Medieval literature, like any other literature, was created and existed in a specific historical context. The modern reader, of course, is entitled to disregard this context and to interpret medieval literature from any number of reader- or aesthetic-oriented critical approaches. But if the reader aspires to understand what a given work of literature meant to its original audience, then he needs to know something about the political, cultural, and artistic ideologies upon which that work draws. He needs also to know something about how the work of literature was produced and disseminated, for this information can provide significant insights into the cultural status both of the work itself and of the author. “Literary production,” as Jerome McGann has suggested, “is not an autonomous and self-reflexive activity; it is a social and an institutional event.”

For medieval literature, one of the relevant “institutions” is scribal transmission. Specifically, most late medieval works survive in the handwritten copies of private readers and professional, independent copyists. Since the individual copies of a given medieval work typically disagree with each other in any number of substantive ways, the intended words of the original author are not always apparent. In trying to recover the initial authorial intention, a number of differing editorial schools of thought have developed, but most scholars would agree that the ideal of historically minded editors and readers would be the recovery of what the author alone wrote; the points of contention typically are the likelihood of such a recovery and the method by which it can be effected. Accordingly, the non-authorial readings produced by the scribes are often judged to be of little intrinsic worth. Malcolm Godden, for instance, voices the opinion of many editors and critics when he observes that

the tendency to incorporate into the text alterations by later adaptors or to allow easily correctable errors to stand, on the dubious principle that a scribe's version is as interesting as the
author's, not only gives undue weight to inept scribes and correctors but also obscures the history of the text.²

Recently, however, Barry Windeatt has suggested that since scribal alterations seem to be a natural byproduct of medieval manuscript transmission, they are valuable historical evidence for the initial reception of a given work. Windeatt specifically suggests that to ignore the evidence of the scribes except in so far as it can be categorized for the editorial purpose of determining originality is to pursue a modern ambition to create a text free from its scribal medium. This is in itself essentially a falsification of how the poem was first read, through the medium of scribal copies with all their built-in adaptations and interpretations of the poet's intentions.³

For those interested in the historical meanings of medieval literature, such an attitude is commendable, for it recognizes the manuscript context of medieval literature as a source of significant information and not as simply a disturbance in the textual journey from medieval author to modern printed edition.

As insightful as Windeatt's observations are, however, the significance of scribal alteration may sometimes be far greater than he suggests. At issue here are not unconscious errors due to eyeskip, dittography, or homoeoteleuton; rather, my concern is with the apparently conscious alteration of a grammatical ending, word, or clause. The traditional editorial view of the scribal institution would regard such alterations as corruptions which imply a failure in scribal transmission, while Windeatt's analysis would suggest that though this may be the case, they are nevertheless informative corruptions. But in some texts the extensiveness of the "corruptions" calls into question the very basis of such a judgment. That is, the problem may not lie so much with the scribal institution as with the modern interpretation of it. To attribute to any scribe the desire to reproduce exactly what was in front of him is to impute specific conceptions of scribal role, authorial intention, and the definition of a text, and it is only with regard to these imputed conceptions that a scribe can be said to have failed. Thus, if the goal of the historically minded critic is to understand a given work of literature in the ways its original audience did, it will prove profitable to explore the possibility that for certain medieval works the conventional interpretations of scribal role and authorial intention are simply inappropriate.⁴ Chaucer's Boece, which survives in ten manuscripts and two early printed editions of manuscript value,
is particularly appropriate for such an exploration, for since it is a translation, the definitions of author and text which it embodies should be clear enough; Boethius is the author of the Consolatio, Chaucer is the author of the translation, and scribes are the transmitters of both. If in such an apparently unambiguous textual situation like this one conventional textual interpretations prove inadequate, then there may be reason to believe they will prove inadequate for other medieval texts as well.5

Of the twelve authorities, all of which are at least one copy removed from Chaucer's holograph and some of which are fragmentary, only two of the manuscripts, both now in Cambridge University Library, are considered consistently close to what Chaucer probably wrote, and all modern editions of the Boece are based on one or the other of these manuscripts.6 The remaining authorities embody a remarkable amount of the sort of alteration familiar to the editors of many medieval works. Many of these scribal alterations—again disregarding obvious copying errors—are designed as expansions on or modernizations of what Chaucer wrote.7 In terms of morphology, verb endings are most affected, with the scribe of Salisbury MS. 113 (Sal) regularly substituting s for eth as the suffix for third person singular present indicative verbs, and the scribe of British Library MS Add. 16165 (A2), John Shirley, replacing the e or en of plural verbs with the southern dialectal form, eb.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original</th>
<th>Revised</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hath (lpl.33)</td>
<td>has Sal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ben (1p2.18)</td>
<td>beþe A²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shyneth (1m3.11)</td>
<td>schynes Sal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>defenden (1p4.193)</td>
<td>defendeþe A²</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chaucer's syntax, which preserves a number of constructions which were falling out of currency by the mid-fifteenth century, when most of the Boece manuscripts were produced, was also subject to scribal alteration. Some of these alterations are quite minor, such as the insertion of the preposition "to" before an infinitive, the modernization of an idiomatic construction, or the addition of an understood pronominal object:

- they maken a man rather han . . . to haue nede . . . Sal
- nede of foreyne help (3p3.60–61)
- a maner body (3p10.120) . . . manere of . . . Pk
- I mot graunte as it is . . . graunte it . . . H
- (3p9.47–48)

Other syntactic alterations are more substantial. For instance, the scribe of B rewrites the passive construction "for it is demed to ben
good” (3p10.155) as “for men trownen also þat hit be good.” And Cx, or the scribe who prepared the manuscript from which he was working, strengthened the parallelism of the following sentence by repeating the main verb phrase:

so that it [the divine foreknowledge] knowe sum-tyme of thing and sum-tyme the contrarie (5p6.188–89)

So that hit knowe somme tyne oon thyng And somme tyne yt knoweth the contrarie of that thing. ⁸

Chaucer’s diction is varied and sometimes aureate in the Boece. For the scribes, particularly that of B, this ornateness was cause to modernize, as were what the scribes evidently regarded as archaisms:

elde (1m1.9)       age B
mintinge (1m2.2)    thynkyng B
hielde (2m2.1)      powrid B
whyalom (2m6.3)     somtyme A¹, Sal
ploungy (3m1.6)     blowyng A¹
supplien (3p8.8)    prey B
infinite (4p6.48)   wipouten fyn A¹, Sal
batailen (4p7.31)   fy3tten B

Such alterations of morphology, syntax, and diction, as was noted above, are common in most medieval works which exist in more than a few manuscripts. There are other scribal alterations, however, which seem occasioned especially by the nature of the Boece. For instance, several scribes expanded Chaucer’s common technique of doublets by pairing some of Chaucer’s unusual or archaic words with more familiar ones:

felonous (1p4.146)  wykked or felonous B
fele-folde (2p1.11) fele or manyfolde Th

Several scribes also clarified the dialogue structure of the Boece by adding “P” before Lady Philosophy’s speeches and “B” before Boethius’s,⁹ while on a few occasions the scribe of B attempted to improve the “ordinatio” of Chaucer’s translation by adding “Glosa” and “Textus” at relevant—and sometimes irrelevant—points.¹⁰ The “ordinatio” of the Boece was also scribally altered by the insertion in 5m3 of additional material from Trevet’s commentary in the archetype of A¹ and Sal and by a body of lexical glosses which were attached to, and sometimes infiltrated, Chaucer’s text. These glosses, many of which derive from Trevet’s commentary, typically explain difficult words or philosophical concepts.¹¹

The fact that the Boece is a translation occasioned another distinctive
kind of scribal alteration: some scribes “improved” Chaucer’s text through consultation of the sources. The scribe of the exemplar of A¹ and Sal, for example, apparently had access to Jean de Meung’s French translation, for on several occasions A¹ and Sal are harmonized with Jean’s version. For example:

polum relinquit extimum / dorsaque uelocis premat
aetheris / compos uerendi luminis (4m1.16–18)
elle delaissera le derrenier point du ciel et marchera seur
le dos du firmament isnel et verra la redoubtable clarté (9–10)
he shal forleten the laste hevene, and he shal pressen and
wenden on the bak of the swifte firmament, and he shal
ben maked parfit of the worshipfull light of god (16–19)

In A¹ and Sal the sentence is: “she shal forleten þe last poyn of þe
hevene 7 she shal pressen 7 wenden on þe bak of þe swifte firmament
7 she shal ben maked parfit of þe dredefulle clerenesse of god.” Similarly,
there is evidence that Caxton consulted the Latin. The clause
“and somme dispyse that they mowe nat beren” (4p6.188–89) occurs
only in Cx and in Th, which, to a large extent, is a copy of Cx. It is
important to recollect here, however, that Chaucer’s text does not
always correspond to the modern editions of the Consolatio and Li
Livres; indeed, Dedeck-Héry, who prepared what has become the stan-
dard edition of Li Livres, demonstrated that throughout the Boece
there are readings which correspond neither to the Consolatio nor to Li
Livres as Jean evidently wrote it but to the idiosyncratic French text of
Li Livres which is preserved in Besançon MS. 434.¹² In this manu-
script, in fact, the clause which would correspond to the English one
found only in Cx and Th was omitted through eyeskip, and so it is clear
that the absence of the English clause in the Boece manuscripts is
authorial and that the clause, which Robinson does not print, is in fact
Caxton’s own translation of the Latin. Thynne also probably had ac-
cess to the Latin, for he corrects many of the proper names to their
correct Latin forms. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senecciens (1p3.40)</th>
<th>Senecas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agamenon (4m7.1)</td>
<td>Agamemnon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

He also sometimes corrects the Latin rubrics of Caxton’s text, as at
2m5, where Cx reads “felici,” while Th reads “facili.”

The Boece scribes, then, altered their text in a number of substantive
ways, and in order to assess the implications of these alterations, which
range from the modernization of a grammatical ending to the insertion
of a clause, it will be useful to consider the nature of the text which the
scribes were transmitting. The Boece is a translation, the ultimate source of which, of course, is Boethius's De Consolatione Philosophiae. To the Middle Ages, however, the Consolation was not a fixed text but a living tradition. That is, perhaps due to the intensely personal, moral response which the Consolation might elicit in a reader, Boethius's text underwent continual revision, translation, and explication throughout the medieval period. By the ninth century, from which the earliest extant manuscripts of the Consolatio date, several textual strains had developed, and by the fourteenth century, when Chaucer was writing, a distinct redaction, typically called the "Vulgate" text today, had arisen. While the Latin text was thus developing, a diverse body of commentaries accrued to the Consolatio; these commentaries might simply accompany the Latin text in the margins of manuscripts, they might be bound with the text, or they might even, in the case of individual readings, infiltrate the text. The Consolation tradition became even more diverse whenever the Consolatio was translated, for translators altered the text both through the incorporation of commentary material and by the very act of translation. To speak of the Consolation in the Middle Ages, accordingly, is to speak of an undulating tradition rather than of a fixed text written by Boethius.13

Thus, that Chaucer did not translate the Latin alone, or even for the most part, is not surprising. In fact, he also translated Jean de Meung's French translation, Nicholas Trevet's commentary on the Consolatio, and perhaps some of the so-called Remigian glosses, all of which reflect the living nature of the Consolation in the Middle Ages. There is very little in the Boece which can be attributed solely to Chaucer, and so in this sense the Boece must be called a close translation. But it is a close translation of a "source" which exists only by implication, for there is no other medieval version of the Consolation which has the same mixture of Boethius, Jean de Meung, Trevet, and Remigius. That is, Chaucer himself in effect created his source—and thus produced a new text—by compiling these disparate aspects of the Consolation tradition which accrued to what Boethius wrote. The implication of Chaucer's procedure in the Boece, which of course is rooted in the nature of the Consolation tradition, is a conception of a text much different from the modern conception. For Chaucer, the text he was transmitting was not static, but fluid, and he, as a translator, gave it a temporary shape, just as Jean de Meung had done before him. Significantly, a similar situation obtains for many original vernacular compositions, where the author or form of a given text was less important than its "sentence." In many cases, medieval authors, especially vernacular ones, were transmitters who supplemented or abridged an existing tradition by, in Chaucer's own words, recovering
from “olde bokes . . . this newe science that men lere” (PF, 24–25). In such cases, as C. S. Lewis indicates, authorship and text existed in a continuum:

For many of the texts there is no one human being who can really be called the author in the full sense. You may sometimes be able to pick out the bits added by the last writer and separate them from those which were already there in the text he touched up. You may decide that his are the best bits. But of course this does not make him responsible for that complex organization which the whole book now is.14

The fact that the Boece is considered a translation by modern scholars is beside the point here, for the complexity of Chaucer’s “source” and his treatment of it render the Boece, in effect, a new composition in many ways. Chaucer claims to have translated “Boece de Consolacione,” but what he in fact did was to combine selectively aspects of the Consolation tradition and thereby create from these “olde bokes” a “newe science.” His textual procedure in creating the Boece in fact parallels his procedure in creating many of his poems, wherein he reworked existing texts into new ones. The absence of the reordering of extended passages, which occurs in the Troilus for instance, is of course necessitated by the strict demands of logical argument in comparison with narrative verse.

From this perspective on medieval texts, the implications of the conscious alterations of the Boece scribes become clear. Just as Chaucer gave temporary shape to a fluid text, so, too, did the Boece scribes. The majority evidently did not view the text they were copying as something sacrosanct: Chaucer’s authorial intention was not their primary concern. Rather, their procedure suggests that they appropriated for themselves the power to give a shape to what they were transmitting—to act, in effect, as authors. In the Middle Ages the Consolation was a living text, and the Boece scribes, several of whom were private readers rather than professional copyists, had as much right as Chaucer did to interpret and express Boethius’s ideas. Indeed, the similarities between Chaucer’s procedure and those of the scribes are sometimes striking. Thus, Chaucer, like the scribes, emphasized parallelism by repeating understood words, explained unusual words by pairing them with more common ones, and clarified the structure of the Boece by adding “Boece,” “Philosophie,” “Glosa,” and “Textus” at the appropriate places. And Chaucer’s procedure of translating the Latin and the French has a counterpart in, for instance, Caxton’s procedure of supplementing Chaucer’s translation with his own translations from
the Latin or in the incorporation of additional material from Trevet’s commentary in the archetype of A^1 and Sal. In effect, the various scribal alterations are extensions of Chaucer’s own method of composition, so that for the Boece scribes, to return to Chaucer’s metaphor in the Parliament, the act of copying, like the act of composition, could in effect be the plowing of “olde feldes.” That the “newe corn” which the Boece scribes raised is not as sweet as Chaucer’s is an aesthetic, not a textual, judgment. As was noted above, the limits of Boethius’s ideas prevented complete rearrangement of Chaucer’s composition, but this conception of a text as something fluid does reach an apogee of sorts among the Boece manuscripts in Bodleian MS Auct. F.3.5. This manuscript contains Book One only. But the text is not really that of Book One. It is, in fact, a revision of Book One which supplements Chaucer’s text with lengthy philosophical and cosmological clarifications and which in no way recognizes Chaucer’s “authorship,” so that the text which Chaucer transformed into something Boethius would not recognize is transformed again into something which scarcely resembles what Chaucer wrote.\(^{15}\)

In their occasional assumption of what is in effect an authorial posture the Boece scribes were certainly not unique in the Middle Ages, for a similar posture was adopted by other medieval scribes working on a variety of texts. Some scribes of the Canterbury Tales, for instance, took Chaucer at his word when he suggested they might “Turne over the leef and chese another tale” (CT, A 3177): they omitted the tales they did not like.\(^{16}\) Similarly, some scribes of Piers Plowman created composites of Langland’s three poems,\(^{17}\) while the scribe of The Book of Margery Kempe apparently served as a sort of Maxwell Perkins to Margery’s Thomas Wolfe.\(^{18}\) Indeed, it has already been suggested that scribal involvement in such texts can be so extensive that the distinction between author and scribe finally breaks down. As Derek Pearsall has noted with regard to some Piers Plowman manuscripts,

> the mind of the scribal editor has played with such freedom upon and among the texts of the poem as to reconstitute parts of it in virtually a new form. The precise difference between this kind of editorial activity and the original activity of the author engaged in the process of revision and recomposition is a legitimate matter of debate.\(^{19}\)

The textual situation of Piers, of course, is probably unique. What other work of literature exists in at least three distinct, authorial versions? Moreover, the topical nature of the poem was an important factor in its transmission. As George Kane has noted, Piers
was especially subject to variation as a living text with a content of direct concern to the scribes. Its relevance to contemporary circumstances would not merely distract them from the passive state of mind ideal for exact copying, but actually induce them, whether consciously or subconsciously, to make substitutions. It is difficult to imagine a reader for whom the Boece would have had similar immediacy. And yet the Boece scribes responded almost as actively to their text as the Piers Plowman scribes did to theirs. If the scribal alterations in the Boece manuscripts lack the consistent ideological motivations of the alterations found in many Piers manuscripts, it is because of the different natures of the two works. The scribes' willingness to adapt the text being copied remains apparent in each case.

The implications of scribal alteration in texts like the Boece are thus far-reaching indeed, for they involve the definitions of author and authorial intention, and, consequently, impinge on the procedure and goals of a modern editor. The editor, as was suggested at the beginning of this discussion, typically wants to recover the textual intentions of the original author. To be sure, there were medieval writers who were quite protective of their own and other writers' intentions; the authenticity of a text was of clear importance to St. Anselm, Petrarch, and Chaucer himself, to name a few well-known examples. Similarly, there is evidence that scribes, at least monastic ones, were admonished to copy correctly and that correctors improved the quality of many a medieval text. But what scribes were told and what they produced do not necessarily agree, for the manuscript evidence of the Boece indicates that the scribes involved in its transmission did not hesitate to alter substantively the texts they were copying.

Indeed, the terms “scribe,” “author,” and even “scribal editor,” as conventionally used, would seem to involve question begging for the Boece, for the activities of those who transmitted it clearly overlap with Chaucer's procedure in producing the translation. If there is not question begging involved here, then there is the tacit admission that for the Boece the scribal institution was a failure. Significant insights may derive, however, from medieval terminology for those who participated in the production and dissemination of books. According to St. Bonaventura,

[Q]uadruplex est modus faciendi librum. Aliquis enim scribit aliena, nihil addendo vel mutando; et iste mere dicitur scriptor. Aliquis scribit aliena addendo, sed non de suo; et iste compilerator dicitur. Aliquis scribit et aliena et sua, sed aliena tamquam principalia, et sua tamquam annexa ad evidentiam; et iste dicitur commentator non auctor. Aliquis scribit et sua et aliena,
sed sua tamquam principalia, aliena tamquam annexa ad confirmationem et debet dici auctor.24

[The manner of making a book is fourfold. One person writes the words of another, neither adding nor changing a thing; and this person is called simply a scribe. Someone else writes the words of another and supplements them, but not with his own words; and this person is called a compiler. Someone else writes the words of another and supplements them with his own words, but the other's words are primary and his own are used for clarification; and this person is called a commentator, not an author. And someone else writes the words of another as well as his own, but his own are primary, while the other's are used for clarification; and this person ought to be called an author.]

Strictly speaking, throughout the Middle Ages neither a vernacular writer in general nor a translator in particular could be an “auctor.” Indeed, according to St. Bonaventura’s classification, Chaucer’s “plowing” of the field of the Consolation tradition in order to create the Boece makes him in effect a “commentator,” as is any medieval vernacular writer who creates “newe science” out of “olde bokes.” The difference between this process of production and that of a copyist who consciously alters the text in front of him is perhaps one of degree and not kind, so that such a copyist ought to be considered a “commentator” rather than a “scriptor.” In such a textual situation, consequently, the distinction between “scribe” and “author”—one of the foundations of the editing of medieval texts—disappears.

For certain types of works, such as the Middle English metrical romances, the notion of several authorial versions has been readily accepted and incorporated into editorial procedure.25 The evidence of the manuscripts of the Boece, the textual situation of which might seem entirely unambiguous a priori, suggests that the concepts of scribal role and authorial intention may need further consideration for other types of medieval literature as well. When scribal alteration is not simply the result of ineptitude but of the assumption of an authorial role, then there is a sense in which such alteration embodies authorial intention. In attempting to isolate the intentions of one writer in a living textual tradition like that of the Consolation—that is, in interpreting any alterations of those intentions as corruptions—even if that writer is Chaucer, an editor may well be distorting the manuscript evidence and misrepresenting the medieval conceptions of author and text. That Chaucer in fact had a sense of himself as an “auctor” is beside the point,26 for to many of his copyists his texts were only old fields to be
replied. The suggestion here is not that a medieval audience could not distinguish a bad work of literature from a good one, nor that it did not care about the quality of its texts. Rather, the suggestion is that if one wants to appreciate what a work of literature meant to its original medieval audience, then that work of literature needs to be considered on its own terms and not on the terms of the modern editor. Every manuscript of every medieval work perhaps ought to be assessed individually, for conventional thinking about authors and scribes may be masking the true nature of much medieval literature.

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6. The manuscripts in question are Cambridge University Library MSS Ii.1.38 and Ii.3.21. For the convenience of the reader and to simplify reference, I list the twelve authorities:
   C.U.L. MS Ii.1.38 (C¹)
   C.U.L. MS Ii.3.21 (C²)
   B.L. MS Add. 10340 (A¹)
   B.L. MS Add. 16165 (A²)
   Bodleian Bodley MS. 797 (B)
   B.L. MS Harley 2421 (H)
   University of Missouri, MS Fragment Manuscripta No. 150 (Mo)
   Cambridge Pembroke College MS. 215 (Pk)
   National Library of Wales MS Peniarth 393 (Pn)
   Salisbury Cathedral Library MS. 113 (Sal)
   Caxton's edition, 1478 (Cx)
   Thynne's edition, 1532 (Th)
7. I use "scribal alteration" rather than "scribal editorialization," for the latter term seems to me to involve question begging. Indeed, George Kane has recently noted that it is often difficult to distinguish unconscious alterations from conscious ones. See "John M. Manly and Edith Rickert," in Editing Chaucer, The Great Tradition, ed. Paul G. Ruggers (Norman, 1984), 220. The frequency of many of the changes which I am here discussing indicates that they are indeed intentional. The scribe of B, for example, always substitutes "man" for "wyht," while the scribe of the exemplar of A¹ and Sal always substitutes "somtyme" for "whylom."
8. Skeat prints "of that thing," but the evidence of Cx and Th. who prints this sentence as found in Cx, is unreliable and inconclusive.
9. These attributions are most common in B, H, Cx and Th. These texts are closely
affiliated in various ways, so that the attributions may derive from a common ancestor. It is interesting to note that in addition to adding "P" and "B," B curiously deletes most of the occurrences of "quod 1" and "quod she."

10. "Glosa" is correctly added at 4p2.109 and 4p6.235, "Textus" at 3m11.21, 4p2.112 and 4p6.237. "Glosa" is incorrectly added at 4m5.11.


13. For a fuller discussion of these points, see Tim William Machan, Techniques of Translation: Chaucer's "Boece" (Norman, 1985), 125–31. Also see "Textual Affiliations" in The Boece. Here, Consolatio means the tradition, Consolatlo the Latin text.


16. Paul Strohm, "Jean of Angleulôme, A Fifteenth Century Reader of Chaucer," NM 72 (1971): 69–76; that some of the changes in this manuscript were made by the scribe, Duxworth, under the direction of Jean, and others by Jean himself, does not affect the present discussion. To a certain extent, Caxton and Thynne also assumed an authorial posture by the way they included or excluded specific pieces in their collected works of Chaucer. See R. F. Yeager, "Literary Theory at the Close of the Middle Ages: William Caxton and William Thynne," SAC 6 (1984): 135–64.


19. Derek Pearsall, "Editing Medieval Texts," in Textual Criticism and Literary Interpretation, ed. Jerome J. McGann (Chicago, 1985), 104. See G. H. Russell's observation that in the manuscripts of the A, B, and C versions of Piers Plowman "we have constantly to face the problem of discriminating between a process of authoritative (and putatively authorial) revision and a process of non-authoritative (and putatively editorial or scribal) revision" ("Some Aspects of the Process of Revision in Piers Plowman," in Piers Plowman, Critical Approaches, ed. S. S. Hussey [London, 1969], 30). It is interesting to note Sir W. W. Greg also recognized that the authorial and scribal roles were not always distinct: "Indeed, every manuscript is individual and contains, in a manner, a work different from every other manuscript: in some limited sense, every scribe is a subsidiary author, even when he is doing his best to be a faithful copyist, still more when he indulges in emendations and improvements of his own" ("Bibliography—an Apologia," in Collected Papers, ed. J. C. Maxwell [Oxford, 1966], 259).


25. The classic relevant studies of the romances are A. C. Baugh, “Improvisation in the Middle English Romance,” Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 103 (1959):418–54; and “The Middle English Romance, Some Questions of Creation, Presentation, and Preservation,” Speculum 42 (1967):1–31. Also see Derek Pearsall, “Texts, Textual Criticism, and Fifteenth Century Manuscript Production,” in Fifteenth-Century Studies, ed. Robert F. Yeager (Hamden, 1984), 126–27. It has been recognized that there can be no one authorial version in other types of texts as well. In her essay “Middle English” in Editing Medieval Texts, Anne Hudson notes that “many Lollard texts make one question the very concept of ‘original’ text: the various states of the Wycliffite handbook, the Floretum or Rosarium, have equal standing” (49). And Marjorie Curry Woods has noted a similar situation among the commentaries on Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s Poetria nova. See “Editing Medieval Commentaries: Problems and a Proposed Solution,” Text 1 (1981):133–45.


28. I would like to thank George Kane, John C. McGalliard, and Donald W. Rowe for their helpful comments on early versions of this paper.