

Introduction

Chaucer and the Book

In a Glasgow copy of a 1602 edition of Chaucer's *Workes*, one reader did some arithmetic in the margin of this otherwise unannotated book. Perusing Chaucer's biography, specifically a section on 'His Death', the reader would have learned that 'Geffrey Chaucer departed out of this world the 25 day of October, in the yeare of our Lord 1400, after hee had liued about 72 yeares'. Quite remarkably, the reader then paused to determine the mathematical difference between Chaucer's time and their own. The numbers scribbled in the page's left-hand margin reveal that this reader lived in '1656', a number from which they subtracted '1400' to arrive at a difference of '256' years.¹ Lacking the convenient labels of 'medieval' and 'Renaissance' or 'early modern' – the periodising boundaries now enshrined in literary history – the seventeenth-century reader's means of approaching the past was to count the number of years in the intervening period since Chaucer's time. In a copy which bears no other traces of contemporary readers' marks, this glimpse of a historically minded reader peering back across the centuries to consider Chaucer's lifetime is striking.² These annotations preserve a sense of the continuity as well as the ruptures of historical time; they imply an awareness of the medieval past as both flowing into the early modern present and as remote enough that its distance had to be computed to be understood. Like the annotator of the Glasgow copy, the readers in this study used books as a means of thinking about the people, culture, and legacy of the medieval

¹ Glasgow, Dr.2.2 (1602; *STC* 5080), sig. cr^v.

² Another copy of Thomas Speght's Chaucer, a 1598 edition at HEHL, carries a similar genre of annotation on its title page, as a reader (perhaps the 'Antho. Heron' who also inscribed his ownership on the title page in 1683) has calculated the difference between the year 1677 and the book's year of publication; see Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Workes of our Antient and Learned English Poet, Geffrey Chaucer, newly printed*, ed. by Thomas Speght (London: Adam Islip, 1598; *STC* 5078), sig. [a]2^r, *EEBO*, HEHL copy, www.proquest.com/books/workes-our-antient-learned-english-poet-geffrey/do-cview/2240864652/se-2?accountid=13042.

past. In creative and often surprising ways, they used books to approach and better apprehend that past.

Throughout this study, I identify Chaucer's books as a rich and generative site of what Jonathan Gil Harris has called 'untimely matter'. Harris's work stresses the polychronic and multitemporal possibilities of early modern objects – that is, their palimpsestic ability to 'collate diverse moments in time'. In considering Books of Hours inherited by post-Reformation readers, he recognises their capacity to sustain 'multiple temporal relations . . . among past, present and future'.³ The Chaucerian books discussed in the following pages are often, like Harris's untimely objects, 'temporally out of step with themselves and their moment'.⁴ *Chaucer's Early Modern Readers* shows that an understanding of the layered, sometimes contradictory, relationships between medieval and early modern books may shed new light on the poet's refashioning in the period. The book's central focus is on fifteenth-century manuscripts of Chaucer, and it discusses how these volumes were read, used, valued, and transformed in an age of the poet's prominence in print.

The reception of medieval English manuscripts constitutes a comparatively small body of scholarship. That observation is summed up in A. S. G. Edwards's pronouncement, in 2011, that 'The history of the post-medieval collecting and study of Middle English manuscripts has yet to be written'.⁵ Today, a recent flurry of incisive monographs by Margaret Connolly, Hannah Ryley, and Elaine Treharne heralds a new wave of interest in the topic.⁶ *Chaucer's Early Modern Readers* joins these studies in answering the call for medievalists to eschew the individual case study in favour of developing 'a synthetic overview of manuscripts and how they work within culture' and 'to begin analyzing the unique contours of manuscript culture writ large'.⁷ As is evident in this study, for their early

³ Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), pp. 4, 17.

⁴ Harris, *Untimely Matter*, p. 10.

⁵ A. S. G. Edwards, 'Sir James Ware, the Collecting of Middle English Manuscripts in Ireland in the Seventeenth Century, and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*', *ChR*, 46.1 (2011), 237–47 (237).

⁶ Treharne, for example, advances 'An architextual approach to the extant medieval book corpus . . . that encourages an audience to see the manuscript as a whole from its mode of production to its inclusion of later notes and traces of use'; see *Perceptions of Medieval Manuscripts: The Phenomenal Book* (Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 105. See also Margaret Connolly, *Sixteenth-Century Readers, Fifteenth-Century Books: Continuities of Reading in the English Reformation* (Cambridge University Press, 2019); Hannah Ryley, *Re-Using Manuscripts in Late Medieval England: Repairing, Recycling, Sharing* (York Medieval Press, 2022).

⁷ Michael Johnston and Michael Van Dussen, 'Introduction', in *The Medieval Manuscript Book: Cultural Approaches* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 1–16 (pp. 1, 3).

modern readers, medieval manuscript books could be closer to a desired past, and were rare, authentic, and worth preserving; on the other hand, they could be corrupt, damaged, difficult to read, less complete, and, for their most zealous critics, potentially dangerous. This work is informed by an appreciation of such contradictions, which build towards a more nuanced picture of the role of the manuscript book in history.

Corollary to the book's aim of highlighting the early modern afterlives of fifteenth-century volumes is its intention to refine our understanding of the multiple points of intersection between manuscript and print in the period. In the wake of Elizabeth Eisenstein's field-defining work on the European invention of print, the relationship between manuscripts and printed books has come to be best described as 'less a revolution than an accommodation' between the two forms.⁸ This book pushes the now widely adopted idea of coexistence between print and manuscript further, by illustrating that early modern attitudes towards the medieval author were shaped as much by old manuscript books as by the printed books whose company they kept in the lives and libraries of readers. In an essay on the printing of ephemera and other 'little jobs', Peter Stallybrass ventures that 'printing's most revolutionary effect was on manuscript', and suggests some of the means by which print gave (and still gives) rise to writing by hand.⁹ Focussing mainly on the incunabula period, and in a similar vein, Aditi Nafde has documented the scribal reliance on printed books as exemplars for newly copied manuscripts.¹⁰ Like those studies, *Chaucer's Early Modern Readers* asserts print's role in sustaining manuscript culture during the pre-modern period. The medieval manuscripts discussed in the following pages preserve unexpected and compelling evidence of print's influence on Chaucer's early modern reception. Each chapter argues that material interventions made by readers in their manuscripts – correcting, completing, supplementing, and authorising – reflect conventions which circulated in print and, in a wider sense, convey prevailing preoccupations

⁸ David McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order, 1450–1830* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 3; Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge University Press, 1980).

⁹ Peter Stallybrass, "'Little Jobs': Broadides and the Printing Revolution', in *Agent of Change: Print Culture Studies After Elizabeth L. Eisenstein*, ed. by Sabrina A. Baron, Eric N. Lindquist, and Eleanor F. Shevlin (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), pp. 315–41 (p. 340).

¹⁰ See Aditi Nafde, 'Replicating the Mechanical Print Aesthetic in Manuscripts before circa 1500', *Digital Philology: A Journal of Medieval Cultures*, 9.2 (2020), 120–44; and Nafde, 'Gower from Print to Manuscript: Copying Caxton in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Hatton 51', in *John Gower in Manuscripts and Early Printed Books*, ed. by Martha Driver, Derek Pearsall, and R. F. Yeager (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2020), pp. 189–200.

about Chaucer in the period: the antiquity and accuracy of his words, the completeness of individual texts and of the canon, and the figure of the author himself. Such evidence of the interactions between fifteenth-century manuscripts and their early modern analogues therefore has much to offer Chaucerians and historians of the book alike.

Despite the longstanding scholarly interest in Chaucer's reception in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the afterlives of his medieval manuscripts have not yet been the subject of an extended study. However, Chaucer is the ideal subject for a study of the relationship between old books and new ones because his works were continuously produced, read, discussed, imitated, and even vocally repudiated in the centuries after his death, placing him at the epicentre of concerns about the medieval past in the early modern present. Chaucer's reputation in the early modern period is characterised both by continuity and by radical change. The idea of his antiquity itself offered the grounds for his veneration and a convenient pretext for his continued reinvention, granting him (in the words of Megan L. Cook) a peculiar 'temporal doubleness'.¹¹ The books studied in this work register the extent to which early modern people saw Chaucer with this type of double vision and, like Harris's untimely objects, they belong at once to the medieval past and the early modern period. As will become clear, such objects reveal the practices through which readers tried to reconcile received ideas about the authority of the past in relation to the present: from repairing old copies with freshly transcribed parchment supply leaves, to supplementing manuscripts with texts newly admitted to the canon, to the painstaking collation and correction of the work of fifteenth-century scribes with later printed texts. They document the creative, appropriative, invasive, and imitative habits by which early modern readers remade their old books in the image of new ones. Throughout, I emphasise the agency of scholars, antiquaries, collectors, and many nameless readers into whose hands manuscript books passed and whose uses of those books reveal the desires that they brought to their copies of Chaucer.

Such interventions matter for two major reasons. First, this evidence of readers' willingness to alter Chaucer's manuscript books disrupts cultural assumptions about the value of the old in relation to the new. It comes up against the proverbial assertion – memorably dramatised by the early seventeenth-century incarnation of John Gower that appeared on stage

¹¹ Megan L. Cook, *The Poet and the Antiquaries: Chaucerian Scholarship and the Rise of Literary History, 1532–1635* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), p. 19.

in *Pericles* – that old things, especially stories, were better than new ones.¹² And it supports instead Daniel Woolf's observation that the early modern historical sensibility emerged in a context where 'such ingrown assumptions as the intrinsic value of oldness were being assailed increasingly by a social, cultural and technological environment in which new things and events were increasingly evident to the senses'.¹³ As the ensuing discussions will make clear, Chaucer's antiquity was an ingredient essential to his early modern prominence, but the value assigned to his oldness was far from uncomplicated or unqualified. The readers who subjected Chaucer's old manuscript books to vigorous correction, updating, and improvement according to printed exemplars saw their actions as consistent with the desire to preserve his works for a new age. The contradictions inherent to such beliefs help to illuminate the readiness with which Chaucer was radically refashioned in the early modern period.

Second, the interventions made by readers in medieval manuscript copies of Chaucer provide a material complement to the compelling and widely accepted idea that the early modern period remade or even invented him in consequential ways. Tim Machan's 1995 essay 'Speght's "Works" and the Invention of Chaucer' is a touchstone in this respect, arguing that 'Speght figuratively and materially helped to construct an English literary tradition that began with Chaucer'.¹⁴ The 2020 *Oxford Handbook of Chaucer* repeats in its marketing blurb the dictum that '[e]very age remakes its own Chaucer'.¹⁵ I do not wish to rebut such declarations, but do want to point out that amidst the crystallisation of this view in studies of Chaucer's reception – and in particular, the attribution of that reinvention to single actors, editions, or moments in time – it is easy to lose sight of the fact that the remaking of Chaucer was an active, dynamic process which relied for its materialisation as much on generations of readers as on Speght and his collaborators themselves. The *Workes* collected by Speght and other editors form the basis of many of the stories of Chaucer's reception told in this book, but my focus is on the readers who engaged with these print

¹² 'Et bonum quo antiquius eo melius.' William Shakespeare, *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, Sc. 1, ed. by Roger Warren, in *The Oxford Shakespeare*, ed. by Stanley Wells (Oxford University Press, 2003). Oxford Scholarly Editions Online (2012), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oseo/instance.0000596>

¹³ Daniel R. Woolf, *The Social Circulation of the Past: English Historical Culture, 1500–1730* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 45.

¹⁴ Tim William Machan, 'Speght's "Works" and the Invention of Chaucer', *Text*, 8 (1995), 145–70 (170).

¹⁵ *The Oxford Handbook of Chaucer*, ed. by Suzanne Conklin Akbari and James Simpson (Oxford University Press, 2020). The assertion echoes a statement made by Helen Cooper (see Chapter 3, p. 127), but my point is the consistency of this language and the process it describes.

authorities and their earlier manuscript counterparts. In the hands of readers, the early modern remaking of Chaucer takes on a new and vivid material dimension.

The readerly and scholarly attention to Chaucer scrutinised (and indeed perpetuated) in this book is predicated on the cultural import that derives much of its power from his antiquity. In early print, Chaucer's antiquity was marked by the fact that his first printers took pains to position him as historically distant. 'The philologist's characteristic posture is melancholy at the tomb', James Simpson has observed, and it is at that locus, Chaucer's Westminster tomb, that the humanist veneration of the English author has been said to begin.¹⁶ It began, more precisely, in books issuing from the press of William Caxton, who dutifully reprinted the Latin epitaph from Chaucer's tomb in his edition of *Boece*, and who composed prologues and epilogues in which the dead poet became 'the subject of a learned elegy, the object of historical recovery, a figure in the origins of literary history from ancient times to the present'.¹⁷ In England as on the Continent, the book itself became both the instrument and the object of philological rediscovery.

Nearly 200 years after Caxton, in 1646, the reader of the Glasgow copy with which I began was still wondering about Chaucer's life and times, for questions about this poet from the past had become no less pressing. The very book in which the annotations were made was brimming with reminders of the poet's historical distance from the reader's present day. The edition's full title as published in 1602 was *The Workes of our Ancient and learned English Poet, Geffrey Chaucer, newly Printed*, and its editor was the London schoolmaster Thomas Speght. In a dedication on the leaf immediately following the title page, Speght's 1602 edition assured the reader of the text's integrity and authenticity. In this second edition, Speght writes, '[B]oth by old written Copies, and by Ma. William Thynns praise-worthy labours, I haue reformed the whole Worke, whereby Chaucer for the most part is restored to his owne Antiquitie'.¹⁸ This 'Antiquitie' was inalienably bound up with Chaucer's early modern identity, and provided the pretext for the work of philological recovery which

¹⁶ James Simpson, 'Diachronic History and the Shortcomings of Medieval Studies', in *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England*, ed. by Gordon McMullan and David Matthews (Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 17–30 (p. 27); Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* (Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 147–68.

¹⁷ Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers*, pp. 148, 152–3.

¹⁸ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Workes of our Ancient and learned English Poet, Geffrey Chaucer, newly Printed*, ed. by Thomas Speght (London: Adam Islip, 1602; STC 5080), sig. [a]3^r. Further references to the 1598 and 1602 *Workes* are to the Bodmer copies, unless otherwise noted.

Speght saw himself and his fellow editors (like Thynne) as undertaking. The insistence that the poet be restored to ‘his *owne* Antiquitie’ is revealing in this respect, for the phrase banishes Chaucer to a faraway past from which he could be recovered heroically by the labours of Speght and his colleagues. ‘Historical rupture’, as Simpson reminds us, ‘is the premise of the philological project’, and such an endeavour pursues ‘the past textual object [which] can be seen “in its *own* terms”’.¹⁹

Accordingly, and even as they present Chaucer in a new guise, the printed editions trace their own descent from older manuscript books. Those new prints are everywhere branded with what Siân Echard has called ‘the mark of the medieval’ – ‘those elements of the book that connect this new [book] to its past’.²⁰ Speght and his fellow editors may have been makers of newly printed books for the rapidly expanding English book trade, but they were also scholars who worked in the humanist tradition and who privileged the ‘old written Copies’ which survived from Chaucer’s time. A verse dialogue included in the paratextual material of Speght’s editions explicitly frames the enterprise of reading Chaucer in terms of old books and new ones. In it, a fictive Renaissance reader professes that, until now, Chaucer has been ‘Unknowne to us, save only by thy bookes’. The poem’s second speaker, ‘Geffrey’, responds that this was true, ‘Till one which saw me there, and knew my friends, / Did bring me forth’.²¹ Although they brought him forth from this assumed oblivion in a newly printed form, the editors’ version of the poet was a ‘conspicuously archival Chaucer’ – from the black letter type in which he was printed, to the conscious archaising of his orthography, to the claim that Speght had ‘repair’d’ and thereby rescued the poet’s works from the dark corners of the past.²² The point about Chaucer’s restoration from archival obscurity by Speght could not be more plainly or prominently stated than it was on two variants of the 1598 title page. There, in a cartouche at the head of an

¹⁹ Simpson, ‘Diachronic History’, p. 27; emphasis added.

²⁰ Siân Echard, *Printing the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. vii. On the use of this rhetoric in relation to early modern manuscripts, see Cathy Shrank, “‘These Few Scribbled Rules’: Representing Scribal Intimacy in Early Modern Print”, *HLQ*, 67.2 (2004), 295–314.

²¹ For discussion of the poem, see Louise M. Bishop, ‘Father Chaucer and the Vivification of Print’, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 106.3 (2007), 336–63 (352–3); Stephanie Trigg, *Congenial Souls: Reading Chaucer from Medieval to Postmodern* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 133–4; David Matthews, ‘Public Ambition, Private Desire, and the Last Tudor Chaucer’, in McMullan and Matthews, pp. 74–88 (p. 75); and Cook, *Poet and the Antiquaries*, pp. 1–2.

²² Jennifer Summit, *Memory’s Library: Medieval Books in Early Modern England* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 192.

elaborate architectural frontispiece which resembles a monument, is an extract from Chaucer's own *Parliament of Fowles*, which asserts the ability of 'old books' to yield 'al this new science that men lere'.²³ To the literary historian looking back today, Speght's gesture is a poignant one for, as Helen Cooper puts it, '[Chaucer] thought of himself as the new corn; already, to his 1598 editors, he was the old field'.²⁴ These editions, meanwhile, embodied the 'new science' of the age, representing bibliographic, lexicographic, and iconographic firsts which elevated Chaucer according to the humanist ideals of the Renaissance edition.

For all that sense of Chaucer's historical remoteness cultivated by the prints, his was a towering presence in early modern England. He had already enjoyed an outsized influence in the fifteenth century, thanks to a series of passionate supporters and prolific imitators, but in the sixteenth century he became a cultural behemoth. The inestimable impact of Chaucer's writing on the major authors of the early modern period has long been acknowledged, and the extent of this influence is still being mapped today.²⁵ More than those of any other medieval English author, his works metamorphosed into new and plentiful adaptations in the subsequent centuries while the accepted canon underwent its own spectacular transformations and expansions, as Protestants, Catholics, antiquaries, philologists, and men of letters all bent Chaucer to their own purposes. 'None of the other English works of literature inherited from the Middle Ages carried with them this kind of cultural urgency', observes Cooper.²⁶ In 1570, the reformist historian John Foxe could enthuse that 'Chaucers workes be all printed in one volume, and therefore knowen to all men'.²⁷ The version of Chaucer read by (for example) Spenser and Shakespeare, or Milton and Dryden – to say nothing of generations of readers across two centuries – was therefore refracted through a distinctly early modern understanding of the poet and his works. Given his imposing

²³ The variant title pages which print these lines are *STC* 5078 and 5079 (but not 5077); discussed in Chapter 3, pp. 133–6; see also Figure 3.1.

²⁴ Helen Cooper, 'Chaucerian Representation', in *New Readings of Chaucer's Poetry*, ed. by Robert G. Benson and Susan J. Ridyard (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), pp. 7–29 (p. 14).

²⁵ An early study is Ann Thompson, *Shakespeare's Chaucer: A Study in Literary Origins* (Liverpool University Press, 1978). Recent work includes Helen Barr, *Transporting Chaucer* (Manchester University Press, 2014); *Rereading Chaucer and Spenser: Dan Geffrey with the New Poete*, ed. by Rachel Stenner, Tamsin Badcoe, and Gareth Griffith (Manchester University Press, 2019); and Jeff Espie, 'Spenser, Chaucer, and the Renaissance *Squire's Tale*', *Spenser Studies*, 33 (2019), 133–60.

²⁶ Helen Cooper, 'Poetic Fame', in *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*, ed. by Brian Cummings and James Simpson (Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 361–78 (p. 365).

²⁷ John Foxe, *Actes and Monumentes* (London: John Day, 1570; *STC* 11223), vol. II, sig. 3D4^r.

cultural and literary presence in the centuries following his death, it is no accident that modern scholarship has repeatedly turned to Chaucer to think about the persistence and reimagining of the English past in the early modern period.

In its dual emphasis on the neglected afterlives of Chaucer's medieval manuscripts and their deeply intertwined relationships with print, this study places the Chaucerian book at the heart of the poet's early modern reinvention. Commercial success in print has long been identified as essential to Chaucer's early modern prominence, for this was the primary form in which his name and works were encountered. So influential was the philological project undertaken by Speght and editors before him that the history of Chaucer's sixteenth- and seventeenth-century reception has come to be defined by the landmark folio editions of his classically styled *Workes* – of which the first appeared in 1532, marking a bibliographical first for any English poet. Within the study of literary history, the production, circulation, and reception of Chaucer's works have consequently proven a rich seam of inquiry. As Alice Miskimin pronounced in her 1975 study of *The Renaissance Chaucer*, 'The metamorphosis of one poet's book, from manuscript to print, provides a paradigm of literary evolution'.²⁸ Subsequent scholarship on Chaucer's reception has also been animated by questions about the printed books that canonised him.²⁹ The folio editions, as Cook has documented in *The Poet and the Antiquaries*, were part of a broader antiquarian investment in promoting Chaucer's historical and cultural stature during the Renaissance. This book emphasises that Chaucer's medieval manuscripts continued to be collected, studied, and read alongside such volumes, and that they intersected with them in telling ways. Their early modern reception throws new light on contemporary readings and revisions of the poet's oeuvre, and prompts us to recognise print's active role in facilitating the continued use of these older manuscript books.

²⁸ Alice S. Miskimin, *The Renaissance Chaucer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 10.

²⁹ In addition to those already cited, essential studies include A. S. G. Edwards, 'Chaucer from Manuscript to Print: The Social Text and the Critical Text', *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 28.4 (1995), 1–12; Alexandra Gillespie, *Print Culture and the Medieval Author: Chaucer, Lydgate, and Their Books 1473–1557* (Oxford University Press, 2006); Joseph A. Dane, *Who Is Buried in Chaucer's Tomb? Studies in the Reception of Chaucer's Book* (Michigan State University Press, 1998); Alison Wiggins, 'What Did Renaissance Readers Write in Their Printed Copies of Chaucer?', *The Library*, 7th ser., 9.1 (2008), 3–36.

Antiquaries Reading Manuscript and Print

A well-known caricature written by the Jacobean satirist John Earle places the antiquary in the library's recesses, amidst spiders and cobwebs: 'Printed bookes, he contemnes, as a novelty of this latter age, but a Manuscript he pores on everlastingly, especially if the cover be all Moth-eaten'.³⁰ While Earle's extended portrait is satirical, the outlook it describes only exaggerates the quality of bookishness which was known to belong to many enthusiasts in the period. A closer look at the trajectories of medieval manuscripts following the upheavals of the English Reformation will help to elucidate their cultural status and relation to print. By way of routes which are still being mapped, many surviving manuscripts from the dissolved religious houses and institutional collections found their way onto the second-hand market. By the middle of the sixteenth century, stationers who had initially acquired manuscripts for use as waste material were putting these intact whole volumes up for resale.³¹ Oxford's university stationer, Garbrand Herkes, is known to have purchased unwanted manuscripts from All Souls College in 1549–50, and to have sold manuscripts on to local collectors.³² In 1574, John Dee is recorded as having bought a manuscript 'from a stall in London' and Stephen Batman likewise bought a copy of *Piers Plowman* from one 'Harvey in Grac street', probably Gracechurch Street, London.³³ As the century wore on, collectors of modest and greater means alike were able to buy up medieval manuscripts for incorporation into their personal libraries.³⁴ The scholars, antiquaries, and readers who purchased manuscripts after the Reformation were also

³⁰ John Earle, *Micro-cosmographie. Or, a peece of the world discovered* (London: William Stansby, 1628; STC 7441), sig. C2^v–3^r. Discussed further in Daniel R. Woolf, 'Images of the Antiquary in Seventeenth-Century England', in *Visions of Antiquity: The Society of Antiquaries of London 1707–2007*, ed. by Susan Pearce (Society of Antiquaries of London, 2007), pp. 11–44 (p. 19).

³¹ Richard Ovenden, 'The Libraries of the Antiquaries (c. 1580–1640) and the Idea of a National Collection', in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland*, ed. by Elisabeth S. Leedham-Green and Teresa Webber (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1, pp. 527–62 (p. 538).

³² Andrew G. Watson, 'Thomas Allen of Oxford and His Manuscripts', in *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries: Essays Presented to N. R. Ker*, ed. by M. B. Parkes and Andrew G. Watson (London: Scolar Press, 1978), pp. 279–314 (p. 286), and Watson, 'The Post-Medieval Library of All-Souls', repr. in his *Medieval Manuscripts in Post-Medieval England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 65–91 (p. 87).

³³ Ovenden, 'Libraries of the Antiquaries', pp. 538–40 also notes other sellers of secondhand manuscripts: Stephen Potts, Laurence Sadler, Cornelius Bee, and Launcelot Toppyn. Batman's manuscript is now Bodl. MS Digby 171; see Simon Horobin, 'Stephan Batman and His Manuscripts of "Piers Plowman"', *RES*, 62.255 (2011), 358–72 (368).

³⁴ By the late seventeenth century, medieval manuscripts could be acquired at auction; see Richard Beadle, 'Medieval English Manuscripts at Auction 1676–c. 1700', *The Book Collector*, 53 (2004), 46–63.

(in their other capacities) clergymen, schoolmasters, physicians, lawyers, clothworkers, and civil servants.³⁵ Some of those copies collected by individuals would eventually find their way into institutional libraries via benefactions; Bodley's library in Oxford, which owed the majority of the 800 medieval manuscripts assembled during its founder's lifetime to donations, is notable in this regard.³⁶

These historically-minded people sought out old manuscripts for the laudable purposes of research, study, and sometimes for devotional reading, as well as for copying and thus safeguarding them, but there are indications that they were also collected to be admired as works of art, or amassed for the simple sake of possession and then passed down from one generation to the next.³⁷ The pleasure and satisfaction of collecting, owning, and reading old manuscript books, although difficult to trace for historical actors, surely undergird the motivations of many of the readers described in this study.³⁸ Meanwhile, the very top tier of early modern manuscript collecting was occupied by men like Archbishop Matthew Parker (1504–75) and Sir Robert Cotton (1570/1–1631), who were inspired by nationalist ideals and who built libraries with the intent of safeguarding England's bibliographical heritage. Cotton had been a driving figure behind a failed petition for the founding of a national library and he viewed his own collections as serving a surrogate function in this regard, storing and generating an archive of historical and contemporary records for posterity.³⁹ Parker, on the other hand, was explicitly charged with responsibility for the collection and care of the nation's ancient records and monuments by the Privy Council in 1568.⁴⁰ Both were implicated by

³⁵ See the case studies collected in Watson, *Medieval Manuscripts* and Connolly, *Sixteenth-Century Readers*.

³⁶ Ian G. Philip, *The Bodleian Library in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, The Lyell Lectures, Oxford, 1980–1 (Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 18. On a smaller scale, the Fellows' Library at Winchester College received seven medieval manuscripts, donated by five individuals, between 1608–14; see Richard Foster, 'Robert Hedrington and Wynkyn de Worde at Winchester College', *New College Notes*, 7 (2016), 1–5 (4).

³⁷ On the aesthetic considerations of antiquarian manuscript collectors, see Ovenden, 'Libraries of the Antiquaries', pp. 540–5, who observes that Cotton sometimes noted the beauty of his manuscript books in the course of cataloguing them. For a sixteenth-century collector who may have acquired manuscripts 'for their own sake', see Andrew G. Watson, 'Robert Hare's Books', in his *Medieval Manuscripts*, pp. 209–32 (p. 215).

³⁸ On the joy of reading manuscripts, see Treharne, *Perceptions of Medieval Manuscripts*, pp. 121–30.

³⁹ Colin G. C. Tite, *The Manuscript Library of Sir Robert Cotton*, The Panizzi Lectures 1993, IX (London: British Library, 1994), pp. 20, 51–7, 101.

⁴⁰ The most complete study of Parker remains R. I. Page, *Matthew Parker and His Books: Sandars Lectures in Bibliography* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications and Parker Library, 1993); see also Jeffrey Todd Knight, *Bound to Read: Compilations, Collections, and the Making of Renaissance Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), pp. 38–47.

choice as well as duty in building a set of libraries that would be, in Summit's words, 'a guardian of both heritage and inheritance while creating the English past as a primarily archival entity'. Alongside these broader symbolic goals, such libraries were also enlisted to serve more immediate and practical purposes, as the medieval manuscript books they gathered were mined for precedents that could inform contemporary legal, political, and ecclesiastical debates.⁴¹

Consideration of those copies of Middle English manuscripts that came into early modern hands gives some sense of their manifold trajectories. In addition to his *Piers* manuscript, Parker's associate, Batman, owned a copy of *Troilus and Criseyde* as well as devotional texts including *The Chastising of God's Children* and *The Doctrine of the Hert*.⁴² In his copy of *Piers*, Batman wrote an extended inscription which outlines the rewards he sought from his reading. He praises the work as one that 'diserveth the Reeding' and adds that 'Bookes of Antiquiti' are well served by 'Sober staid mindes'; on the contrary, he writes, 'Frantik braines suche az are more readye to be prattlers than / parformers / seing this book to be olde / Rather take it for papisticall / then else. & so many books com to confusion'.⁴³ Batman's commentary highlights both the post-Reformation associations of medieval manuscripts with Catholicism, as well as the possibility that discriminating readers might look beyond such associations.⁴⁴ The drastically divergent readings of different manuscript copies of the same text are also chronicled in Connolly's account of the afterlife of the *Pore Caitiff*, a work of vernacular religious instruction. While some copies saw parts of the text carefully annotated by sixteenth-century readers, at least two other copies were used as manuscript waste during the binding of late sixteenth-century printed books.⁴⁵ That mixed reception is suggested, too, by the work of the antiquary John Weever,

⁴¹ See Summit, *Memory's Library*, esp. pp. 101–96 (p. 108).

⁴² Batman's manuscripts are catalogued in M. B. Parkes, 'Stephen Batman's Manuscripts', in *Medieval Heritage: Essays in Honour of Tadahiro Ikegami*, ed. by Masahiko Kanno and others (Tokyo: Yushodo Press Co., 1997), pp. 125–56 (pp. 139–50).

⁴³ Bodl. MS Digby 171, fol. 2', qtd. in Horobin, 'Stephen Batman', 360. Horobin argues that Batman also owned TCC, MS R.3.14, another medieval manuscript of *Piers*.

⁴⁴ On Batman's selective reading of medieval manuscripts, see Summit, *Memory's Library*, pp. 114–18. Such discernment is also borne out by the fact that Books of Hours continued to be engaged for devotional and household use by sixteenth-century readers, and some may have preferred them over their more widely available printed counterparts; see Margaret Connolly, 'Late Medieval Books of Hours and Their Early Tudor Readers In and Around London', in *Manuscript and Print in Late Medieval and Early Modern Britain: Essays in Honour of Professor Julia Boffey*, ed. by Tamara Atkin and Jaelyn Rajsic (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2019), pp. 107–21 (p. 114).

⁴⁵ Margaret Connolly, 'Reading Late Medieval Devotional Compilations in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries', in *Late Medieval Devotional Compilations in England*, ed. by Marleen Cré, Diana Denissen, and Denis Renevey (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), pp. 131–56.

who, for the purpose of compiling his *Ancient Funerall Monuments* (1631), consulted medieval literary manuscripts which were ‘overlooked by his contemporaries’ but which contained works by Gower and Langland (as well as Richard Rolle).⁴⁶ Copies of Gower, Chaucer (including at least one *Canterbury Tales* manuscript), and Lydgate were also part of the Middle English holdings in the impressive collection of medieval manuscripts assembled by the politician and historian Sir James Ware (1594–1666).⁴⁷

The motivations of manuscript readers and collectors were various, and the broad impetus behind this activity shifted during the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Andrew Watson has suggested that medieval manuscripts in this period followed a general path after the dissolution, moving first from small-scale to large-scale buyers during the mid- to late-sixteenth century, and thence to the ‘great libraries’ of the most serious and wealthy collectors.⁴⁸ The bookish activities of Parker and his circle are particularly apt for closer consideration here. At least two medieval manuscripts of Chaucer were in Parker’s immediate orbit, and two surviving copies of Stow’s edition of the *Workes* (1561) bear annotations indicating their presence amongst his associates.⁴⁹ For now, though, I am less interested in Parker as a reader of Chaucer *per se* than in his household’s use of manuscripts. Their practices of collecting, studying, transcribing, and remaking medieval manuscripts, and the milieu in which they occurred, provide a valuable evidentiary basis for understanding the forms of interventionist reading and book use that the following chapters will detail.

At his death, Parker’s library held over 500 manuscripts and around 850 printed books.⁵⁰ Notoriously, the Archbishop and his associates had libraries stripped and sanitised according to their compliance with a revisionist history of the nation. According to this scheme, some manuscripts and early printed books – histories, chronicles, commentaries, charters, homilies – were deemed worthy of preservation while breviaries, psalters, missals, and prayer books

⁴⁶ Summit, *Memory’s Library*, pp. 185–9. ⁴⁷ See Edwards, ‘Sir James Ware’.

⁴⁸ Watson, *Medieval Manuscripts*, p. xix.

⁴⁹ CCCC, MS 61, a copy of *Troilus and Criseyde*, passed into Parker’s library via Batman, to whom it had been given by one Mr Carey; see Parkes, ‘Stephen Batman’s Manuscripts’, p. 139. A copy of ‘Chawcer written’, possibly TCC, MS R.3.15, was also to be found in the collection of his son John Parker; see Joseph Dane and Alexandra Gillespie, ‘Back at Chaucer’s Tomb – Inscriptions in Two Early Copies of Chaucer’s “Workes”’, *Studies in Bibliography*, 52 (1999), 89–96 (95); and Conor Leahy, ‘An Annotated Edition of Chaucer Belonging to Stephan Batman’, *The Library*, 22.2 (2021), 217–24. The Parkerian connections of TCC, MS R.3.15 are discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, pp. 103–5, 161–5.

⁵⁰ Knight, *Bound to Read*, p. 40.

were condemned to destruction, or else repurposed as decoration or binding waste.⁵¹ Yet this mandate alone does not account for all the transformations that Parker made to his books, nor for the more challenging aspects of his practices as a collector. As Knight reports, Parker ‘frequently removed leaves, erased text, or inserted parts of one manuscript into another, sometimes gluing or stitching them in custom arrangements’, and accordingly kept his books in a highly contingent state that permitted this easy reshaping.⁵² While some of the Archbishop’s redesigns were guided by doctrine, many of his bibliographical choices stemmed from a parallel desire to improve manuscripts which were damaged or deemed (following some opaque criteria) to be less than perfect. Parker’s methods for improving medieval manuscripts included furnishing newly copied supply leaves to fill in textual gaps, and the removal of leaves from one manuscript to service others.⁵³ Even more alarming to a modern sensibility is the Parker circle’s willingness to refashion medieval books for purely decorative purposes, or for the sake of a cleaner aesthetic effect. For instance, they went to significant lengths to tidy up imperfect volumes, which in practical terms involved the excision, washing, or pasting over (using parchment scraps from other books) of medieval leaves in order to hide unwanted text that served as a marker of a book’s incomplete state.⁵⁴ Parker’s sixteenth-century household represents a unique convergence of privileged access, exceptional manuscripts, and a state-sanctioned religious mission, but their repair, customisation, and remaking of old books place them squarely in the bibliographical culture of their time. Their mission may have had ideological roots but the group’s particular habits of transcribing, reshuffling, and migrating leaves and whole quires belonged, more fundamentally, to a reading culture which treated the material book, in Knight’s words,

⁵¹ Summit, *Memory’s Library*, pp. 106–10. For examples, see discussion of CCCC, MSS 162, 163, 419, 452, and 557 in Page, *Matthew Parker and His Books*, pp. 49–51.

⁵² Knight, *Bound to Read*, p. 41. In some ways, Parker’s modular treatment of manuscript books is also reminiscent of the norms of medieval codicological practices, on which see Ryan Perry, ‘The Sum of the Book: Structural Codicology and Medieval Manuscript Culture’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval British Manuscripts*, ed. by Elaine Treharne and Orietta Da Rold (Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 106–26.

⁵³ Parkerian transcripts are to be found, for example, in CCCC, MSS 383 and 449; see R. I. Page, ‘The Transcription of Old English Texts in the Sixteenth Century’, in *Care and Conservation of Manuscripts 7*, ed. by G. Fellows-Jensen and P. Springborg (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2003), pp. 179–90 (p. 183). Manuscripts containing medieval leaves transposed from elsewhere include CCCC, MSS 162, 419, and 452; for discussions of these see Knight, *Bound to Read*, p. 42 and Siân Echard, ‘Containing the Book: The Institutional Afterlives of Medieval Manuscripts’, in Johnston and Van Dussen, pp. 96–118 (pp. 108–9).

⁵⁴ For example, in CCCC, MSS 162 and 197. For these and other examples, see Page, *Matthew Parker and His Books*, pp. 46–51; Knight, *Bound to Read*, p. 42; and Echard, ‘Containing the Book’, pp. 110–11.

as 'relatively open-ended and to a great extent bound (in both senses) by the desires of readers'.⁵⁵

Transcription, for instance, was expressly required by the Privy Council decree that manuscripts found by Parker and his agents should be copied if they had to be returned to their owners. In Parker's household, the work of transcribing medieval manuscripts could fall to several people: an especially talented man named 'Lyly' (who could 'counterfeit any antique writing'), Stephen Batman, Parker's secretary John Joscelyn, his son John Parker, or any number of less experienced copyists 'who would have trouble with unfamiliar words, spellings, accident, and letter forms'.⁵⁶ Though highly atypical in their scale and motivations, the Parker circle's practices of transcribing medieval texts and producing supply leaves are not themselves anomalous in the long history of the book. Scholars had been adding supply leaves to old books since the eighth century, and in the sixteenth century it was a regular practice in English institutions concerned with the collection and custodianship of old volumes.⁵⁷ For example, at Christ Church, Canterbury during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, a series of scribes was responsible for copying both supply leaves and whole books from older copies.⁵⁸ John Leland has been shown to be an avid transcriber, while John Bale likewise transcribed (or had professionally copied) historical records of interest to him, and made copies of Leland's own copies. The antiquary James Ussher wrote in 1625 of his quest for 'one that hath already been tried in transcribing of manuscripts', and John Stow and Robert Talbot were themselves avid transcribers of historical works which survived in manuscript.⁵⁹ The collector Simonds d'Ewes condemned the scribe Ralph Starkey for making 'copies of [a] book common by his base nundination or sale of them', an offence which caused the dejected d'Ewes to abandon his own copying of the book and hire 'an able librarian' to finish it.⁶⁰ A latter-

⁵⁵ See Knight, *Bound to Read*, p. 9.

⁵⁶ Page, 'Transcription of Old English', p. 180; H. R. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts, 1558–1640* (Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 119.

⁵⁷ M. B. Parkes, 'Archaizing Hands in English Manuscripts', in *Pages from the Past: Medieval Writing Skills and Manuscript Books*, ed. by P. R. Robinson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 101–41 (p. 101). As McKitterick notes, until the late fifteenth century, copying was the only way of preserving ancient texts; see *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order*, p. 15.

⁵⁸ Parkes, 'Archaizing Hands', p. 110.

⁵⁹ Robert Talbot's interest was in making transcripts of now lost charters written in Old English; see Page, 'Transcription of Old English', p. 186. On Bale, Leland, Stow, and Ussher as transcribers, see Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney*, pp. 118, 124, 129.

⁶⁰ *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Sir Simonds D'Ewes, Bart., during the Reigns of James I and Charles I*, ed. by J.O. Halliwell (London: Richard Bentley, 1845), I, pp. 294–5. As Woudhuysen points out, 'This suggests that at least part of the pleasure of transcription lay in the copying of rare texts'; see *Sir Philip Sidney*, p. 128.

day group inspired by the original Society of Antiquaries and led by Christopher Hatton, Thomas Shirley, and William Dugdale included in their founding agreement the pledge that each member should 'borrowe of other strangers . . . all such bookes, notes, rolles, deedes, etc., as he can obteyne'.⁶¹ The scholarly networks and private libraries which flourished in the early modern period catered directly to that desire for access to rare texts.⁶² Within these networks, successive generations of early modern antiquaries relied on borrowing and transcribing old books for the making of their own fair copies, and many of them also produced new copies for the purposes of creating duplicates and supply leaves of rare and damaged ones. Far from being an esoteric preoccupation, transcription was a practice spurred on by the fragmented state of the country's manuscript inheritance and one which is underacknowledged yet 'integral to the development of the libraries of antiquaries during this period'.⁶³ Not only were medieval manuscripts plentiful in certain circles, then, but a willingness to reproduce and augment them for the sake of study and preservation is detectable across early modern communities of collectors. These acts of transcription should remind us that medieval manuscripts, while visually and sometimes materially distinctive, existed in this period amidst a vibrant early modern manuscript culture. Like the contemporary transcripts these scholars created by copying historical works, most manuscript copies of medieval texts moved within relatively 'small and compact' networks whose major nodes included the Elizabethan Society of Antiquaries, the College of Arms, and Cotton's library.⁶⁴

Early modern English antiquarianism was therefore organised around the search for and securing of rare materials and of medieval manuscript texts in particular but (contrary to Earle's caricature) it did not cultivate an indiscriminate aversion to printed books or harbour the desire to 'contemne' them for their novelty. Instead, the antiquaries demonstrate a vested interest in print as a medium of scholarly exchange and communication. Manuscripts of historical texts provided them with the vital primary materials necessary to sustain their scholarly pursuits, but the most ambitious and influential work was destined for the wider audiences

⁶¹ Qtd. in Ovenden, 'Libraries of the Antiquaries', p. 535; Page, 'Transcription of Old English', pp. 180–7.

⁶² Tite, *Sir Robert Cotton*, p. 20; Summit, *Memory's Library*, pp. 104–8, 135–8; William H. Sherman, *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), pp. 37, 46–50.

⁶³ Ovenden, 'Libraries of the Antiquaries', p. 545.

⁶⁴ Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney*, pp. 120–33 (p. 121).

to be had in print.⁶⁵ Speght's *Workes* itself has been recognised as a printed monument to Chaucer, but behind it lay a series of manuscript notes – 'those good observations and collections you haue written of him' – which circulated in 'Copies to vse priuatly for mine owne pleasure', as Francis Beaumont's prefatory epistle to the editor puts it.⁶⁶ The presence in early modern England of contemporary manuscripts containing Chaucerian material is corroborated by Derek Pearsall's suggestion, concerning the copytexts of *The Isle of Ladies* and *Floure and the Leafe*, that 'manuscript "pamphlets" of old poems were in lively circulation in the sixteenth century, ready to be picked up by collectors such as Stow and put into print'.⁶⁷ In turn, printed books could be annotated and excerpted in ways which unsettle any rigid distinction between knowledge that circulated in manuscript and in print.

Medieval texts printed and read in this period preserve evidence of how the early modern period defined itself in relation to the material past. While new editions of old texts could not make a claim for their own material antiquity, they could purport to be superior to their manuscript antecedents in other ways: more legible, more correct, or simply better because they were newer. From its beginnings, the trade in printed books defined itself by its material novelty. As Caxton put it in the *Recuyell*, the first book printed in English, his volume 'is not wreton with penne and ynke as other bokes ben to th'ende that every man may have them atones'.⁶⁸ Print's role in mediating the medieval past is also borne out in the early establishment of Chaucer's reputation as a print-published author. This is acknowledged, for example, when Stephen Hawes's *Pastime of Pleasure* (1509) celebrates the fact that Chaucer's 'goodly name / In prynted books doth remayne in fame' (ll. 1336–7).⁶⁹ The antiquaries of the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries likewise endowed print with authority and contributed to its establishment as a learned medium. Ultimately, it was the early modern trade in printed volumes that brought historical works to a wider readership than ever before.

⁶⁵ Ovenden, 'Libraries of the Antiquaries', p. 558. D. R. Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 2000) provides a thorough analysis of historical works in print.

⁶⁶ *Workes* (1598), sig. [a]4^v, [a]6^r. On the association of Chaucer manuscripts with intimacy, see Trigg, *Congenial Souls*, pp. 109–43.

⁶⁷ Derek Pearsall, 'Thomas Speght (ca. 1550–?)', in *Editing Chaucer: The Great Tradition*, ed. by Paul G. Ruggiers (Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1984), pp. 71–92 (pp. 79–80).

⁶⁸ *Caxton's Own Prose*, ed. by N. F. Blake (London: Deutsch, 1973), p. 100.

⁶⁹ Stephen Hawes, *The Pastime of Pleasure*, ed. by William Edward Mead (London: Published for the Early English Text Society by Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1928). Discussed in Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers*, pp. 187–90.

For the antiquaries and the stationers who saw their works through the press, print provided a golden opportunity in which to ‘render the antique alluring and desirable’, to reframe rarefied work in terms of historical recovery for the common good, and crucially, to profit from the past.⁷⁰

The epithet ‘newly printed’ adorned the title pages of countless volumes in the period, including successive generations of Chaucer’s works. Besides the folio editions from William Thynne (1532) to Speght, which consistently used the phrase in their titles, earlier editions by Richard Pynson and Wynkyn de Worde also advertised themselves as ‘newly printed’ or ‘newly correcked’.⁷¹ By 1612, John Webster could compare an unappreciative theatre audience to readers ‘who visiting Stationers shoppes their vse is not to inquire for good bookes, but new bookes’.⁷² But old-fashioned texts were not inherently undesirable and the book trade sustained a market for earlier material even as title pages praised the newness of successive editions.⁷³ Underlying the emphasis on the printed book’s novelty, moreover, is another oblique celebration of the poet’s oldness – the fact that these works of Chaucer had long existed but ‘were never in print before’, as the titles of several sixteenth-century editions put it.⁷⁴ There was therefore an added cachet to be gained from the claim that an ancient or rare copytext lay behind a newly printed book.⁷⁵

Accordingly, the authority of the Chaucerian text in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was built on bibliographical narratives about the relative reliability of printed books compared to medieval manuscripts, yet these latter

⁷⁰ Lucy Munro, “‘O Read Me for I Am of Great Antiquity’: Old Books and Elizabethan Popularity”, in *The Elizabethan Top Ten: Defining Print Popularity in Early Modern England*, ed. by Andy Kesson and Emma Smith (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 55–78, (p. 66); Woolf, *Reading History*, pp. 132–67.

⁷¹ Geoffrey Chaucer, *Here begynneth the boke of Troylus and Creseyde, newly printed by a trewe copye* (London: Richard Pynson, c. 1526; *STC* 5096); Geoffrey Chaucer, *Here begynneth the boke of Canterbury tales, diligently and truly corrected, and newly printed* (London: Richard Pynson, 1526; *STC* 5086); Geoffrey Chaucer, *The noble and amerous au[n]cyent hystory of Troylus and Cresyde, in the tyme of the syege of Troye* (London: Wynkyn de Worde, 1517; *STC* 5095).

⁷² John Webster, *The White Devil* (London: Nicholas Okes, 1612; *STC* 25178), sig. A2^r.

⁷³ Some editors, publishers, or printers specialised in publishing older material; see Munro, “‘O Read Me’”, p. 62.

⁷⁴ Thynne’s editions are *STC* 5068 (1532) and 5069 (1542). *STC* 5070 is a variant of 5069 also published in 1542. The booksellers’ reprint (c. 1550) is represented by *STC* 5071, 5072, 5073, and 5074. John Stow’s edition is *STC* 5075, with a reissue represented by 5076, and its variant, 5076.3. Pynson’s three Chaucer volumes are *STC* 5086, 5088, and 5096, respectively. See Jonathan R. Olson, “‘Newly Amended and Much Enlarged’: Claims of Novelty and Enlargement on the Title Pages of Reprints in the Early Modern English Book Trade”, *History of European Ideas*, 42.5 (2016), 618–28. For this and other ‘temporal modifiers’ used in title page marketing, see Mari-Liisa Varila and Matti Peikola, ‘Promotional Conventions on English Title-Pages up to 1550: Modifiers of Time, Scope, and Quality’, in *Norms and Conventions in the History of English*, ed. by Birte Bös and Claudia Claridge (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2019), pp. 73–97 (pp. 81–4).

⁷⁵ Varila and Peikola, ‘Promotional Conventions’, p. 83.

remained at the symbolic centre of the editors' study of Chaucer. Speght (d. 1621), a schoolmaster by profession and former scholar of Peterhouse, Cambridge, was a friend to many in the Elizabethan Society of Antiquaries.⁷⁶ Though not himself a member of that group, his academic and antiquarian connections furnished him with the necessary materials and support for his editorial project. Chief amongst these was his relationship with the indefatigable antiquary, bibliophile, and editor of the 1561 Chaucer, John Stow (1524/5–1605).⁷⁷ Speght recounts in the 1602 edition, for example, that he has consulted a 'written copy' of Chaucer's *Complaint to his Purse* 'which I had of Maister Stow (whose library helped me in many things) wherein ten times more is adjoined, than is in print'.⁷⁸ So famous were Stow's collections that the antiquary was examined for papistry in 1569, on a charge related to his collecting of old books.⁷⁹ Elsewhere, Speght recalls that he has encountered a rare copy of a tract on a visit to the antiquary Thomas Allen, fellow of Trinity College in Oxford, 'a man of as rare learning as he is stored with rare bookes'.⁸⁰ The fingerprints of other well-regarded antiquaries and their books are also detectable in Speght's editions. Francis Thynne (1545?–1608), the son of editor William Thynne, served as an unofficial secretary for the Society and was an indirect contributor to Speght's 1602 Chaucer, having written a lengthy series of *Animadversions* (1599) on the first edition, pinpointing perceived textual infidelities and other quibbles which the editor hastened to address in the new volume. The younger Thynne speaks, tantalisingly, of 'written copies there came to me after my fathers deathe some fyve and twenty', but indicates that some of these were stolen, and some given away to Parker's associate Batman.⁸¹ John Speed, another member of the Society, provided the engraving for the Progenie page, while the lawyer Joseph Holland supplied the text to *Chaucer's ABC* from his fifteenth-century manuscript of Chaucer's works.⁸² These early modern collections grew out of an

⁷⁶ See Pearsall, 'Speght'.

⁷⁷ On Stow's involvement in Chaucer's *Workes*, see A. S. G. Edwards, 'John Stow and Middle English Literature', in *John Stow (1525–1605) and the Making of the English Past*, ed. by Ian Gadd and Alexandra Gillespie (London: British Library, 2004), pp. 109–18.

⁷⁸ *Workes* (1602), sig. b8^v.

⁷⁹ Derek Pearsall, 'John Stow and Thomas Speght as Editors of Chaucer: A Question of Class', in Gadd and Gillespie, pp. 119–25 (p. 121).

⁸⁰ *Workes* (1598), sig. 4B5^r. Pearsall, 'Speght', p. 82; see also Watson, 'Thomas Allen of Oxford', pp. 279–314.

⁸¹ Francis Thynne, *Chaucer: Animadversions upon the annotacions and corrections of some imperfections of impressiones of Chaucers workes*, ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall and G. H. Kingsley (London: published for the Early English Text Society by Oxford University Press, 1875), p. 12.

⁸² Martha W. Driver, 'Mapping Chaucer: John Speed and the Later Portraits', *ChR*, 36.3 (2002), 228–49 (238–41); George B. Pace, 'Speght's Chaucer and MS. GG.4.27', *Studies in Bibliography*, 21 (1968), 225–35.

assumed and urgent need to retrieve, chronicle, and archive the past – a cause to which Chaucer and his old books were duly enlisted.

Renaissance scholars regularly bundled the classical and medieval periods into a capacious notion of antiquity into which Chaucer could fit comfortably.⁸³ Yet this oldness and its attendant challenges – the difficulty of his language, the variability amongst early witnesses, the dispersal and constitution of his oeuvre, the lack of attribution in the manuscript record – did not keep Chaucer exclusively consigned to the past. Rather (as they would tell it) it led his proponents to scour the manuscript and archaeological evidence in order to put forth ever-improved versions of Chaucer in print. On the print marketplace, Chaucer's distance from the early modern present was announced on the ornate title pages of the 1602 edition and its earlier 1598 counterpart, where the poet's 'Ancient' status served as an authorising stamp for Speght's *Workes*. Inside these books, Chaucer was awarded other hallmarks usually reserved for humanist editions of the classics: a 'Life' of the author, a Latin genealogy of the Chaucer family, a glossary of 'Hard Words', and a list of authors cited by Chaucer all cultivate a sense of the poet as a historically distant figure. As an ancient and erudite authority, his works both required and merited explanatory notes, happily supplied by the editor.⁸⁴ All of these marked him as worthy of veneration in the same terms as a classical author – an English Homer, in the humanist Roger Ascham's esteem.⁸⁵ At the same time, and as this trumpeting of Chaucer's antiquity makes clear, the printed editions were presented not as substitutes for the older manuscripts but as their improved, more accessible surrogates. In this way, the new medium positioned itself as granting access to the medieval past, thereby permitting Chaucer to remain a poet of 'penne and ynke' even as he became a towering literary authority in the new age of printed books. Of course, the categories of old and new did not neatly map on to the media of manuscript and print, and this study occasionally puts them into dialogue with other sorts of books which trouble these convenient divides; incunabula and other old editions, newly copied manuscripts, and annotated

⁸³ Ovenden, 'Libraries of the Antiquaries', p. 527. As Woolf, *Social Circulation*, p. 48 points out, however, the early modern English adjective 'ancient' might refer either 'to very recent times or to very old times, often by the same writer'. Thus even Chaucer's status as an ancient authority is somewhat blurred by the term's imprecision in speaking about the recent and distant past.

⁸⁴ On this paradox, see Machan, 'Speght's "Works"', 157.

⁸⁵ Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion (1357–1900)*, 3 vols. (London: published for the Chaucer Society by Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, and by Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1918), 1, p. 85. Further references are to vol. 1 unless otherwise indicated.

printed copies, too, have much to tell us about the changing value of the Chaucerian book in the early modern period.

Between Medieval Manuscripts and Early Modern Print

Before this book embarks upon its consideration of Chaucer's medieval manuscripts and their relationship to print, it is worth assessing the nature and extent of the accommodation between manuscript and print more generally. To put a notoriously complex matter in the simplest terms, early printed books were like manuscripts in some respects, but departed from them in others. For one thing, print was a more efficient medium; it was expedient to distribute many copies of a book by print compared to copies written by hand.⁸⁶ As was noted, the epilogue to Caxton's *Recuyell* made much of the fact that that volume's new technology allowed 'that every man may have them atones'. In doing so, the printer anticipated the comparative reach of printed and manuscript copies of the work, but naturally, he conceived of both forms as books: the version of the *Recuyell* which he 'practysed & lerned at my grete charge and dispense to ordeyne' was a 'book in prynte' and manuscripts are 'other bokes' different for having been 'wreton with penne and ynke'. Such a reframing – in which books are considered first *as* books regardless of their material properties – is instructive for understanding the early printed book 'not as a printed book to which manuscript marks were added, but as a book parts of which were printed'.⁸⁷

With that understanding in place, it becomes easier to appreciate the fact that while print did not universally supplant manuscripts, its technological novelty nonetheless had visible effects in certain corners of the book trade. As McKitterick reports, the 'more ordinary' segment of the Italian manuscript trade, which catered to a mainstream clientele rather than wealthy collectors, was severely curtailed in the latter part of the fifteenth century as a result of the coming of print.⁸⁸ Institutional catalogues record this shifting of the bibliographical centre of gravity from manuscripts to printed codices. At Syon Abbey, a place noted as having 'embraced the potential of the printing press early', printed books did indeed replace manuscript copies of the same works.⁸⁹ In that religious house, as Vincent Gillespie concludes in a study of

⁸⁶ McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order*, pp. 100–1.

⁸⁷ McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order*, p. 34.

⁸⁸ McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order*, pp. 30–1.

⁸⁹ *Syon Abbey, with the Libraries of the Carthusians*, ed. by Vincent Gillespie and A. I. Doyle, Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues, IX (London: British Library in association with the British Academy, 2001), pp. li–lv.

the library's cataloguing up to the early decades of the sixteenth century, 'Script gave way to print, or was at least increasingly heavily outnumbered'.⁹⁰ In Oxford, the acquisition of increasing numbers of printed books led to physical changes in the layout of some college libraries at the end of the sixteenth century, where large lecterns were replaced with bookcases which as much as trebled capacity.⁹¹ The medieval library of All Souls College was gradually transformed during the sixteenth century, from 'a collection of manuscripts with a few incunables' before 1500 to 'a collection of printed books with a few manuscripts' by the mid-1570s.⁹²

The number and nature of volumes in institutional catalogues give some sense of the scale of these changes, but it is much harder to apprehend the relative value and associations that handwritten or printed books may have held for readers from the late fifteenth century onwards. As Woudhuysen rather pessimistically puts it, 'it remains generally impossible to capture at first hand the difference they felt between reading works in manuscript and in print'.⁹³ Notwithstanding the impossibility of recreating any historical experience with complete certainty, there remain some perceptible indications of the shifting status of both types of book in the period under consideration. Many of these changes were aesthetic. The technical operations of the printing press necessitated certain modifications to page layout, resulting first in the absence of signatures, catchwords, foliation, and pagination in incunabula, and later in their positioning within the main text block, thereby rendering these printed features more prominent than they were in manuscripts.⁹⁴ Woudhuysen has suggested that the differences between manuscript and print were especially vast for texts such as poetry, 'part of whose aesthetic experience lies in the look of the poem on the page'.⁹⁵ Some visual features of scribally copied texts could be accentuated when they passed into print. This dynamic is occasionally detectable in manuscripts transcribed from print, where there is evidence of scribes taking pains to split and compress words or to insert line fillers for the sake of imitating the sharp right-hand edge of the printed text.⁹⁶ Other visual features would eventually (though not immediately) be flattened in print. Rubrication and illumination, visual elements widespread in manuscript, were incorporated into the design of some incunabula but would

⁹⁰ Gillespie, *Syon Abbey*, p. lxiv. ⁹¹ Watson, 'The Post-Medieval Library of All-Souls', p. 76.

⁹² Watson, 'The Post-Medieval Library of All-Souls', p. 74.

⁹³ Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney*, p. 9.

⁹⁴ Nafde, 'Gower from Print to Manuscript', p. 191; see also McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order*, p. 38.

⁹⁵ Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney*, p. 15. ⁹⁶ Nafde, 'Mechanical Print Aesthetic', 194.

later be phased out in favour of woodcut initials and printed headings.⁹⁷ For all the continuities and interdependencies between the two media, attempts would be made over the subsequent centuries to distinguish them.

At least according to those printers who styled themselves as bringing to light forgotten or neglected texts, print was superior to manuscript in its stability and reliability. When, in 1532, printer Thomas Berthelet had a choice between reproducing Gower's *Confessio Amantis* either according to the manuscripts or to Caxton's 1483 edition (which contains what is now known to be a different recension of the text), he chose to follow the printed precedent. His decision, he writes, was because 'most copies of the same warke are in printe' – a recognition that he saw print as outnumbering and thus outranking manuscripts of Gower's text. At the same time, Berthelet reveals that he nonetheless 'thought it good to warne the reder, that the writen copies do not agre with the prynted', so he also printed the variant lines in the book's preface.⁹⁸ Although Berthelet's edition demonstrates the printer's inventiveness and the book's flexibility in containing both versions, the distinction between the more dominant print tradition and the superseded manuscript one persists in the bibliographical hierarchy between the main text and prefatory paratext to which the printer assigns them respectively. Printers themselves were subject to both condemnation and praise – simultaneously seen by the humanists as the preservers of endangered texts, or as sloppy workers and opportunistic salesmen. Erasmus was able to reconcile both views in his *Adages*, in which he lauded the 'positively royal ambitions' of Aldus Manutius to restore ancient texts to circulation only to offer a biting commentary on the printer's dishonest and incompetent peers.⁹⁹ In the preface to his translation of Seneca's *Thyestes*, Jasper

⁹⁷ For colour printing, see Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 137–9 and *Printing Colour 1400–1700: History, Techniques, Functions and Receptions*, ed. by Ad Stijnman and Elizabeth Savage (Leiden: Brill, 2015). For decorated incunabula, see Lilian Armstrong, 'The Decoration and Illustration of Venetian Incunabula: From Hand Illumination to the Design of Woodcuts', in *Printing R-Evolution and Society 1450–1500*, ed. by Cristina Dondi, Studi Di Storia, 13 (Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2020), x111, pp. 773–816; and A. S. G. Edwards, 'Decorated Caxtons', in *Incunabula: Studies in Fifteenth-Century Books Presented to Lotte Hellinga*, ed. by Martin Davies (London: British Library, 1999), pp. 493–506.

⁹⁸ John Gower, *Io. Gower de confessione amantis* (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1532; STC 12143), sig. 2a3^r. For discussion see Daniel Allington and others, *The Book in Britain: A Historical Introduction* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019), p. 84; Meaghan J. Brown, 'Addresses to the Reader', in *Book Parts*, ed. by Dennis Duncan and Adam Smyth (Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 81–93 (p. 89); and Siân Echard, 'Gower Between Manuscript and Print', in Driver, Pearsall, and Yeager, pp. 169–88 (pp. 169–71).

⁹⁹ Desiderius Erasmus, *Adage II.1.1*, *Collected Works of Erasmus, Adages: II i 1 to II vi 100*, trans. by R. A. B. Mynors, *Collected Works of Erasmus*, 33 (University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp. 9–15.

Heywood lamented the faults of printers, and singled out Richard Tottell, who was responsible for his earlier *Troas* (1559), as having tampered with his text: ‘That though my selfe perusde their prooues’, he laments, ‘When I was gone, they wolde agayne / the print therof renewe, Corrupted all’. The result, predictably, is ‘fowrescore greater fautes then myne / in fortie leaues espyde’.¹⁰⁰ Although Heywood’s preface, framed as a dream vision dialogue with the dead Seneca, is conventional in several respects, the level of specificity surrounding the circumstances of *Troas*’s publication – down to the poem’s naming of Tottell’s premises at the ‘sygne of Hande and Starre’ – suggests that the author’s grievance was genuinely felt.¹⁰¹

Manuscripts, meanwhile, were known to have their own affordances and drawbacks. The late medieval abbot Johannes Trithemius (1462–1516) praised manuscripts both for the longevity of their parchment medium (assuming the paper used in printing to be less durable), and for the discipline and care of the copyists who made them.¹⁰² But the keeping and study of historical manuscripts would pose practical challenges to some readers. Even the learned antiquary Sir Peter Manwood (d. 1625) mentioned to Cotton his difficulties in ‘writing oute of an oulde booke’, complaining that ‘itt goeth forward slowly because of ye ould hande out of use with us’.¹⁰³ Nonetheless, handwriting remained the chosen medium for prestigious presentation copies, and older manuscripts were granted an aura of authenticity. Returning to *Thyestes* and its verse preface, we learn that the ghostly Seneca’s solution to the corruptions of his work in print is to read his ‘Tragedies’ aloud to his translator Heywood from a ‘gylded booke’ written in glittering letters and on fine parchment made from the skins of celestial fawns by the Muse herself; that is, from an authorially-sanctioned manuscript that represents the truest instantiation of Seneca’s works. At this, the dreamer Heywood ‘sawe how often tymes / the Printers dyd him wrong’ and then adjusts his own copies accordingly – ‘styll my

¹⁰⁰ Jasper Heywood, *The seconde tragedie of Seneca entituled Thyestes* (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1560; STC 22226), sig. [fleuron]r.

¹⁰¹ sig. *8^v. That suggestion is supported by physical evidence that indicates that the printing of that work was indeed ‘renewed’ without consultation with the author. H. J. Byrom notes an ‘abnormal number of errors’ in the 1559 edition; see ‘Richard Tottell – His Life and Work’, *The Library*, 4th ser., 8.2 (1927), 199–232 (215). On the printing of *Troas*, see Ronald B. McKerrow, ‘Notes on Bibliographical Evidence for Literary Students and Editors of English Works of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries’, *The Library*, TBS-12.1 (1913), 213–318 (261). On the early modern model of ‘the author-in-the-print-shop’ poring over printed proofs, see Adam Smyth, *Material Texts in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 91–4.

¹⁰² Johannes Trithemius, *In Praise of Scribes. De Laude Scriptorum*, trans. by Roland Behrendt (Lawrence, KA: Coronado Press, 1974), pp. 35, 61–5.

¹⁰³ Qtd. in Ovenden, ‘Libraries of the Antiquaries’, p. 545.

booke, / I did correcte by his'.¹⁰⁴ The preface ends with Heywood awakening to lament the disappearance of Seneca's ghost and penning the text of *Thyestes*. Muses, of course, do not write manuscripts, but Heywood keeps up the conceit for the purpose of promoting the unmediated quality of his new translation, and getting in a barb at Tottell along the way.

Yet the fiction of flawless textual transmission by manuscript that Heywood lays out in his preface necessarily undoes itself through the fact of its own existence in print. In order to disseminate the very copies in which readers could learn how 'the Printers dyd him wrong', he had to turn his new book, *Thyestes*, over to the printing house (this time, Berthelet's) once again. Neither medium could be all things to all people, and textual production in both manuscript and print allowed for 'the cumulative accretion of error'.¹⁰⁵ Partly in response to the fallibility inherent in its technical complexity and the exigencies of the trade, print therefore strove to create an 'impression of definitive knowledge'.¹⁰⁶ But the seeming miracle of print was at odds with the material and human realities of the process – with the reliance on people working at pace to distribute and set type and to proofread and correct printing errors.¹⁰⁷ Some contemporary accounts of printing house practice nonetheless offered 'reassurance where such reassurance could not be justified', and conjured an ideal of stability which ultimately 'depended on a visual sleight of hand in which most of the slippery manufacture was concealed'.¹⁰⁸ By the end of the period this book investigates, Chaucer's medieval manuscripts were judged (consciously or not) according to standards of design and legibility codified in print. Printed books, for their part, ultimately originated in some manuscript antecedent. McKitterick locates the 'divorce' between print and manuscript in the middle of the seventeenth century, a time when institutional catalogues began listing the two types of book separately.¹⁰⁹ By 1658, the preacher of a London sermon could describe printing as a 'new Art or invention opposed to writing'.¹¹⁰ Yet as for all things which share

¹⁰⁴ Heywood, *Thyestes*, sig. [fleuron]3^r, 7^v.

¹⁰⁵ Julia Crick and Alexandra Walsham, 'Introduction: Script, Print and History', in *The Uses of Script and Print, 1300–1700*, ed. by Crick and Walsham (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 1–28 (p. 5).

¹⁰⁶ Crick and Walsham, 'Introduction', p. 5.

¹⁰⁷ McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order*, pp. 113–14. On these complexities, see D. F. McKenzie, 'Printers of the Mind: Some Notes on Bibliographical Theories and Printing-House Practices', *Studies in Bibliography*, 22 (1969), 1–75.

¹⁰⁸ McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order*, pp. 114, 118.

¹⁰⁹ McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order*, pp. 12–13.

¹¹⁰ Qtd. in McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order*, p. 26.

longstanding affinities, it was not easy to put them asunder. At All Souls College in 1697, a cataloguer working in the library mistakenly listed two lavishly illuminated incunables as manuscripts.¹¹¹ A divorce between manuscript and print may have been underway, but the terms of their separation would not be fully settled for some time.

Perfecting Print and Manuscript

Given these entanglements and intersections between printed and handwritten media in the pre-modern period, it follows that many volumes are today recognised as hybrid, composite, or blended in their fusion of old and new elements. Such books were not uncommon, though the later separation of manuscript and print in many of the institutions which hold these books means that the full scale of the phenomenon is difficult to gauge. Parker, already mentioned, ‘seems not to have drawn as rigorous a distinction between manuscript and print’, and is well known for having fused and remade both manuscripts and printed books according to his own tastes and needs – as when he oversaw the copying of supply leaves in medieval manuscripts, especially those containing Old English.¹¹² In the case of CCCC, MS 16, a copy of Matthew Paris, the newly restored book was intended to serve as printer’s copy.¹¹³

I have been suggesting that Parker, for all the scale of his resources and ambition, was not unique in his understanding of the codex form as endlessly versatile. Around 1458, a century before Parker’s mission, the first print-manuscript hybrid book was produced in Mainz by Johann Fust and Peter Schoeffer.¹¹⁴ The *Canon Missae* was a twelve-leaf publication designed to supplement manuscript missals and, being the part of the book that saw the heaviest use, was sometimes printed on more durable vellum. In practice, Fust and Schoeffer’s single printed quire was inserted into both manuscript and printed missals, but there is also evidence of printed missals having been recomposed from fragments of different copies, and of manuscript leaves of the *Canon* replacing missing leaves in printed copies.¹¹⁵ While the printed leaves of the *Canon* were designed to be mixed with manuscripts, some fifteenth-century manuscripts may be considered hybrid for other reasons – for example, because they were

¹¹¹ Watson, ‘The Post-Medieval Library of All-Souls’, p. 67. ¹¹² Knight, *Bound to Read*, p. 43.

¹¹³ Parkes, ‘Archaizing Hands’, pp. 123–4.

¹¹⁴ Eric Marshall White, ‘Fust & Schoeffer’s *Canon Missae* and the Invention of the Hybrid Book’ (presented at the 2015–16 Book History Colloquium at Columbia University, 2016).

¹¹⁵ McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order*, pp. 42–3.

copied from print and their scribes chose to retain distinctive features such as the printer's colophon, or because they consciously employ elements of the printed page absent in their exemplars.¹¹⁶ Other early print-manuscript composites may reflect their owners' wishes rather than the design of their makers. For example, Mary C. Erler has identified an early surviving example of a reader pasting manuscript pictures into a printed book: a series of eleven roundels glued into the margins or in place of initials in a Caxton psalter dated to c. 1480.¹¹⁷ In a book culture where differences between the two media were less entrenched in the minds of readers, exchanges could flow freely, and in both directions.

This book is chiefly concerned with the migration of new (often printed) elements into old (especially manuscript) Chaucer books with the aim of improving them. By focussing principally on that form of transmission, this study highlights an overlooked pattern of textual consumption in the history of Chaucer's reception. Writing of the print-to-manuscript phenomenon, Julia Boffey has observed that the transfer of material from printed books into manuscripts 'may have posed more practical challenges [than manuscript into print] but certainly took place'.¹¹⁸ Blair, meanwhile, has enumerated some of the methodological difficulties of identifying such manuscripts and adds that, as a result of this partial understanding, the copying of manuscripts from print was 'more common than one might expect'.¹¹⁹ Not only did textual transfers from print into manuscript take place on a scale which is not yet fully appreciated, but they endured far beyond the incunabula period. The addition of manuscript leaves (copied from print) into printed copies where such material was wanting was a common occurrence, and this copying was done by both professional scribes and book owners themselves.¹²⁰ For instance, a verse miscellany copied in Oxford around the middle of the seventeenth century includes

¹¹⁶ The term 'blended' is borrowed from Nafde; see 'Gower from Print to Manuscript', pp. 197–9 and Nafde, 'Mechanical Print Aesthetic', 120, 137.

¹¹⁷ Mary C. Erler, 'Pasted-In Embellishments in English Manuscripts and Printed Books c. 1480–1533', *The Library*, 6th ser., 14.3 (1992), 185–206 (188). An array of examples is also provided in Julia Boffey, *Manuscript and Print in London: c. 1475–1530* (London: British Library, 2012), pp. 45–80.

¹¹⁸ Julia Boffey, 'From Manuscript to Print: Continuity and Change', in *A Companion to the Early Printed Book in Britain 1476–1558*, ed. by Vincent Gillespie and Susan Powell (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014), pp. 13–26 (p. 23).

¹¹⁹ Ann Blair, 'Reflections on Technological Continuities: Manuscripts Copied from Printed Books', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 91.1 (2015), 7–33 (9–10, 21). For a late fifteenth-century Middle English manuscript copied, in part, from a Caxton print of Higden's *Polychronicon*, see Cosima Clara Gillhammer, 'Fifteenth-Century Compilation Methods: The Case of Oxford, Trinity College, MS 29', *RES*, 73.308 (2022), 20–41.

¹²⁰ Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney*, pp. 22–5.

faithful transcriptions of two pamphlets published by Wynkyn de Worde, down to the printed title page, woodcuts, colophon, printer's device, and ornaments.¹²¹ Customisation, prestige, practicality, censorship, and devotion were all factors which might drive the copying of manuscripts from print in the handpress period.¹²² Of course, the two media could interact in any number of additional configurations too. Besides manuscript-to-manuscript copying (by which means the antiquaries created new transcripts of old texts), manuscript-to-print transmission was commonplace, and lay behind many products of the press. Those printed books were regularly supplied by their readers with additional manuscript features, such as scribbled ownership marks, marginal glosses, and other hand-created embellishments. Individual surviving copies of Caxton's *Canterbury Tales* show the varied receptions that could await printed books: they might be extravagantly illuminated by hand after printing, or fused with manuscript texts and subject to a unifying scheme of decoration, or repaired with new paper and handwritten text copied from print in a later century.¹²³ Such incunabula have benefitted from a vast amount of prior scholarship, and are consequently well recognised as an important site of interaction between manuscript and print in the history of the Chaucerian book.¹²⁴

Like medieval manuscripts, incunabula were sometimes also subject to schemes of readerly updating and improvement. This book occasionally draws upon those early printed copies for evidence of print-to-print transmission. In doing so, it acknowledges the overlap between practices

¹²¹ Bodl. MS Eng. Poet. E. 97 is reproduced and discussed in Crick and Walsham, 'Introduction', pp. 12–14 and Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 327.

¹²² Blair, 'Reflections on Technological Continuities', offers a useful overview on the phenomenon and its possible motivations.

¹²³ Respectively, these copies are Oxford, Merton College, Scr.P.2.1; Oxford, St John's College, b.2.21/266; and Cologny, Fondation Martin Bodmer, Inc.B.70. Discussed in Boffey, 'From Manuscript to Print: Continuity and Change', pp. 18–20; Edwards, 'Decorated Caxtons', pp. 499–501; Gillespie, *Print Culture*, pp. 77–86; Devani Singh, 'Caxton and His Readers: Histories of Book Use in a Copy of *The Canterbury Tales* (c. 1483)', *JEBS*, 20 (2017), 233–49 (241–4).

¹²⁴ See, for example, Edwards, 'Decorated Caxtons'; Alexandra Gillespie, 'Caxton's Chaucer and Lydgate Quartos: Miscellanies from Manuscript to Print', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 12.1 (2000), 1–25; Satoko Tokunaga, 'Rubrication in Caxton's Early English Books, c. 1476–1478', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 15.1 (2012), 59–78. Studies of the reception of incunabula include David McKitterick, *The Invention of Rare Books: Private Interest and Public Memory, 1600–1840* (Cambridge University Press, 2018); and Kristian Jensen, *Revolution and the Antiquarian Book: Reshaping the Past, 1780–1815* (Cambridge University Press, 2014). The Material Evidence in Incunabula Database is an invaluable resource for the study of copy-specific manuscript additions such as rubrication, decoration, and annotation. See <https://data.cerl.org/mei/>.

of using later editions to update fifteenth-century manuscripts and fifteenth-century printed books, and views them as a collective testament to the unprecedented scale and influence of print. However, I have largely singled out the manuscripts as a result of this book's interest in transmission across media, and specifically in print-to-manuscript transfers. As the preceding discussion has outlined, medieval manuscripts held a privileged status for early modern readers with antiquarian interests, and one which they did not always share with incunabula. McKitterick has located the emergence of an interest in the rarity (and thus value) of printed books in the late sixteenth century, and consequently begins his study of that phenomenon in 1600.¹²⁵ Kristian Jensen has likewise shown that until the late eighteenth century, the commercial resale value of incunabula in England, and even of Caxtons, was mixed.¹²⁶ For Chaucer's early modern readers, the material properties and associations of medieval manuscripts distinguished them in ways that were not automatically paralleled by the earliest printed books. In a period where scribal hands were not used to date manuscripts with any precision, handwritten books could benefit from the possibility that they 'seemeth to haue been written neare to Chaucers time', and the antiquaries further relished the thought that some manuscript copies had passed through the poet's own hands.¹²⁷ In electing to collect and renovate old handwritten copies when more legible, navigable, and current printed versions were available, early modern readers express an appreciation of the historicity of the medieval manuscript book.

The terminology of hybridity provides a convenient shorthand for describing books that elude easy classification in their sliding between manuscript and print, but such volumes would not have been recognised as 'hybrid' in their own time. In lieu of hybridity, this book considers the corrected, repaired, and expanded medieval volumes which it discusses as having been *perfected*. The idea of the perfected copy offers a historically attested concept for discussing the quality, completeness, and level of finish desired of books in the early modern period and provides a robust framework for characterising the updates that later readers made to their old books in the spirit of improvement. Thinking about the corrected, repaired, and altered medieval books in this study as perfected adds nuance

¹²⁵ McKitterick, *The Invention of Rare Books*, p. 15.

¹²⁶ Jensen, *Revolution and the Antiquarian Book*, pp. 76–81.

¹²⁷ *Workes* (1602), sig. Q1^v. Francis Thynne, *Animadversions*, p. 6 reports that 'one coppye of some part of [Chaucer's] woorkes came to his [William Thynne's] hands subscribed in diuers places with "examinatur Chaucer"'.

and specificity to the available scholarly vocabulary and brings us closer to viewing them as their early modern readers did. Moreover, the classification of particular genres of book use under the capacious yet more precise term of perfecting gives modern scholars and students an interpretative guide for understanding the motivations behind seemingly inscrutable, disparate, and idiosyncratic historical practices of bookish activity. This book therefore gathers historical evidence of reading, writing in, and remaking books under this umbrella concept, presenting perfecting as a practice that encapsulates a range of literate, scholarly, and bookish behaviours that are especially relevant to old volumes: glossing, correcting, emending, repairing, completing, supplementing, and authorising. In general terms, this book understands perfecting as the attempt to improve and complete a book according to a physical or imagined model. While it has become customary to apply the language of perfecting to early books which were subject to belated modern enhancements, I wish to reorient this term by recognising the currency and range of meanings it commanded for early modern makers, vendors, and readers of books.

In this, I follow Sonia Massai's observation that in the early modern period the verb *to perfect* could convey a dual sense of completing and correcting.¹²⁸ Massai classes authors, publishers, and readers within a larger category of 'annotating readers' whose activities show that 'the text preserved in early modern printed playbooks was in fact regarded as positively fluid and always in the process of being perfected'.¹²⁹ While the principal interest of her *Shakespeare and the Rise of the Editor* is in the recovery of early modern practices of preparing copy for the press, Massai's identification of 'an early modern understanding of printed playbooks as endlessly perfectible' also entails, as she goes on to note, 'the projection of the perfecting task onto the text's very recipients, its readers'. Building upon Massai's work, I will suggest in what follows that the early modern usage of *perfect* signals the concept's imbrication in the contemporary book culture that would have been familiar to Chaucer's early modern readers.

The idea of bibliographical perfection, meaning completeness, has its lexical roots in classical ideas about bodily perfection and mutilation which had already been transposed by the early modern period to ideas about books. The Latin 'Imperfectus', John Rider's *Bibliotheca Scholastica* (1589) records, was a synonym for 'Vnperfect, maimed, or wanting some thing'.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Sonia Massai, *Shakespeare and the Rise of the Editor* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 3–10.

¹²⁹ Massai, *Shakespeare and the Rise of the Editor*, p. 204.

¹³⁰ John Rider, *Bibliotheca Scholastica* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1589; STC 21031.5), sig. 2L1^v.

Given the word's embodied associations, it is appropriate that when the preacher Henry Smith described the restoration of the 'whole lims' of a faulty and unauthorised prior edition of his sermon, the verb he chose to characterise his work of augmentation was 'perfit'.¹³¹ An understanding of 'perfect' close to the editorial sense proposed by Massai is also detectable in Francis Thynne's report that his father William, in his undertaking to produce the first complete folio edition of Chaucer, 'made greate serche for copies to perfecte his woorkes'.¹³² Each of these statements from Smith and Thynne conceives the editorial work of perfecting – implying the augmenting and improvement of a text – as a process that takes place before a book has gone through the press.

However, a different bibliographical application of perfecting appears in Thomas Middleton's *A Game at Chesse* (1625), at the point where the Fat Bishop requests information about the printing of a book he has written, to which his pawn replies, 'Ready for publication: / For I saw perfect bookes this morning (sir)'.¹³³ Middleton's use of 'perfect' here, which conveys the readiness of the material book for distribution after printing, is distinct from the preceding examples. The two senses of perfect – to describe books that are both improved and complete – are blended in the prefatory epistle to Shakespeare's First Folio (1623), which describes the plays in terms of the editors' labours and the resulting book's definitiveness:

we pray you do not envie his friends, the office of their care, and paine, to have collected & publish'd them; and so to have publish'd them, as where (before) you were abus'd with diverse stolne, and surreptitious copies, maimed, and deformed by the frauds and stealthes of injurious impostors, that expos'd them: even those, are now offer'd to your view cur'd, and perfect of their limbes; and all the rest, absolute in their numbers, as he conceived them.¹³⁴

Heminge and Condell's sales pitch puns on the corporeal and bibliographical resonances of 'perfect' to suggest that the formerly 'maimed' and

¹³¹ Henry Smith, *Sermon of the Benefit of Contentation* (London: Abell Jeffes, 1591; *STC* 22696.5), sig. A2^r; discussed in Massai, *Shakespeare and the Rise of the Editor*, p. 5.

¹³² Thynne, *Animadversions*, p. 6.

¹³³ Thomas Middleton, *A Game at Chesse* (London: [s.n.], 1625; *STC* 17885), sig. D3^v. Discussed in Aaron T. Pratt and Kathryn James, *Collated and Perfect* (West Haven, CT: GHP, 2019), p. 31, <https://hrc.utexas.edu/collections/early-books-and-manuscripts/pdf/Collated-and-Perfect.pdf>. See also the use of perfect books as a synonym for 'gathered books' (meaning sets of printed sheets assembled into complete copies) in Joseph Moxon, *Moxon's Mechanick Exercises, or, The Doctrine of Handyworks Applied to the Art of Printing*, ed. by Theodore Low De Vinne, 2 vols. (New York: Typothetæ of the City of New York, 1896), II, p. 380.

¹³⁴ William Shakespeare, *Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* (London: Isaac Jaggard and Edward Blount, 1623; *STC* 22273), sig. A3^r.

'deformed' copies are 'cur'd, and perfect of their limbes' because their textual and material integrity has been restored. These examples from Middleton and Shakespeare's playbooks evoke the world inside or near the printhouse, though they use 'perfect' not to denote the behind-the-scenes work that happens before printing but as an adjective to characterise printed books on the threshold of their delivery to readers – in other words, completed.¹³⁵ Further evidence that 'perfect' could refer to a general sense of textual and bibliographical completeness is supplied by Guy Miège's *A new dictionary French and English* (1677), in which 'perfected' and 'finished' are treated as synonyms in two of the translator's example sentences:

ALMOST, *presque, quasi, à peu pres.*
This Book is almost perfected, *ce livre est presque achevé.*¹³⁶

Achevé, *finished, ended, concluded.*
Ce Livre est presque'achevé, *this Book is almost finished.*¹³⁷

Although Miège's sample definitions are by necessity stripped of any context, the choice of a bookish example to illustrate the usage of *achevé*, which he translates as finished or perfected, shows the specifically bibliographical associations of the concept of perfecting. This broader definition of 'perfect' to mean 'finished' in early modern English also operates in Robert Herrick's lyric poem 'His Request to Julia' (1648):

Julia, if I chance to die
Ere I print my Poetry;
I most humbly thee desire
To commit it to the fire:
Better 'twere my Book were dead,
Then to live not perfected.

Herrick's latest editors gloss 'perfected' in the final line as 'successfully completed', noting of the lyric that despite its playful tone, it more seriously 'suggests that [Herrick] saw print as the fulfilment of his ambition, with MS circulation an insufficient end'.¹³⁸ 'Perfect', then, was

¹³⁵ As Pratt notes, 'perfect' in Middleton here refers to the fact that 'all of the sheets had gone through the press and were gathered into individual copies for distribution'; *Collated and Perfect*, p. 31.

¹³⁶ Guy Miège, *A new dictionary French and English, with another English and French* (London: Thomas Dawks, 1677; Wing M2016), sig. ²C1^r.

¹³⁷ Miège, *A new dictionary French and English*, sig. *C2^r.

¹³⁸ Robert Herrick, *The Complete Poetry of Robert Herrick*, ed. by Tom Cain and Ruth Connolly (Oxford University Press, 2013), 1. Accessed via Oxford Scholarly Editions Online (2014), doi:10.1093/acrade/9780199212842.book.1.

a positive label regularly applied to books whose production was complete and which were deemed to be finished and ready for sale.

Perhaps most significantly, the use of the adjective 'perfect' to describe books which were well printed, finished, and available for distribution is also apparent in numerous warranties of perfection issued by booksellers in the seventeenth century. Such texts, in which a stationer makes a written pledge as to a book's completeness, show that bibliographical perfection was a well-established concept for stationers and readers in the early modern trade, and one that was of real economic consequence. These booksellers' warranties allowed early modern readers to shore up their purchases against sloppy work in the printhouse. Evidence of one such transaction survives on a folio-sized paper leaf which is now detached from the book in which it was originally written:

Bought of ffrancis Smethwicke
y^c 6th of ffebruary 1639 and he
doeth warent it to be perfit or to
make it perfeit or to give hime
his mony againe¹³⁹

Smethwicke's warranty of the book's completeness is atypical in its thoroughness and in his money-back guarantee, while the promise to 'make it perfect' if it is found to be otherwise reveals that the act of making perfect (whatever that could mean in this context) was an available avenue for improving incomplete books. Stationers and readers alike were accustomed to this sort of improvisation to repair and resolve problems in a book's production, notably in the supplying of both printed and manuscript supplements to furnish text that had been missed out during the printing process.¹⁴⁰ John Buxton, a member of the gentry who kept meticulous accounts during the early seventeenth century, records having paid six shillings 'for the changing of Shak-spheares works for on that is perfect' around 1627.¹⁴¹ The nature of the imperfection in Buxton's First Folio is unspecified; it might have been badly printed, as has been posited,¹⁴² but

¹³⁹ Now Washington, Folger Shakespeare Library, X.d.254; see LUNA: Folger Digital Image Collection, 'Note concerning the purchase of a book from the bookseller Francis Smethwicke', <https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/u4pq95>. My thanks to Ben Higgins for drawing this note to my attention.

¹⁴⁰ McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order*, pp. 102–8, 126, 127.

¹⁴¹ David McKitterick, "'Ovid with a Littleton': The Cost of English Books in the Early Seventeenth Century", *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 11.2 (1997), 184–234 (215).

¹⁴² Michael Dobson, 'Whatever you do, buy', *London Review of Books*, 23.22 (15 November 2001), www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v23/n22/michael-dobson/whatever-you-do-buy.

the fact that Buxton was willing to pay for the privilege of making the trade suggests to me that the damage had been done not in the printshop, but as a result of readerly use. These possibilities for perfecting show the early modern book's existence on a continuum between an imagined ideal of textual fixity and the flexibility born of its material existence. Booksellers might promise that printed books were perfect and complete, but there was always some degree of variance inherent to its production by human hands and eyes, and those that fell short of the ideal could be retroactively perfected according to the means and wishes of their readers.¹⁴³

It has been suggested that booksellers' warranties of perfection for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries 'related more frequently to new books' (in contrast to the claims of perfection that attached to antiquarian volumes from the eighteenth century).¹⁴⁴ As Aaron Pratt has shown, however, warranties of perfection could be applied to printed books on the second-hand market as well. Pratt has identified three seventeenth-century books which were decades old when they were sold with warranties of perfection inscribed by their booksellers. He observes that in all three cases (plus for a fourth, undated example) the warranties accompany thick books and might have been 'occasioned by a large number of leaves and an awareness that second-hand copies might be missing one or more of them'.¹⁴⁵ In one of these notes, inscribed on the final verso of a copy of John Gerard's *The Herball, or Generall Historie of Plantes* (1597), there is evidence of a forward-thinking bookseller, Richard Whittaker, also trying to drum up future business at the point of sale. On 3 December 1632, Whittaker wrote, 'I doe warrant this to bee of the last Impression and Perfect', going on to add that 'if Mr Caprle please to change it for one of the new Impression when it commeth out', he will exchange the old edition with the newly printed one for an extra twenty shillings, provided the first edition is still in good condition.¹⁴⁶ In this case, the bookseller's promise is not simply a *pro forma* guarantee of the old book's completeness. It also serves as an insurance policy for the buyer against his copy becoming superseded, and a savvy play for future sales on the part of Whittaker who, it transpires, was involved in publishing the second edition which would

¹⁴³ McKitterick suggests that imperfectly printed books were so common that they were 'merely an irritant' and not systematically insured. See *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order*, pp. 147–9.

¹⁴⁴ McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order*, p. 147.

¹⁴⁵ These are a note by Nathaniel Nowell dated 21 June 1666 in a 1640 folio herbal; a note by Richard Whittaker and dated 3 December 1632 in a 1597 herbal; and a note by a bookseller named Lee and dated 21 June 1664 in a book printed in 1637; see Pratt, *Collated and Perfect*, pp. 29–30.

¹⁴⁶ Washington, Folger Shakespeare Library, STC 11750 copy 6, sig. 514^v.

appear in the following year.¹⁴⁷ To these may be added three further seventeenth-century English warranties reported by F. C. Francis (which appear in Continental books printed seven, twenty-seven, and fifty-five years prior to their second-hand sale), and a 1649 warranty inscribed by the bookseller Sarah Jones in a copy of Shakespeare's Second Folio (1632).¹⁴⁸

This overlap between completeness and currency and their relation to the idea of the perfect book is expressed in the address 'To the Candid and Ingenious Reader' which prefaces the collected *Workes* (1629) of the clergyman Thomas Adams. He writes, 'I cannot but take notice, that much iniurie hath beene done to the buyers of such great bookes, by new additions: so that by the swelling of the later impressions, the former are esteemed vnperfect'.¹⁴⁹ Adams's assurances point to a slippage between material and textual perfection: a book, however complete it may be at the time of purchase, may nonetheless be 'esteemed vnperfect' in relation to later editions which have been augmented or 'swelled' with more material. For his part, Adams promises his readers that the volume they hold in their hands will never become outdated because any future work he produces 'shall be published by it selfe, and neuer preiudice this', the definitive collected edition.

It emerges from this array of evidence that 'perfect' could be used to describe printed books that were complete, finished, ready for distribution, and fully realised. A perfect book was a complete one and an imperfect or 'vnperfect' one was its opposite which was wanting in some way, either because it was faulty, damaged, or simply out of date. This latter condition, of no longer being current and therefore deemed incomplete, was a type of imperfection to which old books were naturally susceptible. But happily for such a book, as Smethwicke reassured his customer in 1639, it was possible 'to make it perfeit' again. The righting of imperfect books was a responsibility shouldered by stationers as well as by customers of the early modern book trade. The shared nature of this burden is most plainly visible in the

¹⁴⁷ John Gerard, *The herball or Generall historie of plantes* (London: for Adam Islip, Joyce Norton, and Richard Whitaker, 1633; STC 11751).

¹⁴⁸ The books which Francis reports as containing dated booksellers' warranties are Wolfgang Musculus, *In Esaiam prophetam commentarii* (Basel, 1623), Nicolaus Gorranus, *In quatuor Euangelia commentarius* (Antwerp, 1617), and Jean de Serres, *Opera quae extant omnia* [Plato] (Geneva, 1578). See F. C. Francis, 'Booksellers' Warranties', *The Library*, 5th ser., 1.3–4 (1946), 244–5. The copy of the Second Folio in which Sarah Jones's inscription can be found is now held at the Washington, Folger Shakespeare Library and may be a made-up copy; see Shakespeare Census, 'STC 22274 Fo. 2 no. 03', <https://shakespearecensus.org/copy/177/>. The inscription is also discussed in Kitamura Sae, 'A Shakespeare of One's Own: Female Users of Playbooks from the Seventeenth to the Mid-Eighteenth Century', *Palgrave Communications*, 3.1 (2017), 1–9.

¹⁴⁹ Thomas Adams, *The workes of Tho. Adams* (London: Thomas Harper, 1629; STC 105), sig. 53^r.

ubiquitous errata notices which encourage readers to correct and amend faults escaped in the book's printing, and many of which directly instruct them to take up their pens to do so.¹⁵⁰ Heidi Brayman Hackel makes the connection explicit in her observation that 'the invitation to "amend" a book from an errata sheet placed readers in the position of "perfecting" printed books'.¹⁵¹ But what happens to our understanding of historical reading practices if we remove the distance-inducing scare quotes with which the word 'perfecting' is punctuated in this formulation? The preceding discussion has shown that early modern stationers and their customers thought about books in terms of perfection and imperfection. By extension, these terms give book historians another way of apprehending the social, cultural, and economic value that accrued to old and new books, and a framework for interpreting evidence of readers' engagement with them.

My evidence for bibliographical perfecting has so far been confined to products of the press. To what extent was the early modern idea of the perfect book applicable to the manuscripts that form the centre of this study? It is apparent that perfecting was practised in both media. Although booksellers' warranties appear chiefly in relation to printed books, this was not universally the case. On the first leaf of a fourteenth-century parchment missal which had previously been at All Souls College, Oxford, there is a sixteenth-century note which closely echoes those warranties inscribed in printed books: 'Hic liber emptus a garbrando for xs. and if it do lacke anie parte he dothe promisse to make it complete'.¹⁵² The bookseller from whom the book was bought may be Oxford's Garbrand Herks – whom we may recall bought books from the college in 1549–50 and sold them second-hand – or his son, Richard, who inherited his father's business including his 'old parchment bookes'.¹⁵³ Regrettably, this Sarum missal is now missing twenty-eight leaves, and it is not clear how 'Garbrando', who surely sold printed wares as well as manuscripts, might have proposed 'to make it complete' but it is conceivable that a manuscript replacement leaf would have been supplied for the purpose.¹⁵⁴ I would venture that some of

¹⁵⁰ Smyth, *Material Texts*, pp. 95–6.

¹⁵¹ Heidi Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England: Print, Gender, and Literacy* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 30.

¹⁵² Oxford, All Souls College, MS 302, fol. 1^r; see *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Medieval Manuscripts of All Souls College, Oxford*, ed. by Andrew G. Watson (Oxford University Press, 1997) p. 219; and Watson, 'The Post-Medieval Library of All-Souls', p. 88.

¹⁵³ Watson, *Descriptive Catalogue*, p. 219. For Herks's will, see 'Garbrand HARCKES of Oxford', *Oxfordshire Family History Society*, http://wills.oxfordshirefhs.org.uk/az/wtext/harkes_001.html.

¹⁵⁴ As McKitterick notes, manuscript was regularly used to make good printed copies in which text was wanting; *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order*, pp. 102–8, 126–7.

the material techniques for perfecting manuscripts detailed in the subsequent chapters would have been recognisable to the Herkses and their manuscript-buying clients. By the late eighteenth century, when Eliza Dennis Denyer undertook a project of repairing a fifteenth-century psalter by supplying missing text and rendering lost pictures, borders, and illuminated capitals in her own hand and style, the verb used to describe her efforts was 'perfected'.¹⁵⁵ As such cases illustrate, an appreciation of antiquity was not inimical to altering old books in the spirit of improvement. For those interested in the textual and codicological integrity of medieval manuscripts, enhancing and repairing them was a vital practice which elevated their utility, value, or beauty, and made them more, not less, worthy of preservation. To understand such volumes as perfected is to access a reader's-eye view of old books as open-ended, flexible, and conducive to adaptation and improvement.

Often, it was a worry about the state of the text, specifically its accuracy and completeness, that spurred the early modern urge to perfect old books in these ways. These concerns about the integrity of Chaucer's texts, and the reasons one might remedy them, are articulated in a c. 1555 revision of *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* undertaken by Walter Stevins. He observes in a preface 'To the Reader' that he found Chaucer's text 'corrupte and false in so many and sondrie places' and 'dyd not a lytell mervell if a booke showld come oute of his handes so imperfite and indigest'. Significantly, Stevins takes Chaucer's exceptionality as axiomatic and justifies his work of perfecting the text of the *Astrolabe* on that basis. Chaucer's 'other workes' are 'reckenyd for the best that ever weare sette fowrth in owre english tonge' and are 'taken for a manifest arguemente of his singuler witte, and generalitie in all kindes of knowledge'. He goes on to detail the nature of his interventions: 'in some places where the sentences weare imperfite I haue supplied and filled them as necessitie required'. Finally, he professes to have carried out these labours for the sake of Chaucer and the work itself, 'which if it had come parfite vnto owr handes (no dowbte) woold have merited wonderfulle praise'.¹⁵⁶ For Stevins, the text of the *Astrolabe* was unbefitting the author because it was 'imperfite' and he imagines himself as restoring it to the 'parfite' state written by Chaucer. The circumstances surrounding Stevins's revision leave some doubt as to whether he was referring to 'imperfect' printed or

¹⁵⁵ For an account of Denyer's life and her work on BL, Additional MS 6894, see Sonja Drimmer, 'A Medieval Psalter "Perfected": Eighteenth-Century Conservationism and an Early (Female) Restorer of Rare Books and Manuscripts', *British Library Journal*, Article 3 (2013), 1–38.

¹⁵⁶ BL, MS Sloane 261, fols. 3^r–4^r.

manuscript versions of the text (or both), but the fair copy in which his revisions survive suggests that he planned to circulate his own ‘newly amendyd’ version in print.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, it has been judged by A. E. Brae that Stevins’s text of the *Astrolabe* ‘possesses almost the authority of a printed book zealously edited; and indeed it is very much more correct than any of the printed copies’.¹⁵⁸ Stevins’s editorial attention to the *Astrolabe* matters here not only because he intervened to improve its text and framed his amendments in terms of perfecting, but also because (as he tells it) his work was warranted by Chaucer’s status as the paragon of English letters. His comments make explicit the assumptions around Chaucer’s singularity and superiority which were widely held but, because they were seen as self-evident, were seldom expressed by the perfecting readers who undertook such work.

Naturally, the verb *to perfect* included the more general meaning of improving something, but this brief history shows that perfecting had a deep and particular resonance within the bibliographical lexicon of the early modern period.¹⁵⁹ To perfect a text might mean to edit and correct it, whereas the adjectival sense designated texts and books which were finished and fully realised (sometimes by the author), and the obverse *imperfect* was applied to faulty or incomplete ones. Historians of the book increasingly recognise the seeming borderland between manuscript and early print as an illimitable site of overlap and exchange. It should be no surprise, then, that a book culture which had learned to think about and value books in terms of their completeness would apply these judgements and desires to volumes new and old, in print and in manuscript. As I demonstrate in the chapters that follow, old written copies were known to be plagued by the same concerns about incompleteness, inaccuracy, and authority which troubled print in this period, and the notion that books could be updated, expanded, and corrected was not confined to contemporary volumes. This book attends to some of those manuscripts which book historians might call hybrid, and recasts them in terms of the practice of perfecting. In the process, it suggests that a sharper understanding of pre-modern book

¹⁵⁷ Stevins’s manuscript preface indicates that he was familiar with printed versions of the text but Brae suggests that another manuscript (BL, MS Sloane 314) ‘was obviously in the possession of him who wrote 261 – probably the very original from which he copied it’; see Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Treatise on the Astrolabe Edited with Notes and Illustrations*, ed. by A. E. Brae (London: John Russell Smith, 1870), p. 6.

¹⁵⁸ Brae, *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, p. 6.

¹⁵⁹ Pratt, *Collated and Perfect*, p. 31. See also *OED*, ‘perfect, *v.*’, 2. Subsequent references to the *OED* also refer to its online version, www.oed.com.

culture may be gained from reconceiving such volumes not as hybrid oddities but as having been renovated in the spirit of improvement.

In the printhouses of the early nineteenth century, the verb *to perfect* would come to refer to the impression of the second forme on a sheet.¹⁶⁰ Concurrently, 'making perfect' would become a well-attested phenomenon amongst nineteenth-century collectors, who often had missing leaves in printed books supplied from other copies or with pen facsimile.¹⁶¹ Although they differ in their detail, these uses of 'perfect' retain the vestigial sense of finishing an otherwise incomplete book – a sense which already had currency in the early modern period. By antedating the well-established later senses of perfecting to the preceding centuries, we may better account for the habits of reading and use early modern owners brought to their books. The readerly techniques and acts of remaking that the following chapters chart in relation to Chaucer will be recognisable to anyone who has spent enough time with medieval manuscripts, but the lexicon for describing and understanding these practices has remained underdeveloped. Thinking about these acts in terms of perfecting grants access to a richer vocabulary for describing what early modern readers did to their manuscripts and provides a new lens on the range of value assigned to different kinds of books in the period.

That early modern readers and owners modified their books is not a new observation, but the choices that they made with a view to improving their manuscripts altered them in suggestive, meaningful ways. Today, scholarship has moved on from condemning the 'deplorable methods' of an age which 'approved the restoration, physically as well as conjecturally, not only of what the author was believed to have written, but what they might have written had they been in possession of other sources of information'.¹⁶² Such judgements have given way to more accommodating views of the past, some of which have been best expressed in those studies of Matthew Parker which acknowledge the relationship between the remaking of old books and the production of meaning. The Parker Librarian R. I. Page once observed that the manuscripts in his care were

¹⁶⁰ *OED*, 'perfect, *v.*', 1(b); for a description of the process see Gaskell, *Bibliography*, pp. 131–3. It is not clear, however, that this usage was in place during the early modern period, when 'reiteration' was the term used to designate this process in printers' manuals. For example, see Christophe Plantin, *Calligraphy & Printing in the Sixteenth Century: Dialogue Attributed to Christopher Plantin in French and Flemish Facsimile*, ed. by Ray Nash (Antwerp: Plantin-Moretus Museum, 1964), p. 248; Moxon, *Moxon's Mechanick Exercises*, II, p. 326.

¹⁶¹ Sarah Werner, *Studying Early Printed Books, 1450–1800: A Practical Guide* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2019), pp. 136–7.

¹⁶² May McKisack, *Medieval History in the Tudor Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 36.

'in a sense sixteenth-century ones'.¹⁶³ Siân Echard, who cites Page's provocative formulation in a later piece, concludes that 'When Matthew Parker performed surgery on his books, he was usually trying to complete or improve them in some way'.¹⁶⁴ But Parker was not alone in this, and in this book I delineate the insights into Chaucer's reception that may be gained from taking these bibliographical improvements seriously – that is, by studying the principal forms they assumed, and the ends to which they aspired. Such an inquiry reveals a set of early modern assumptions and preferences about Chaucer and his works. The chapters of this book identify and discuss the various means by which early modern readers perfected Chaucerian manuscripts: (1) glossing, correcting, and emending; (2) repairing and completing; (3) supplementing; and (4) authorising. Reading, annotating, and book use are often characterised as highly idiosyncratic activities. Organising the chapters by particular genres of readerly activity rather than by manuscript or text allows for the emergence of common threads from pieces of evidence which might seem anomalous or exceptional in isolation. In each chapter I show that the pattern of reading in question may be connected to broader cultural preoccupations with Chaucer and his works in the period. Thus, the correctors, glossators, and emendators of Chapter 1 convey their anxiety about the intelligibility and accuracy of Chaucer's language as it has been received; the readers in Chapter 2 try to make good old books in pursuit of imagined ideals of bibliographic completeness; those in Chapter 3 reveal their preconceptions about the Chaucerian canon as they augment old copies with additional texts; and the readers in Chapter 4 show their desire to know the author and define his works. Every chapter illuminates the role of print in informing and shaping these readerly expectations and beliefs. Accordingly, the modifications made by such readers signal their appreciation of a set of print conventions surrounding Chaucer whose importance has long been acknowledged but whose impact has been harder to document. Taken together, the book's chapters illustrate that the relationships between medieval manuscripts and early modern printed books cast new light on Chaucer's reception in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Though the chapters of this work identify persistent patterns in the early modern reception of the medieval manuscript book, its claims are not exhaustive, nor are they applicable to the entire corpus of surviving

¹⁶³ Page, 'Transcription of Old English', p. 6, qtd. in Echard, 'Containing the Book', p. 106. See also Summit, *Memory's Library*, pp. 102–14.

¹⁶⁴ Echard, 'Containing the Book', p. 114.

fifteenth-century Chaucer manuscripts. Its approach is necessarily selective, and my intention is to assemble manuscripts into new formations and to illuminate what their shared histories of reception reveal about Chaucer in the early modern period.

The single-author approach this study takes is facilitated by Chaucer's exceptional place within literary history, for he presents us with the most successful example of how Middle English texts which circulated widely in manuscript were transmitted to readers in a new medium and age. While no other medieval English author enjoyed Chaucer's enduring presence in printed books, he was by no means the only one whose works were repackaged as goods for that burgeoning marketplace. The methods for studying reception that I employ in the ensuing chapters might therefore be applied to studies of the surviving medieval manuscripts of Gower, Langland, and Lydgate, who all received some treatment in early modern print, and whose names (or at least works, in the case of *Piers Plowman*) were well known in the literary and antiquarian circles of England. Other scholars have already identified some of the tangible effects that the entry of these Middle English authors into print had on the afterlives of their manuscripts and on their later reception. For instance, Sarah Kelen has located echoes of the first printed edition of *Piers* in the prophetic interpretations of that text by early modern readers of manuscripts.¹⁶⁵ The scribe of one fifteenth-century copy of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, meanwhile, is known to have used a Caxton edition (1483) as an exemplar.¹⁶⁶ More subtle traces of print's influence on late medieval and early modern reading may well exist in the nearly fifty medieval manuscripts of the *Confessio* that still survive.

It is appropriate at this point to pause over the use of 'readers' in my title. Recent scholarship has acknowledged the problem of classifying idiosyncratic readerly habits and has attempted to accommodate their variety under a more generous concept of 'book use' that has gradually displaced the discourse of reading alone. Books were not only read, many historians of the book assert, but actively used as well, for purposes ranging from handwriting practice, to recording milestones in the lives of their owners, to political self-fashioning.¹⁶⁷ The people whose traces I find in Chaucer's

¹⁶⁵ Sarah A. Kelen, *Langland's Early Modern Identities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 37–8.

¹⁶⁶ On this manuscript, Bodl. MS Hatton 51, and its exemplar, see Nafde, 'Gower from Print to Manuscript'.

¹⁶⁷ William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

medieval manuscripts often show themselves to be attentive and studious readers, and their cognitive engagement with the book took diverse textual and material forms which reflect their concerns with accuracy, completeness, and authority, all variously conceived. The labours of the attentive reader have come to be emblematised by the image of the bookwheel, an early modern contraption made of wood and cog-wheels which allowed the seated individual to cycle smoothly through open copies of multiple books. As Jardine and Grafton write in their study of Renaissance polymath and aspiring courtier Gabriel Harvey, the bookwheel ‘belongs to Harvey’s cultural moment, in which collation and parallel citation were an essential, constructive part of a particular kind of reading’.¹⁶⁸ This book uncovers additional cases of readers who were similarly at home in this intellectual milieu, who pored over Chaucerian manuscripts and read them in parallel with different copies of the same text. In doing so, it excavates histories of readers and their books, as well as relationships between books that existed in physical proximity, or which were simply connected in the imaginations of their readers. When this book speaks of readers, then, it does so in order to acknowledge their embeddedness in the matrix of early modern book culture, and is cognizant that the historical practices it studies often defy any strict definition of the term.

Fittingly for a book which charts the interweaving of past and present and invokes Chaucer’s untimeliness, I take a broad view of another term from my title: ‘early modern’. As Carolyn Dinshaw has noted in a study of medieval asynchrony which also pointedly critiques the idea of historical time, ‘period boundaries are inadequate in the face of the complexity of temporal and cultural phenomena’.¹⁶⁹ The misfit is amplified when the materials under discussion are temporally elusive – when it is impossible to date for certain a particular annotator’s hand on palaeographic evidence alone, or to determine exactly which of three similar Chaucer editions a copyist used for their transcription. I specify individual instances of reading and reception as precisely as is possible and use the early modern period to mean the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but by necessity this book also ranges more widely, from its discussions of fifteenth-century printed books, manuscripts, and scribes to eighteenth-century editors who played their own part in perfecting old copies of Chaucer. Alongside this study’s historical specificity, in other words, is a sense of the Chaucerian

¹⁶⁸ Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, ‘“Studied for Action”: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy’, *Past & Present*, 129 (1990), 30–78 (48).

¹⁶⁹ Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now? Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 19.

book as an object on the move through time. In this way, it models and contributes to a vision of book history articulated by Peter Stallybrass – one that ‘should make us think of all history in terms of multiple (overlapping and intersecting) temporalities rather than the punctual time of specific dates and periods’.¹⁷⁰ In drawing attention to practices of reading Chaucer manuscripts in an age which redefined him in print, this book elucidates the layered, often messy, relationships between old and newer books. These are challenging objects which resist easy binaries and prompt a recognition of the Chaucerian book as a perennial site of both historical continuity and reinvention. To observe the movement of these volumes in time is to witness the persistence and transformations of the past through periods of substantial technological, cultural, and linguistic change.

¹⁷⁰ The quotation appears in an unpublished piece by Stallybrass, cited in Harris, *Untimely Matter*, pp. 17–18.