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0521481554 - The Emergence of the English Author: Scripting the Life of the Poet in Early Modern England

Kevin Pask

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The historical construction of literary authorship has long been of particular interest to literary scholars. Yet an important aspect of the historical emergence of the author – the literary biography or “life of the poet” – has received scant attention. In *The emergence of the English author*, Kevin Pask studies the early life-narratives of five now-canonical English poets: Geoffrey Chaucer, Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, John Donne and John Milton. By attending to the changing shape of the lives of these poets, Pask produces a history of the developing conception of literary authorship in England from the late medieval period to the end of the eighteenth century, and offers a long-term sociohistorical account of literary production. His book is the first full-scale history of the cultural construction of literary authority in early modern England.

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Since the 1970s there has been a broad and vital reinterpretation of the nature of literary texts, a move away from formalism to a sense of literature as an aspect of social, economic, political and cultural history. While the earliest New Historicist work was criticised for a narrow and anecdotal view of history, it also served as an important stimulus for post-structuralist, feminist, Marxist and psychoanalytical work, which in turn has increasingly informed and redirected it. Recent writing on the nature of representation, the historical construction of gender and of the concept of identity itself, on theatre as a political and economic phenomenon and on the ideologies of art generally, reveals the breadth of the field. *Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture* is designed to offer historically oriented studies of Renaissance literature and theatre which make use of the insights afforded by theoretical perspectives. The view of history envisioned as above all a view of our own history, a reading of the Renaissance for and from our own time.

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