way.[13] Nor does he hesitate to intervene in order to amend the credibility of no less a figure than Virgil. Of the implausible incident of Venus making Eneas invisible, Chaucer says:

> I can nat seyn if that it be possible,
> But Venus hadde hym maked invysible –
> Thus seyth the bok, withouten any les.
> (*The Legend of Good Women*, 1020-2)

By implying the possibility of Virgil's lying, Chaucer manages to corrode the traditional reverence for Virgil's paternal authority with scepticism.

A digression to medieval theory of authorship may be useful at this point to pursue the argument of Chaucer's irreverence to his literary predecessors. Bonaventure in his definition of the quadripartite hierarchy of writers, which heavily influenced literary activity from the mid-thirteenth century on, distinguished the *scriptor*, who contributes nothing of his own but carefully copies other people's material "nihil mutando"; the *compilator*, who adds together others' statements; the *commentator*, who explains the views of other men, adding something of his own only to explain and clarify; and, most importantly, the *auctor*, who alone writes "de suo" (see Appendix). A crucial dimension is that veracity and sagacity, preciously cherished qualities in any medieval writing, emanated from the 'intrinsic value' of a literary work, which meant that, as opposed to the fables of (pagan) poets, it had to conform to the Christian truth. An *auctor* was not merely to be read but also to be profoundly revered as someone mediating between God and man and revealing heavenly *dicta*.[14] How closely associated the status of the *auctor* and his subject matter are with the divine can be seen in Bonaventure's employing his hierarchy throughout his commentaries on Scripture: God is the source of all *auctoritas* and a strong line connects him with the human *auctor* who is primarily responsible for letting the Christian word be known.[15]

Minnis argues that it is a constant in Chaucer's poetry to pose as a *compilator*, modestly deferring to the *auctoritas* of his sources and disclaiming any responsibility for what he is repeating – whether good or bad (Minnis, *Medieval Theory*, 10). It is true that Chaucer does sometimes appear to be taking essentially the stance of the scholastic *compilator*, thus axiomatically revering his *auctores*, notably in the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, where he warns "lyte Lowys," his own son:

> considre wel that I ne usurpe not to have founden this werk of my labour or of myn engyn. I n' am but a lewd compilator of the labour of olde astrologiens, and have it translatid in myn Englissh oonly for thy doctrine. (59-64)

But I do not believe that all literary practice of any age can do is to strive to fashion itself in accordance with the prevailing literary theory. Rather, it would seem that Chaucer often discoursed with it in a very subversive way.[16] There are works, for example, where the substitution of the due deference to his literary fathers with a playful attitude seems to be a token of a new conception of literature – my example is the notorious Lollius, Chaucer's fictitious authority for his "*Trojan matter*".[17] It is fairly certain, after Kittredge's masterly article, that Lollius is nothing but a phantom, even a literary construction – a friend of Horace, transformed into the author of a lost work on the Trojan War by a medieval misreading.[18] Kittredge's view is that Lollius is a "transparent literary artifice" and that it is unlikely the learned friends to whom Chaucer dedicated *Troilus* would have been deceived, or even were meant to be deceived, while the less educated members of his audience might have been impressed by his erudition.[19] If this is the case, if the hallowed persona of the *auctor* is not to be taken seriously, then a poet can have absolutely no scruples about drawing material for his "translacions and enditynges of wordly vanitees" from 'suspect' sources: a doubtful dream, an obscure chronicler, a drunken miller – put differently, Chaucer's thematics. Rarely had the mendacity of poetry been more blissfully celebrated. Far from a moral catastrophe, this signals the emergence of a writer confident of his own powers, and completely untroubled by demands for the theological 'intrinsic value' of fiction.

If Chaucer is so lacking in dutifulness to the authority of the fathers, what is his attitude with regard to his own identity as an author? There are times when he is extremely meticulous in averting the possibility of investing himself with paternal authority.[20] In itself, this is quite a paradox, for if he is to occupy the pedestal of the Father-figure in English poetry, it would be imperative that he create the semiotic space where he can claim his role.[21] And yet, the first of what have been called Chaucer's 'authorial signatures',[22] by means of which Chaucer defines himself as an *auctor*, is a playful undermining of the 'totemistic' respect traditionally paid to literary fathers. The company of pilgrims first falling into "fellowshipe", they ask the Host to be their "governour", to which they add a further duty: he will have to be "of oure tales juge and reportour" (I. 814). Harry will be a mere "reportour", an umpire in the tale-telling contest. Given Bonaventure's quadripartite definition, Harry is assigned the oral equivalent of a scribe, the lowest figure in the hierarchy. Chaucer's disciple, Thomas Hoccleve, will helpfully gloss a little later the contradistinction between an *autour* and a *reportour* in his *Dialogus cum amico*:

> Considereth / ther-of / was I noon Auctour;
> I nas in that caas / but reportour
> Of folkes tales / as they seide / I wroot:
> I nat affermed it on hem / god woot![23]

The bottom of the ranking necessitates the top, and the opposition between a "reportour" and an "auctour" in the *Canterbury Tales* would appear to establish Chaucer as the omnipotent, omniscient Authority outside the text, as opposed to the Host, the "reportour" inside it. Once recognised as an *auctor*, Chaucer would be assigned a position in the pantheon of the Fathers of poetry and the daunting task expected from medieval authors, namely, to complete a sequence of poetic activity joining pagan antiquity and the Christian present.[24] It is hardly possible to think of a loftier task for a literary practitioner. Accordingly, the decorum Chaucer will use for his first 'authorial signature' is the immensely prestigious 'sixth-of-six' topos, most famously taken up by no less a Father than Dante himself, when in the *Inferno* he saw the great shades approaching Virgil and himself:

> Quelli è Omero poeta sovrano;
> l' altro è Orazio satiro che vene;
> Ovidio è 'l terzo, e l' ultimo Lucano
> (4: 88-90)

so that he found himself, "sesto tra cotanto senno" (102).

Chaucer will simply deflate all this. Instead of these sacred fathers, among the Canterbury Pilgrims

> Ther was also a REVE, and a MILLERE,
> A SOMNOUR, and a PARDONER also,
> A MAUNCIPLE, and myself – ther were namo.
> (I. 542-4)

He chooses to inaugurate his fatherly authority amidst a low bunch, and friskily exchange the eternal glory of the past authors for what will turn out to be a celebration of the here and now, a lively affirmation of poetry's capacity to emerge from what seemed to have been of scant historical significance.

This denial of paternal authority is analogous to a *cataphasis* of open-endedness, and punctuates a process towards what Roland Barthes called "textualization of the work". "The author," Barthes wrote, "is reputed the father and owner of his work," whereas "the text ... reads without the inscription of the Father." And "a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings ... blend and clash."[25]

Chaucer's unwillingness to assume paternal authority is consistent throughout his career. It has often been noted how modest and self-effacing his narrators are, from the obtuse dreamer in the *Book of the Duchess*, through the diligent but incompetent clerk in *Troilus and Criseyde* to the "lewd compilator" of the *Astrolabe*. It will reach a path-breaking crescendo in his consistent aversion to explicitly declaring the meaning of his poetry. No doubt, indications to the audience as to the drawing of conclusions do appear in the form of remarks such as "Taketh the moralite, goode men" (VII. 3440), or ponderous admonitions like "Lordynges, by this ensample..., / Beth war" (IX. 309-10). But what seems to permeate Chaucer's *oeuvre* is a persistent relinquishment of authoritative interpretation, a relentless refusal of the fatherly guiding security. Two major poems break off immediately prior to the pronouncement of their ultimate meaning: *The House of Fame*, upon the dreamer glimpsing the "man of gret auctorite" (2158), who despite expectations will never profess what the poem was about, and *The Legend of Good Women*, on the astonishing line "This tale is seyd for this conclusioun –" (2723).[26]

This withdrawal of authority leads to a text which announces, and rejoices in, its own unfinished nature. In a number of important senses, the *Canterbury Tales* resists closure and remains essentially fragmentary. Beyond Chaucer's refusal to invest authority in his narrators, one could find numerous indications of Chaucer's disinclination to fixedness: narratives are distributed among many voices, nowhere is there the Gowerian genius figure as authoritative interpreter,[27] Chaucer takes minimal interest in devices such as glossaries, by which a lot of his contemporaries stabilized word meaning and promoted monovocality. Above all, after six hundred year of rigorous editing and criticism, scholarship is still at a loss about the order of the tales: no internal evidence has been found, with the exception of the first and the last (tenth) fragments, and their position has been entirely a matter of scribal and editorial speculation.[28] Derek Pearsall observes that the work should ideally be presented to modern readers "partly as a bound book (with the first and last fragments fixed) and partly as a set of fragments in folders, with the incomplete information as to their nature and placement fully displayed" (23). To the degree that a contemporary response to Chaucer can be reconstructed at all, this response must be imagined less as contemplation of a finished order and more as an awareness of local juxtaposition, of ideas placed side by side, in unresolved contention.[29]

The theology of the Father was dispersed when the sacred *auctores* were seen to be shaky and Chaucer refused to take their place. Freed from any reference to permanent categories, the text will pass the interpretative onus onto the reader. The pilgrim Chaucer means *The Tale of Melibee* as a *fürstenspiegel*, a guiding mirror for princes, while for the Host it was exclusively a tale about how wives should behave, an opportunity to ponder the hardship inflicted upon him by his virago of a wife: the text itself will never arbitrate the diversification, and this polyvocality will establish an incessant chain of decoding on the part of the reader as a chief element in ensuring that poetry works.[30] Chaucer's representation of the reader-text relationship never asserts the primacy of the writer's authority. On the contrary, its effect pivots on a dialogic creation of meaning. Chaucer in the fourteenth century has turned the 'translatio (or rather, *discessio*) auctorum' into an opportunity to animate belief in interpretative possibility within an irrevocably fragmented language.[31] But this is just one of the wonderful things about studying Chaucer in the twentieth century. Or should I say twenty-first?

APPENDIX: Bonaventure's definition of authorship

Procœmi quæstio 4, Conclusio: *Petrus Lombardus, Episcopus Parisiensis, est auctor huius libri*

RESPONDEO: Ad intelligentiam dictorum notandum, quod quadruplex est modus faciendi librum. Aliquis enim scribit aliena, nihil addendo vel mutando; et iste mere dicitur *scriptor*. Aliquis scribit aliena, addendo, sed non de suo; et iste *compilator* dicitur. Aliquis scribit et aliena et sua, sed aliena tamquam principalia, et sua tamquam annexa ad evidentiam; et iste dicitur *commentator*, non auctor. Aliquis scribit et sua et aliena, sed sua tanquam principalia, aliena tamquam annexa ad confirmationem; et talis debet dici *auctor*. Talis fuit Magister, qui sententias suas ponit et Patrum sententiis confirmat. Unde vere debet dici auctor huius libri.

[(...) the method of making a book is four-fold. For someone writes the material of others, without adding or changing anything: this person is said to be only the *scribe*. Somebody else writes the material of others and makes additions, but nothing of his own: and he is said to be the *compiler*. Somebody else writes both others' and his own material, but he principally uses the material of others and attaches his own so as to clarify it: and he is said to be the *commentator*, not the author. Someone else writes both his own material and that of others, but he principally uses his own and attaches that of others so as to confirm his own: and such must be called the *author*.] (My translation)

Quoted from Bonaventura, *S. Bonaventurae Opera*, vol. 1 (Claras Aquas / Quaracchi, 1882) 14-15.

Notes

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1. Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and his Readers*, 3, 5, 10. See also Louis Montrose, "The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text", whose lead Lerer generally follows and whom he quotes on p. 319.
2. Yet another example of a problematic father-son relation is the Franklin's with his son. I have greatly benefited from A. C. Spearing's discussion of the father-figure in Chaucer. See his *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry*, 92-110.
3. There is at least one analogue in medieval Greek literature: [St. John Damascene], *Barlaam and Ioasaph*, 228, 526-32, 538, where the Christian Ioasaph catechizes his heathen father. But here, since the son teaches the father in the name of, and by means of, God the Father, the hierarchical structure remains intact.

4. For a very useful discussion of Guelph and Ghibellin polemics, and Chaucer's attitude to political authority in the broader context of late medieval political thought, see Margaret Schlauch, "Chaucer's Doctrine of Kings and Tyrants."
5. *Inferno*, Canto 33, l. 69. All references to Dante are to the edition by Charles Singleton (Bollingen series 80, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970) and will be given parenthetically in the text by canto and line number.
6. On Dante straddling the spiritual and the historical/corporeal, see Erich Auerbach, *Literary Language and its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, 307-11.
7. The notion was not unthinkable in fourteenth-century England. William Langland speaks of theologising laymen who "telleth ... of the trinite hou two slowen the thridde." See *Piers Plowman: The A-Version*, Passus XI: 38-40.
8. Cf. *Middle English Dictiorary* "governaunce" 1a and 3.
9. David Wallace disagrees on the political nuance of "governance". In a different context, he has noted that "When Chaucer wishes it to be understood that a specific governour is also a lord (or a god), he makes the qualification with evident care." See his *Chaucerian Polity*, 70-1.
10. Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Book 3, ll. 9-13; Horace, Epistle 19, line 7; Propertius, *Elegies*, Book 3:3, line 6; Cicero, *De oratore*, Book 2, 3:10; and Cicero, *De legibus*, I:5. Descent and inheritance as an explanatory model for literature has survived to Harold Bloom's conception of the "anxiety of influence". See also Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance,* 108-9.
11. The lantern could be an unacknowledged intertextual allusion to Dante, f. ex. "O de li altri poeti onore e lume" (*Inferno* 1, 82), and

    e prima appresso Dio m' alluminasti.
    Facesti come quei che va di notte,
    che porta il lume dietro e sé non giova,
    ma dopo sé fa le persone dotte.
    (*Purgatorio* 22: 66-9)

12. Mystifying his audience about his sources could also be the case in the beginning of *The Physician's Tale*, where Chaucer straightforwardly names his source, Titus Livius ("Ther was, as telleth Titus Livius, / A knyght that...", VI. 1-2), only to have the validity of his attribution convincingly questioned by twentieth-century scholarship: Chaucer might as well have found his source in the *Roman de la Rose*. See Edgar F. Shannon, "The Physician's Tale," in *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's* Canterbury Tales, ed. W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster, 399-401, esp. 399 n3 for a serviceable bibliography.
13. Also note the same attitude in l. 314, for example, in Dido's life in the *House of Fame*: Chaucer will interrupt Dido's plaints to affirm that this is indeed how he saw her: "Non other auctour allege I" (314). For a most sensitive reading, see Peter Dronke, "Dido's Lament: From Medieval Latin Lyric to Chaucer," in *Kontinuität und Wandel: Lateinische Poesie von Naerius bis Baudelaire*, 364-90.

    For a detailed discussion of how Chaucer applies his "juggement" to his *auctour*'s work and even protests against Petrarch's condescending attitude to Walter's cruelty, see A. C. Spearing, *Criticism and Medieval Poetry*, chapter 4.
14. See M.-D. Chenu, "Auctor, actor, autor."
15. See A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, esp. 10, which remains the standard discussion of Bonaventure's theory. Very interesting, despite its gaps, is also Chenu, *Introduction à l'étude de saint*

Thomas d'Aquin.

16. Judson Boyce Allen took a completely different position. For him "Chaucer's intellectual and creative *modus agendi*" would have been that "which his contemporaries who wrote commentaries defined as normal for literary works." See his *The Ethical Poetic of the Middle Ages: A Decorum of Convenient Distinction*, p. 105. Minnis does not take his claims so far. See his review of Allen's book in *Speculum* 59 (1984): 365.
17. See *Troilus and Criseyde*, 1.394, 5.1653, and *The House of Fame*, 1468.
18. Confirmatory evidence is offered by Robert A. Pratt, "A Note on Chaucer's Lollius".
19. *Troilus and Criseyde* is only one of a long line of medieval works which cite dubious or non-existent sources. For an impressively long list of examples, see Friedrich Wilhelm, "Über fabulistische Quellenangaben" and M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 120.

    As we move along the continuum from history to romance, the authentication by a fictitious author seems to have been essentially a literary convention. Thus, William of Newburgh accused Geoffrey of Monmouth of fictionality (see William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum anglicarum,* 1:12). Barbour emphasises the "doubill plesaunce" derived from a story which is not only well told, but also true (see John Barbour, *Bruce*, 1:1-8).

    On fictionality see A. J. Minnis, *The Shorter Poems*, 233-7. Also, Bella Millet, "Chaucer, Lollius and the Medieval Theory of Authorship."
20. Of course, in the light of such passages as Chaucer's Retraction, the point should be studied conterminously with its reversal, something which constrictions of space make impossible here. On Chaucer's Retraction, see Jonathan Dent, "Repentance, Art, and Authorship: Chaucer and the Literary Retraction".
21. Scholarship has seen the emergence of Chaucer as the 'father of English literature' and of the English language in general, as the outcome of manoeuvring on the part of Henrician politics to secure the unstable position of the dynasty. Some examples would be John H. Fisher, "A Language Policy for Lancastrian England", who saw Hoccleve and Lydgate praising Chaucer as the pawns of Henry IV's (and especially his son's) decision to shift from French to English as the official language in order to enhance his political position, and Larry Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition* (298), who underlines the initiative of the Plantagenets to seek ideological legitimacy as the force behind the new vernacular tradition. For a different opinion, acknowledging a more active role on these poets' part, see Kostas Yiavis, "English Petitionary Poetry at the Beginning of the Fifteenth-Century."
22. The term was introduced by Anne Middleton in her "William Langland's 'Kynde Name:' Authorial Signature and Social Identity in Late Fourteenth-Century England," and discussed by Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, 80-2.
23. Thomas Hoccleve, "Dialogus cum amico," in *Hoccleve's Works: The Minor Poems*, 137, ll. 760-3. The term does not appear anywhere else in Chaucer or in Ricardian poetry. Cf. *Middle English Dictionary*, "reportour."
24. See David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, 80-1; also Wallace, *Chaucer and the Early Writings of Boccaccio*, 50-3, and "Chaucer and Boccaccio's Early Writings," 150-1.
25. See the seminal "The Author" (1968), and "From Work to Text" (1971), both in Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text.*
26. F. N. Robinson (854) wonders: "It is a little surprising that the legend [of Hypermnestra in the *Legend of Good Women*] should have been left incomplete, when the

story was finished and a very few lines would have sufficed to make the application."

27. As opposed to the genius figure of Chaucer's contemporary, John Gower. See his *Confessio amantis*, vols. 1 and 2.

28. See Derek Pearsall, *The Canterbury Tales*, 1-23, for a discussion on the activities of the scribes of the famous Ellesmere and Hengwrt manuscripts, who inaugurated the tradition of editorial interventions.

29. I am indebted to Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, for many ideas in this reading.

30. On *Fürstenspiegel* (Mirror for Princes, κάτοπτρον ηγεμόνων) as a genre the best recent study is Judith Ferster, *Fictions of Advice: The Literature and Politics of Counsel in Late Medieval England*, while Janet Coleman, "English Culture in the Fourteenth Century," esp. 60, remains useful.

31. For language and eloquence as "the most powerful and distinctive aspect – or tool or weapon- of Chaucerian polity," and a determining force of civic life, see Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, 5 and 218.

Perhaps it is not quite by chance that Chaucer's second 'authorial signature' comes from the Man of Law, somebody who draws his expertise from the study of old texts and, like a poet, lives and perishes through his control of the written and spoken word.

For a succinct account of Chaucer's near contemporary Thomas Usk who "had a remarkable and touching faith in the power of the written word to reorganize social reality," see Paul Strohm, *Hocchon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts*, 145.

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Ο θάνατος του πατέρα ως μορφή εξουσίας στον Chaucer

Κωνσταντίνος Γιαβής

Η κριτική έχει συνδέσει την ανάδειξη του Chaucer στον κανόνα της αγγλικής ποιήσης με ένα «φαινόμενο υποταγής»: όπως οι ποιητές των αρχών του 15ου αιώνα τον καθοσίωσαν ως «Πατέρα της αγγλικής ποίησης» και υποκλίθηκαν στο απόλυτο πρότυπο που αναγνώρισαν ότι έθεσε, όμοια ο Chaucer επιβάλλει το αρχέτυπο του αναγνώστη που οφείλει να επαφίεται στο υπέρτατο κύρος των αρχαίων συγγραφέων, ενώ ο ίδιος ο ποιητής στιβαρά ελέγχει, κατευθύνει και ορίζει τον ερμηνευτικό ορίζοντα των ακροατών του.

Σε αυτήν την προσέγγιση θα μπορούσε να αντιταχθεί ότι ο Chaucer, ως πρωτοτυπικός συγγραφέας, δημιουργεί τον κώδικα μέσα στον οποίον (και με τον οποίον) οι μεταγενέστεροί του μπορούν να αρθρώσουν το δικό τους λόγο που δύναται να υπερβαίνει τον αφετηριακό ποιητή. Η διαδικασία αυτή προϋποθέτει την υπόσκαψη της «τοτεμικής» αντίληψης της αυθεντίας των πατέρων, η οποία ήταν μεσαιωνικό θέσφατο-λογοτεχνικό και όχι μόνο. Το άρθρο αυτό υποστηρίζει ότι σημαντικότατη στην ποιητική του Chaucer είναι η απαξίωση της μορφής του Πατέρα –τόσο ως οικογενειακής αρχής, όσο και ως θεϊκής εξουσίας και λογοτεχνικού πρότυπου. Έτσι, ο Chaucer μπόρεσε να φτάσει σε μια σύλληψη της ποίησης απαλλαγμένης από δύο «θεολογικά» βάρη: πρώτον, την εικονολατρία των λογοτεχνικών αυθεντιών, και, δεύτερον, την ανάγκη εκφοράς «ωφέλιμων μηνυμάτων» αυθύπαρκτης αξίας, όπως οι ορθόδοξες κανονιστικές περιγραφές πίστης και συμπεριφοράς. Κεντρική στο εγχείρημά του αυτό ήταν η επίτευξη μίας πολυφωνικότητας, η οποία εμπλέκει τον αναγνώστη/ακροατή σε μία συνεχή πρωτοβουλιακή ερμηνεία κι εννοηματώνει την ενεργό συμμετοχή του σε μία ανοικτή ερμηνευτική διαδικασία ως βασικό συστατικό της ποίησης.