Introduction

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Some time in the mid fifteenth century, an illustrator – perhaps the London stationer-limner William Abell – was commissioned to illustrate BL, MS Cotton Tiberius A.vii, a copy of an English translation of Guillaume de Guileville's *Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, sometimes ascribed to John Lydgate.[1] One of the hundreds of unframed, pen-drawn miniatures that the limner produced appears on the cover of this book and is reproduced again here (Figure 0.1). Lady Hagiography, who has led the pilgrim-narrator on his wanderings through the poem, leads him and Lady Lesson behind him into a room filled with books: Lady Hagiography stands between the shelves and gestures to all the tomes of wisdom the pilgrim has yet to acquire.

The image has proved an evocative one for students of literary culture in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and of the manuscripts which were that culture's essential tools. In 1942, Laura Hibbard Loomis took up the argument of earlier commentators and described Lady Hagiography's environs as a bookshop.[2] Loomis made this a proof of her argument that in the decades before Geoffrey Chaucer established England's vernacular canon, the production of books was organized out of shops. The wares they produced included the vernacular books that were models for Chaucer's work, such as the 1330s Auchinleck manuscript of English romances in which Loomis was especially interested. In her discussions of this manuscript and England's fourteenth-century book 'shops' generally, Loomis posed some still important, still current questions. In the century or so before the advent of printing, and the decades after the arrival of the press, how were books made in England, and by whom? What were such books like, and how did they promote, sustain or counterbalance all the many literary and historical changes of this period?

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[1] See Firth Green, 'Lydgate and Deguileville'; for Abell, see Driver and Orr (Chapter 5), and Alexander, 'William Abell "Lymnour"'.

[2] 'The Auchinleck Manuscript and a Possible London Bookshop'.
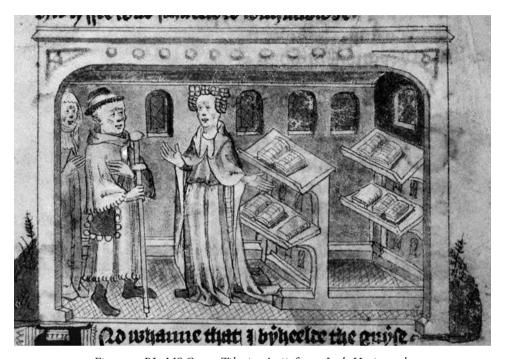
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*Figure 0.1 BL, MS Cotton Tiberius A.vii, f. 91v: Lady Hagiography,
Pilgrim and Lady Lesson in a book-filled room.*

Loomis's argument about Abell's miniature shop is no longer widely accepted. The furniture around Lady Hagiography is now interpreted another way: the shelves, set up in what has been called the 'lectern-system',[3] resemble those of a library. They suggest the importance of books to religious devotion, scholarship and teaching; the networks of people who shared books and their ideas; and the storing of books in the great libraries of English monasteries such as Bury St Edmunds, or in households such as that of Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester, or Sir John Fastolf.[4] Research into manuscripts has explored in depth how books such as those Lady Hagiography gestures to were owned and read – and thus illuminated these meanings of this miniature.[5]

Yet the picture still suggests something not only of the use but of the production of books. If the ascription of the work in this book to Abell is correct, then it

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[3] Streeter, *The Chained Library*, 3–16.
[4] For example, Summit, *Memory's Library*; Beadle, 'Fastolf's French Books'.
[5] On the history of reading in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, see, for example, Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness*; Wakelin, *Humanism, Reading, and English Literature*; Kerby-Fulton and Hilmo (eds.), *The Medieval Professional Reader*; and the seminal essays of Harris, 'Patrons, Buyers and Owners' and Meale, 'Patrons, Buyers and Owners'.

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was illustrated and perhaps copied in the context of flourishing commercial book manufacture in London in this period, activities whose archival remains C. Paul Christianson has documented so usefully.[6] A London setting for the book's manufacture raises questions about the eastern dialect of the scribe who copied out its text. Did he work elsewhere, and was the book carried to the metropolis for decoration? Or did Abell work, in this as doubtless in many instances, with a scribe who was raised out of town but came to London to practise his craft? Or was the book in fact made, as Kathleen Scott has argued, outside the metropolis, in West Suffolk, and illustrated there by an artist she calls the 'Cotton Master'?[7] And, whether the book is the work of London or provincial artisans, who organized their work, and how?

In their 1978 essay on early manuscripts of the works of Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower, A. I. Doyle and M. B. Parkes rejected the idea that vernacular books of the fourteenth or early fifteenth centuries were produced in a highly coordinated way in single 'shops', inside or outside London. Craftsmen who made books and documents in this period did occupy 'shops': the records of the Scriveners' Company in this period refer to guild members' shops; the stationer John Robert was using such a shop when he produced twelve books on hunting for Henry V in 1421.[8] Slowly, scholars are assembling a complex picture of the work that took place in such spaces in the period covered in this book. It was not conducted in uniform ways, but included both organized commissions and contracts involving patrons, stationers and artisans, as well as much more ad hoc activities. It was not simply 'commercial' in ways that we now understand that term. Nor was it always (as the debate about BL, MS Cotton Tiberius A.vii suggests) metropolitan. It involved the activities of members of religious orders, schools and households throughout England, although their activities were never wholly detached from the world of English commerce and other religious, social and economic activities, or for that matter from an international traffic in texts, books and other commodities. Nor was 'book production' a static process across this period – materials were changing; techniques of copying, decorating, illustrating and assembling, stitching and covering books were in a state of flux *before* as well as during the period in which printing was introduced. It is with these dynamic activities of book production – and with the way that these activities are described minutely by their own products, like the miniatures in BL, MS Cotton Tiberius A.vii – that this collection of essays is concerned.

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[6] *Memorials of the Book Trade*; *A Directory of London Stationers*; 'The Rise of London's Book Trade'.
[7] *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, II.252.
[8] See Gillespie, 'Books', 98; Christianson, 'Evidence for the Study of London's Late Medieval Manuscript Book-Trade', 100.

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The period covered by this collection of essays stretches roughly from 1350 to the first few decades after the coming of printing to England in 1476. The book's argument is that the period, somewhat neglected in recent, major treatments of the history of the book, is interesting in its own right and important for an understanding of book production and cultural life in England over the *longue durée*.

These were, for a start, years of vital importance in the history of writing in English. Despite brilliant literature in all the languages of England before these years, the late fourteenth century was a watershed for literary history, when, in the wake of plague and seemingly endless hostilities with France, a large number of Latin and French texts were newly translated, and a great many writers who might previously have composed works in Latin or French began to do so in English – the most famous of them, the well-connected Chaucer. The importance of these years is perhaps distorted by the significance of Chaucer, and of his contemporaries William Langland and John Wyclif, for later readers and historians. Nevertheless, the writers of this period asserted their innovativeness; and the assertion itself inspired or at least signalled change. English vernacular literary activity from the late fourteenth century onwards did flourish with new vigour.[9]

The changes in book production in England in this period, alluded to above, occurred alongside changes in literary activity in this period, and scholars have sometimes suggested close links between them.[10] The lengthening shelf of self-consciously 'literary' works in English was met by a sharp increase in the production of manuscripts of that literature. A. S. G. Edwards and Derek Pearsall note a twentyfold increase in the survival of books of vernacular literature from the period before the last quarter of the fourteenth century, to the century after that watershed – the decades in which Chaucer, Gower, Langland and Julian of Norwich were at work, and John Lydgate and Thomas Hoccleve were beginning to put pen to paper.[11] But there was not merely an increase in the copying of literary works; there was also a large increase in the writing and copying of all manner of texts. Pardons, personal correspondence from households other than the king's, statutes, archival records, chancery documents, prayerbooks, household manuals and works for the newly thriving universities – all these were made, or at least, survive, in more copies in the hundred or so years before printing came to England than in previous centuries.[12]

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[9] For arguments along these lines see, for instance, Cannon, *The Making of Chaucer's English*; Wogan-Browne, Watson, Taylor and Evans (eds.), *The Idea of the Vernacular*.

[10] Pearsall, 'The Ellesmere Chaucer', 267.

[11] Edwards and Pearsall, 'The Manuscripts of the Major English Poetic Texts', 257; see also Sargent, 'What Do the Numbers Mean?', 243.

[12] It may be that book production was slower in this period in some monastic houses than it had been in previous centuries, as collections were established; but in some monasteries there is evidence of concerted efforts, especially in the fifteenth century, to consolidate, renew and refurbish existing collections

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These changes reflect a growth in the use of writing, and in varieties of literacy, in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England. By about 1400, the increasing reliance on written records in business, law and administration had come to affect a very great part of the English population. A proliferation of records produced far more need for literate work – for the creation of writs, deeds, wills – and led to a much wider familiarity with the written word.[13] In parallel, it was in the late 1300s that the ecclesiastical authorities licensed the issue of letters of confraternity and confession in place of orally conferred pardons.[14] The established church, like the Wycliffites who wanted to reform it, sought to affirm the faith of the laity in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries by the dissemination of written works, as well as by visual artefacts and dramatic performances.[15] For every Wycliffite Bible made in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries there survives a personal prayerbook made for the Sarum use.[16]

As we have already suggested, it is possible to overstate the case – change always has a long prehistory. Every century of England's recorded history brought the increased use of writing in the administration of the realm; the edicts of the 1215 Lateran Council on the matter of the education of the laity had a long-lasting effect; and so on. If the matter of vernacularity – the new literature heralded by the Ricardian poets; the new religious discourses promulgated by Wycliffism and its opponents – is put to one side, then it might be said that the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries continue rather than begin many trends in the English uses of books, writing and varieties of literacy. But the contributors to this volume show that what was new about written culture in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was compounded, in the same period, by re-imaginings of the book itself. In chapters on materials by Orietta da Rold, scribal hands by Daniel Wakelin and visual design by Stephen Partridge and by Martha Driver and Michael Orr this collection argues for important innovations in the production and the design of books – especially, though not exclusively, English vernacular books – in the century before the advent of printing. It was in this period that paper appeared – firstly for record-keeping in business and government, then for practical writing of various sorts and, in time, books designed to last. As Erik Kwakkel and Orietta da Rold show below, the use of paper changed the economics of book production considerably. Other writing technologies were in transition: the sort of handwriting used in documents had long been used in books, but in our period, documentary hands were used ever more widely for the copying of longer works, including longer works

(perhaps meant to match continental efforts, e.g., those associated with the Melk reform in Austria and Southern Germany). See some relevant discussion by Gillespie (Chapter 7) and Pouzet (Chapter 10).

[13] Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*; Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth*.
[14] Swanson, *Indulgences in Late Medieval England*.
[15] Somerset, *Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience*.
[16] Duffy, *Marking the Hours*.

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in English, and including works that extended literary culture beyond the essential, traditional texts of worship and learning. The page layouts associated with learned books (which scholars often call, somewhat loosely, their *ordinatio*) spread into books of vernacular literature, firstly in France under Charles V, then in England. Varieties of binding techniques, from the cheap to the luxurious, offered new ways of finishing books – or leaving them deliberately unfinished, better to allow for the diverse methods of distribution and book assembly described by Margaret Connolly in her chapter.

The claim made in this book for the significance of the period covered – and even its very loose start-date, around 1350 – also rests on observations about the organization of book production. Economic change in England more broadly (the rise of the guilds, especially) led to innovations in the provision of books. For example, the increasing ownership of Books of Hours, by merchants as well as by the wealthy nobility, made possible the development of systems for the mass speculative production of these books (mostly in the Low Countries). It is in this context that the question raised by Loomis in her 1942 essay, and taken up again by Parkes and Doyle in 1978, emerges. How far was English book production 'organized'? Or more broadly, what were the new sorts of social, economic and institutional conditions for book production before printing – conditions that are not unrelated to the advent and the successful management and spread of that new technology? These are matters taken up, in each case from a slightly different perspective, in the chapters here by Erik Kwakkel, Linne Mooney and Jean-Pascal Pouzet. In the 1350s, the first London records of the existence of commercial organization of the book trade – of guilds of book artisans – appear. There is evidence, from occupational surnames, from subsidy records and later shop rentals, of the work of commercial scribes, binders, parchmenters and limners in earlier periods. The decades around 1200 mark the likely inception, as Rodney M. Thomson and Nigel Morgan have noted,[17] of work done on books outside monastic houses (although in-house monastic work was never without a 'commercial' aspect, as Pouzet shows in his chapter). In the 1350s, the guilds of the Textwriters and Limners are first identified. By 1373, the Scriveners had formed their own trade organization. By 1403, a new guild of Stationers amalgamated the interests of some of these book producers. And it was the Stationers, not much less than the technology itself, whose monopoly over printing was so influential in coming centuries. Their efforts to control an expanding trade in books began in the period described here, quite independently of the invention of moveable type.[18]

[17] Morgan and Thomson, *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, 'Introduction', xvii.
[18] Steer (ed.), *Scriveners' Company*, vii–ix; Blayney, *The Stationers' Company before the Charter*. On the importance of the Stationers in later centuries, see, for instance, Rose, *Authors and Owners*, on their role in the invention of copyright.

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So in spite of the debate about the importance of 'shops' – and of evidence that manuscript production was typically distributed among artisans at work in their own spaces – the stationer's premises was at least one of the settings for the commissioning of books, the oversight of their production and thus their commercial distribution of books, as Kwakkel argues in his chapter. Stationers might be members of the London guild, after 1403 (although this term was not applied to that organization consistently for many decades); they might also be the men styled 'stationers' who worked around the University of Oxford in this period, and earlier. Yet stationers were not the only ones taking charge of book production. As Pouzet and Mooney stress, books in the period were the products of lay artisans in monastic settings, of 'freelancing' scriveners and of town or privy-seal clerks. They were given bindings by itinerant artisans or were sent, having been copied by the religious, to centres such as Oxford for the finishing touches of the commercial binders busy there, as Alexandra Gillespie notes. David Rundle shows us that books arrived from abroad too, in the hands of importers and humanist scholars; and John Thompson depicts similar arrivals from, and also departures to, late medieval Ireland (of books, and bookish practices as well). Book production was more organized in this period, but it was not – not even when printing made its first appearance – the massively organized commercial activity it became later.[19] It is notable that, in the picture of Lady Hagiography and her bookshelves in Cotton Tiberius A.vii, there is some coherence to the books, in size, colour and arrangement of textual material, as far as we can see in that small picture. But that picture comes from a dream-vision of a heightened, perfected world; in the production of actual manuscript books such coherence was an ideal to which the producers and purchasers of books may have aspired but never attained. Real-world conditions produced something else alongside occasional dreams of perfection: the diverse forms of manuscript books which survive, with all their inconsistencies, oddities and particularities. The contributors to this volume are aware of this diversity and particularity, even as they suggest some general hypotheses. The balance between organization and order, and particularity, improvization, chaos and disorder, is one of the key themes which recurs across several of the essays in this collection. The attempt to draw together some larger patterns with the observation of disruption of those patterns is vital – vital in showing how the books produced in England in these years fit into wider cultural history in general and the history of the book in general.

Firstly, the balance of order and disorder upsets tidy ideas about literary creativity. This has long been one of the main achievements of the conjunction of the history of the book with literary history. D. F. McKenzie, the scholar perhaps most influential in theorizing this conjunction, saw that the study of the physical forms

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[19] On the commercialization of the book trade in the eighteenth century especially, see Johns, *The Nature of the Book*; Raven, *The Business of Books*.

of text would resist formalist idealization of the 'text itself' and would complicate the editorial habit of using bibliographical evidence to establish one final author-ial text.[20] Scholars of Middle English manuscripts have uncovered rich evidence of the material conditions that produced literary texts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and have argued that this evidence is a useful check on or supplement to an anachronistic or idealized concept of 'literature'.[21] Essays in this collection also point out the ways that, say, parts of *The Canterbury Tales* in a particular book may have been formed by accidents in the supply of parchment or the fit of text on a page. Others show how the forms of canonical English verse, such as Lydgate's shorter poetry, were shaped by choices over handwriting or the international traffic in books and scribes.

Secondly, the balance of the grand narratives sketched above and the chaotic particularities of the books themselves suggest ways in which the books discussed in this collection of essays fit into the wider history of the book. This collection, we hope, provides a kind of summary of manuscript culture in the years just before and just after printing began in England. We hope that, as such, it could inform comparisons of manuscript and print, of 'medieval' and 'early modern' books, comparisons which still suffer from ignorance by scholars on each side of these divides. Yet these essays also upset simple contrasts and comparisons. The 'medieval' book was as complex and diverse in its manifestations as the 'early modern' one (or the 'classical' or 'modern'). The essays below suggest trends which might seem typical of, perhaps anticipatory of, printing: patterns of commodification, or standardization of products and even mass production, of cheap as well as quality work. However, they also suggest countertrends which upset any simple model of progress: the persistence, right through the period, of the production of books in thriving religious institutions; the vital life of the bespoke trade in books; and the personal copy, the book made by a person unconnected with any craft or trade, for his or her own use. We might usefully seek analogies for these aspects of production in later periods of the history of the book – might watch out for continuity, as well as change.[22]

Nonetheless, the collection of essays here does provide a kind of background to printing: it shows that the passion for books, and the hectic production of them, did not begin with William Caxton's press. 'Print culture' did not emerge out of a vacuum; it emerged from things already known, from familiar practices and aspirations already held and shared. English people in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries made, used and apparently wanted, or at least were able to obtain and preserve,

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[20] *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts.*
[21] See Hanna, *Pursuing History*, 7, 63–82; and for reflection on this, see recently Meyer Lee, 'Manuscript Studies', 14–15.
[22] See McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order*, esp. 31–6; Gillespie, 'Analytical Survey 9'.

more books than their forebears. Printing was developed and introduced within that culture. As Caxton writes in his *Recuyell*, his first book printed in English, books created with 'penne and ynke' are made laboriously, one at a time, whereas printed books are made all 'attones'. But they are still *books*; no new word is needed to describe them, and little further comment seems necessary (from Caxton or any other contemporary commentator).[23] The chapters in this book, though deliberately focussed on manuscripts, do mention printing: when they do, they suggest no sharp division between manuscript and print production. They argue instead that its 'revolutionary' effects stem from much longer-lived ideas about how to use and organize the various technologies of book production. The contributors thus suggest the things that we might be missing in histories of the book that do not attend to those processes of late medieval manuscript production that were changed by, and were a meaningful context for, printing.

The separation is apparent in the scholarly field of book history to which this volume belongs – for instance, in the monumental and impressive Cambridge series *The History of the Book in Britain*, which began publication in 1999 and is still underway. The division of two volumes around 1400 (volume II covers 1100–1400; volume III covers 1400–1557)[24] on the one hand registers the increase in book production in the vernacular and for the laity around the late fourteenth century (as just described). It would seem to encourage discussion of fifteenth-century manuscripts alongside printing. However, in practice, volume III attends only briefly to manuscript production.[25] Much discussion of manuscripts in the years before 1400 offered in volume II of *The Cambridge History* is of course germane to the years after 1400 too.[26] But the bookish world of England sketched above – the technological shifts in the materials, handwriting and layouts of manuscripts, the incipient commercialization of book production and the sudden and rapid expansion of textual culture – is not fully sketched in *The Cambridge History*. The burgeoning of literate activities in England and in English and the development of printing alongside developments in manuscript production need to be further explored.

Of course, the editors of *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain* can, and do, refer readers to another collection that does cover the period of interest here: Jeremy

[23] Caxton, trans., *The Recuyell*, STC 15375, unsigned leaf 351r.

[24] Ed. Morgan and Thomson and ed. Hellinga and Trapp, respectively.

[25] Volume III does contain some very important work on the reading and storage of manuscripts, in chapters on the use of books (in royal libraries, by gentlewomen and so on) and on particular genres of book (school books, legal books and so on), but its main focus is printing: for more discussion see Gillespie, '*The History of the Book in Britain, 1400–1557*'.

[26] Especially, for example, work by Parkes, 'Layout and Presentation of the Text' and 'Handwriting in English Books'; Hudson, 'Lollard Literature'; and a chapter by Boffey and Edwards, 'Middle English Literary Writings, 1150–1400' that usefully complements the chapter 'Literary Texts' that they contributed to volume III.

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Griffiths and Derek Pearsall's collection of essays *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375–1475*, published in 1989. They are rightly confident that it still offers a magisterial survey of manuscript production in English on the eve of printing. Happily, that volume is once more available in print, but it is also over twenty years old, and the currently thriving interest in the history of the book among scholars of other periods and the interest among historians and critics of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century culture in the links between literary, devotional and social practices and material texts suggest that an overview of new work and new research opportunities is desirable. Griffiths and Pearsall's *Book Production and Publishing* remains the definitive contribution to the field: the aim of the present collection is to complement it in various ways.

Griffiths and Pearsall's *Book Production and Publishing* is partly arranged around 'genres' of writing, such as the manuscripts of medical or literary texts, or connected to particular social groups of users, such as patrons or Wycliffite readers. By contrast, the present collection brings together ideas and evidence dispersed by this arrangement. It begins with seven chapters on methods of book production, including some topics not covered in 1989, such as Simon Horobin's on dialect, Wakelin's on processes of writing, Partridge's on layouts (as distinct from illustrations), Da Rold's on parchment and ink (alongside considerable new work on the arrival of paper) and Gillespie's on bindings before the return of blind-stamping *c.*1450. Connolly and Driver and Orr approach the topics of book illustration and book assembly from new perspectives and with considerable new evidence.

This collection, then, considers books not in terms of their content, but in terms of contexts and systems for their production and distribution. The social and economic organization of book-making in England is covered by Kwakkel and Pouzet, whose chapters, like the work of the book-makers they discuss, are often focussed on Latin language materials. The circumstances in which paid scribes of various kinds made multiple copies of vernacular and literary works are described by Mooney in a chapter that brings together her extensive and important work on this topic. Rundle and Thomson write about the relationship of English book production to other countries. Fiona Somerset discusses the ways that books were made under pressure of censorship and censure, especially in the context of the Wycliffite movement.

We hope that, in this way, the collection will introduce findings, ideas and approaches to manuscript study that have emerged since 1989. And we hope that the collection will suggest some themes to animate future work on manuscripts and printed books, both in their own right and in relation to wider cultural history and literary criticism. The volume is thus not meant to be the last word on its subject, but to encourage continuing discussion, and it raises some questions for which it does not offer comprehensive answers. Firstly, what more might be said about the production of documents as distinct from books – or about distinguishing a 'book' from a document, or whether we should distinguish it thus? Usually