CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-49239-3 — Literary Theory and Criticism in the Later Middle Ages
Edited by Ardis Butterfield , Ian Johnson , Andrew Kraebel
Excerpt
More Information

Introduction
Criticism, Theory and the Later Medieval Text

Andrew Kraebel

> Hic respirat auctor.
>
> Here the author takes a breather.

This neat little phrase appears in an anonymous twelfth-century commentary on the *Aeneid*, the first gloss in the exegete's treatment of Book II.[1] It is preceded only by the first words of the book, *Conticuere omnes*, 'All were silent', underlined in some surviving manuscripts to make them easier for a reader to pick out from the surrounding interpretive materials, and typically with the word-initial *C* spanning multiple lines, foregrounding the *ordinatio textus*, the formal division of the text. (See, for example, Figure 0.2, where space is left but no initial supplied.)[2] As the first break between books in the *Aeneid*, this is the exegete's earliest opportunity to discuss the phenomenon of the text's division. And so he offers this memorable gloss, implying that the break reflects a pause in the composition or – perhaps more likely – recitation of the author's work, a time in which he could catch his breath.

This note on poetic respiration is made even more intriguing by what comes next. The glossator continues, 'Hoc dicebat Magister Ansellus' ('This is what Master Anseau used to say'), evidently referring to the storied master of Laon (d. 1117), from whose school sprang the biblical *Glossa ordinaria*, one of the first major reference texts of scholastic exegesis.[3] We know this master better as Anselm of Laon, but some early sources give

[1] My quotations of this series of glosses on *Aen*. II.1 are taken from Berlin, Staatsbibliothek MS Lat. fol. 34, all on f. 47rb. For discussion, see Kraebel, 'Twelfth-Century Expansion of Servius'. Appearing at the same time as that essay, Bognini, 'Aperçu d'une lecture séculaire', provides another useful reading. I am unpersuaded by arguments attributing the work to Hilary of Orléans (fl. *c.* 1125), first advanced by De Angelis, 'I Commenti Medievali', and followed in recent scholarship.

[2] Ideas of *ordinatio* are reviewed by Johnson in Chapter 7.

[3] Anselm was the hero of the early scholarship of Beryl Smalley, who argued for the place of his work in the creation of the *Glossa*. See esp. Smalley, 'Problem of the "Glossa ordinaria"', and her 'Quelques prédécesseurs'.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-49239-3 — Literary Theory and Criticism in the Later Middle Ages
Edited by Ardis Butterfield , Ian Johnson , Andrew Kraebel
Excerpt
More Information

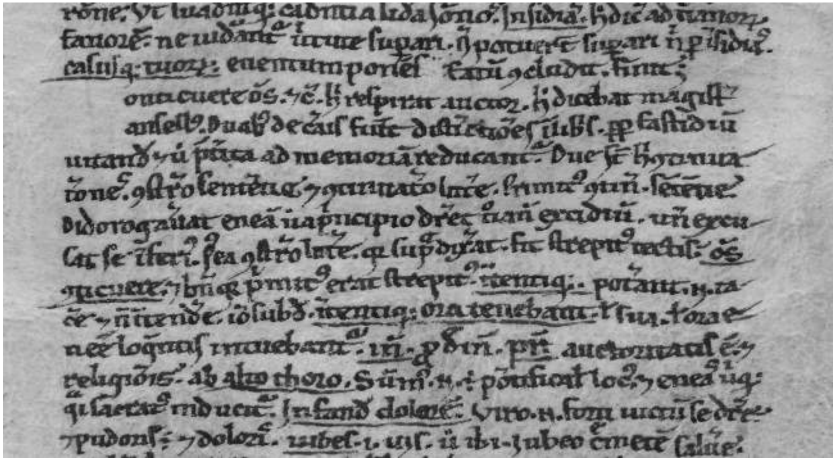

Figure 0.2 Berlin, Staatsbibliothek MS Lat. fol. 34, f. 47rb (selection). The opening of Book II in a twelfth-century commentary on Virgil's *Aeneid*. Reproduced by kind permission.

his name as Ansellus, modern French 'Anseau', and reference to him by this name has sometimes been taken as an indication of greater authenticity, reflecting 'insider knowledge' on the part of scribes and exegetes.[4]

This gloss, together with its knowing attribution, offers a tantalising view into the theories and practices of literary criticism in the later Middle Ages, and it may therefore serve as a useful starting-point for this collection as a whole. Across their different chapters, our contributors take up the question of how texts – poetic, biblical and philosophical, classical and medieval – were interpreted in the later Middle Ages, from *c.* 1100 to *c.* 1450, of how the composition of new poetry took part in – drew on, responded to or against, variously engaged with – this larger tradition of interpretation, and of the continuing influence of scholastic interpretation in later centuries. Here, by way of introduction to this vast and complicated field, I present what I take to be some typical examples of later medieval commentaries and the ways of reading they supported – how, that is, commentators tended to work. I then turn to consider the status of 'theory'

[4] E.g., in the case of the Psalter commentary discussed by Wilmart, 'Un commentaire restitué'. For further examples, see Giraud, 'Anselme de Laon', pp. 241 and 242, nn. 12 and 15. Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England*, p. 339, n. 98, reports that most copies of the commentary register this ambiguity, reading 'Ansellus uel Anselmus'.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-49239-3 — Literary Theory and Criticism in the Later Middle Ages
Edited by Ardis Butterfield , Ian Johnson , Andrew Kraebel
Excerpt
More Information

in this material, the forms that scholastic literary theory/-ies most often took and what this means for how we now study them. Throughout, my aim is to capture the current state of the field, and to explore ways in which this work may be taken further – some ways of thinking through and with medieval theory and criticism that are modelled in the chapters that follow.

To begin, then, I propose to read this Anselmian gloss, together with the series of glosses that come immediately after it, as illustrating some of the interpretive priorities and tactics commonly found in later medieval literary criticism. Putting this material alongside another twelfth-century collection of glosses will allow us to note some of the different forms of commentary, and especially some of the differences between commentary on classical and biblical material, as it was practised in this period – but it will also serve to emphasise the significant continuities across all of these texts, the major commitments of medieval criticism to testing received interpretations and creating new ones.

Reading Medieval Criticism

Look again at Figure 0.2. The exegete follows Anselm's explanation of textual division with a second, and more detailed, account: 'Duabus de causis fiunt distinctiones in libris: propter fastidium uitandum et ut preterita ad memoriam reducantur' ('There are two reasons for dividing books: to avoid boredom and so that what has come before might be committed to memory'). In contrast to the purportedly Anselmian note, this second gloss reflects material found more widely in twelfth-century criticism. A similar account occurs, for example, in the commentary on Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae* by William of Conches (d. *c.* 1155?), at the beginning of Book II, prosa 1 – again, the earliest obvious opportunity:

> *Post haec* etc. Hic incipit secundum uolumen. Mos erat antiquorum terminare libros suos per uolumina, ut daretur spatium lectori recolligendi praedicta, et ut uitaret fastidium, et ut citius aliquid, quod quaeretur, inuenitur.[5]

> *After these things*, etc. Here begins Book II. It was customary for the ancients to divide their works into books, in order to give the reader some space for committing what was said in the previous book to memory, to avoid boredom and to make it easier to find things.

[5] William of Conches, *Glosae super Boetium*, ed. by Nauta, p. 98.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-49239-3 — Literary Theory and Criticism in the Later Middle Ages
Edited by Ardis Butterfield , Ian Johnson , Andrew Kraebel
Excerpt
More Information

Evidently it was not just authors who were thought to need time to gather themselves after a certain quantity of Latin verse or prose – and, as in the *Aeneid* gloss, William's iteration of this comment balances positive (an opportunity to digest the foregoing material) and comically negative (the threat of eyes glazing over) reasons for breaking works into smaller units. To which he adds the practical advantages for those who, without reading the whole from start to finish, need to find a particular passage.[6] Our glossator is thus introducing his readers to ideas about literature that can be applied more widely, to the remaining books of the *Aeneid*, and to other texts as well.[7]

Following these preliminaries, the glossator notes the continuities between Book I and Book II – that is, how Book II can be understood to pick up where Book I left off – and he then moves on to the task that occupies most of his attention, the word-by-word and phrase-by-phrase interpretation of Virgil's text. Here, as throughout his work, he draws the bulk of his interpretations from the late antique glosses associated with Servius, active early in the fifth century.[8] For example, in his treatment of the remainder of II.1–2 (with glosses numbered for ease of reference) –

> *Omnes conticuere.* (1) Et bene, quia primitus erat *strepitus* [*Aen.*, I.725]. *Intentique ora tenebant.* (2) Vel sua uel ora Enee loquentis intuebantur. *Inde* (3) pro deinde. *Pater* (4) auctoritatis est et religionis. *Ab alto thoro.* (5) Summus enim est pontificalis locus, et Eneas ubique quasi sacratus inducitur.
>
> *All were silent.* (1) And this is well-said, since before there had been *an uproar* (*Aen.* I.725). *And they held visages intent.* (2) This either refers to their own faces, or it means they stared at the face of Aeneas as he spoke. *Thereupon* (3) for 'then'. *Father,* (4) authoritative and revered. *From his high couch.* (5) For the highest place belongs to the pontiff, and Aeneas is everywhere presented as though he were holy.

– the first two glosses distil what were longer accounts in Servius, the third repeats Servius, though dropping his identification of this word as an example of apheresis, and the fifth is quoted verbatim from this source.[9] Only the fourth seems to be original to the twelfth-century writer,

[6] An idea more frequently discussed with regard to scholastic reference works: see Rouse and Rouse, '*Statim invenire*'.
[7] For more on this kind of preparation for wider reading, see Woods's discussion in Chapter 1.
[8] On Servius, see Zetzel, *Critics*, pp. 319–24, and, in more detail, Kaster, *Guardians of Language*, pp. 169–97.
[9] Servius, *Servianorum in Vergilii carmina commentariorum*, ed. by Rand et al., II, 311.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-49239-3 — Literary Theory and Criticism in the Later Middle Ages
Edited by Ardis Butterfield , Ian Johnson , Andrew Kraebel
Excerpt
More Information

apparently added in anticipation of the longer note that follows.[10] And so, as he had through Book I, the glossator continues through the remainder of Virgil's epic. Indeed, the methods and priorities evident in these opening glosses from Book II can be found informing the glossator's work on almost any page of his text. Distilling readings on offer in his authoritative source, he omits some material which he seems to have felt unnecessary, and these received and abbreviated interpretations are supplemented with his own insights, framed by more broadly applicable glosses that present ideas of literature then developing in the cathedral schools of northern Europe – in this case, notions of textual division – as well as, on occasion, the kind of memorable turn of phrase seen in the Anselmian scholion.

This snippet of glosses offers just one glimpse into the rich and varied phenomenon of later medieval commentary, and, though brief, it should already indicate some of the complex and at times contradictory forces that worked to shape such texts.[11] Above all, it points to later medieval commentaries as marked, persistently, by the desire to conserve and to supplement, to affirm the value of received readings, while questioning at least some of their claims and extending the possibilities of interpretation in light of new ideas, new sources and new audiences. By naming Anselm at the beginning of Book II – much as, at the very start of his prologue to the *Eclogues*, he had named Servius – the twelfth-century glossator affirms the value of these more recent interpretive insights.[12] That is, he canonises Anselm as yet another interpreter worthy of consideration and, indeed, citation. He asserts Anselm's status as a speaker of authority (*auctoritas*), someone whose words constituted 'a profound saying worthy of imitation or implementation' and whose opinions were fit to be preserved in the persistently accretive work of what we would now call literary criticism.[13]

But what of the content of that Anselmian gloss, its idea of the poet as breathless performer? How are we to read that understanding of textual division alongside those shared by William of Conches? To get at these questions, I want to consider another example. As Figure 0.2 illustrates,

[10] Neither the twelfth-century commentator nor Servius glosses the earlier instance of the phrase *pater Aeneas*, at I.580. Cf. ibid., II, 257; Berlin, Staatsbibliothek MS Lat. fol. 34, f. 46[va].

[11] To my focus on lemmatised commentaries and glosses, one could add, for example, commentaries written in more overtly homiletic styles, on which see the contributions by Hanna and Stadolnik in Chapters 4 and 6.

[12] For the *Eclogues* commentary, see Pellegatta (ed.), 'Edizione critica del commento *Testatur Servius*', here p. 121.

[13] *MTA*, p. 10, translating Huguccio of Pisa's definition of *auctoritas*.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-49239-3 — Literary Theory and Criticism in the Later Middle Ages
Edited by Ardis Butterfield , Ian Johnson , Andrew Kraebel
Excerpt
More Information

the commentary on the *Aeneid* was written as lemmatised prose, with brief quotations from Virgil's text – the lemmata – incorporated into the attendant exposition and distinguished with underlining. Figure 0.3 therefore appears to reflect a different kind of interpretive accretion, the accumulation of layers of criticism in the form of many different glosses added by many different hands to a copy of the classical text. Taken from a twelfth-century manuscript of Lucan's *Pharsalia* or *Bellum civile*, here giving VIII.457–500, this page is perhaps most recognisable from its use on the cover of *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, c. 1100–c. 1375: The Commentary Tradition*, edited by Alastair Minnis and A. B. Scott, with David Wallace.[14] With wide margins and ample interlinear space, the manuscript seems to have been prepared in anticipation of glossing, which it received in abundance – at least six hands are discernible adding notes to this page. Some of their glosses are made up of single words meant to clarify meaning, as in the case of 'id est, astucior' ('i.e., more cunningly'), added over *melior*, VIII.482, 'better'. Others are written as paraphrases, another common technique in medieval criticism, e.g., explaining 'sic utile recto' (VIII.488):[15]

> Quod dii uolunt hoc uelis, et nolis fatis resistere. Quasi dicat: Rectum est ut recipiatur Pompeius, sed utilitas pocius sequenda est quam rectum.
>
> You should want what the gods want, and you should not want to resist the fates. As though he said: It would be right to welcome Pompey, but we should do what is expedient rather than what is right.

At least one gloss, in a box in the outer margin, supplies mythographic content relevant to the text at hand, in this case explaining the cult of Apis (cf. VIII.479):

> Absirtus frustratim interfectus a parentibus suis miseratione deorum ressuscitatus est, et postea Osiris uocatus, qui habuit Yo uxorem, postquam diis uacca mutata est. In hac Absirti suscitatione sacrificatus est quidam Apis, id est bos . . .
>
> Apsyrtus was killed in vain by his kinsmen and brought back to life by the mercy of the gods, and afterwards he was called Osiris. His wife was Io, after she had been turned into a cow by the gods. In the process of reawakening Apsyrtus, a certain Apis, i.e., a cow, was sacrificed . . .

[14] For descriptions, see Pächt and Alexander, *Illuminated Manuscripts*, II, 102 (no. 1046), and Munk Olsen, *L'étude des auteurs classiques*, II, 52–53.
[15] On paraphrasal glossing and the question of voice in commentaries, see Lawton, 'Eleanor Hull's Voices'.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-49239-3 — Literary Theory and Criticism in the Later Middle Ages
Edited by Ardis Butterfield , Ian Johnson , Andrew Kraebel
Excerpt
More Information

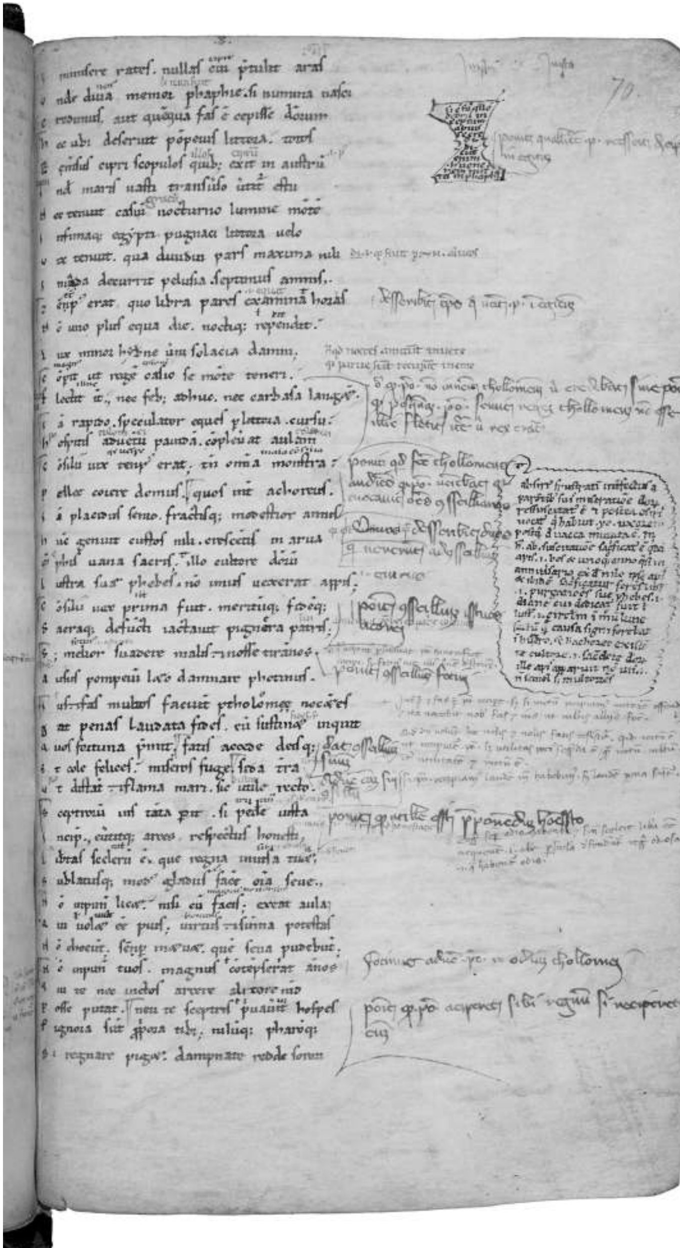

Figure 0.3 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Auct. F. 2. 9, f. 70r. From a twelfth-century glossed copy of Lucan's *Pharsalia*.
Copyright © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, 2018. digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk. Creative Commons Licence CC-BY-NC 4.0.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-49239-3 — Literary Theory and Criticism in the Later Middle Ages
Edited by Ardis Butterfield , Ian Johnson , Andrew Kraebel
Excerpt
More Information

The conflation of the myths of Medea and Osiris, on the one hand, and Io and Isis, on the other, was relatively common in ancient and medieval commentary. On *Thebaid*, I.265, for example, Lactantius Placidus (d. *c.* 400) notes that Io was transformed into Isis after fleeing to Egypt, while a gloss on the same line in a twelfth-century copy of the *Thebaid* identifies Apsyrtus as the brother who dismembered Osiris, later reassembled by the Egyptians.[16] Our glossator contributes to this jumble. Yet another annotator, perhaps the last to add notes to this page, seems principally interested in dividing the text into summarisable units, writing, for example, 'Ponit consscillium Fotini' ('He sets out the counsel of Photinus'), with a corresponding bracket added before VIII.482, or 'Ponit quod Pompeius aciperet sibi regnum si reciperet eum' ('He sets out that Pompey would take the kingdom for himself if he welcomed him'), the final gloss on the leaf, with a bracket added in VIII.498.

Unlike the material on the *Aeneid*, none of these glosses can as yet be traced to an authoritative source, and some contradict interpretations found in more commonly available commentaries.[17] Almost certainly, each of these annotators crafted his glosses for himself, either seeking simple ways to clarify the text or providing more elaborate material – like the mythographic background – from memory. The result is a manuscript that, with each new layer of glosses, became more useful for its audience, in all likelihood a succession of grammar teachers seeking to lead a class of boys through Lucan's historical epic.

Yet, even as this glossed page clearly points to the status of medieval criticism as the cumulative work of many hands, its differences from the *Aeneid* commentary should not be exaggerated. Certainly, the latter is more obviously meant for study and consultation than classroom use – the fragmentation of Virgil's text into lemmata makes it more difficult to navigate on the fly, compared to the ready indexical function played by the central column of Lucan's verse. But these differences may be little more than after-effects of scribal handling, differences in *mise-en-page*, and they potentially obscure larger stylistic and formal similarities. Indeed, it seems to me very likely that the *Aeneid* commentary itself represents an attempt to record, in lemmatised prose, what had begun as a glossed copy of the epic. Notice that, like the glosses in the Lucan manuscript, each of the

[16] *Commentarios in Thebaida*, ed. by Jahnke, p. 32; London, British Library, Harley MS 2720. My thanks to Frank Coulson and Harald Anderson for supplying these examples. On Lactantius, see Zetzel, *Critics*, pp. 273–75, and, on Harley, Anderson, *Manuscripts of Statius*, I, no. 310.
[17] Cf. Hiatt, 'Lucan', p. 210, with further relevant studies cited at p. 223, n. 23.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-49239-3 — Literary Theory and Criticism in the Later Middle Ages
Edited by Ardis Butterfield , Ian Johnson , Andrew Kraebel
Excerpt
More Information

interpretations in the *Aeneid* commentary is a discrete, readily isolable unit – reflected in my numbering in the selection above – each beginning with the bit of Virgil's text to which, in a glossed manuscript, it could be tied. If this is right, then the commentary would preserve, to at least some degree, the authoritative opinions recorded in what was presumably the master's (or successive masters') own copy.[18]

All of which might point to the humbler status of commentary on classical literature relative to biblical commentary – the other major vein of criticism composed in the medieval schools – or it might simply illustrate the different points in their education at which students would study classical and biblical texts. In contrast to the interpretive *bricolage* of these classical glosses, biblical commentaries tend to offer more sustained readings, with local insights tied to the larger interpretive claims articulated in the *accessus* or prologue, and they are more readily read as continuously unfolding prose. That is, the biblical commentary itself, rather than the commentated biblical text, is what structures the experience of reading – and this is true even when commentaries emerge from classroom lectures, as Herbert of Bosham (d. 1194) reports of the *Magna glosatura* on the Psalms and Pauline Epistles by his master, Peter Lombard (d. 1160).[19]

But the distinction between the styles of biblical and classical commentaries shouldn't be exaggerated either. I would be surprised to find a medieval biblical commentary in which the exegete was so focused on his argument that he did not preserve at least some received glosses extraneous to his larger designs, and of course the persistently consulted *Glossa ordinaria* is a collection of discrete and discontinuous scholia. Likewise, in the other direction, the allegorising commentary on *Aen.*, I–VI attributed to Bernardus Silvestris (d. 1178?) pursues with striking persistency a unified reading of the classical text.[20] Whether made up of discrete scholia or continuous prose, interpretively variegated or focused on a unifying notion of the text, the common feature in all of these works is the gloss, the reading that values the text's 'every single word', and medieval critics, however they arranged them, gathered up glosses from an ongoing

[18] Cf. Papahagi, '*Glossae collectae*'. The same situation likely pertains for other commentaries on classical literature attributed to specific masters, e.g., Arnulf of Orléans on the *Pharsalia*. See *Arnulfi Glosule super Lucanum*, ed. by Marti.

[19] For Herbert's comments, offered in his copy of the Lombard's *Glosatura*, see Glunz, *History of the Vulgate*, p. 343.

[20] Bernardus Silvestris, *Commentum super sex libros Eneidos*, ed. by Jones and Jones.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

Cambridge
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-49239-3 — Literary Theory and Criticism in the Later Middle Ages
Edited by Ardis Butterfield , Ian Johnson , Andrew Kraebel
Excerpt
More Information

interpretive tradition, while also generating new ones of their own, all in an effort to draw yet more meanings from the writings of the *auctores*.[21]

The possibility that the lemmatised *Aeneid* commentary represents an attempt to transcribe a glossed copy of the epic can help us, finally, to say more about the short Anselmian gloss that begins Book II. The suggestion that classical poets recited their works to a contemporary audience is itself commonplace, seen in Isidore of Seville's (d. 636) claim that authors of classical tragedies read their work from a raised stage (*orchestra*), while the players pantomimed the scene – an idea elaborated in Nicholas Trevet OP's (d. 1334) commentary on the tragedies of Seneca.[22] And the notion of Virgil, specifically, reciting his verses appears in Servian glosses, e.g., on *Aen.*, IV.323 (from Dido's speech accusing Aeneas), where the poet is said to have 'delivered these verses with great passion when he recited them to Augustus. For he recited in the finest voice the third and fourth books'. Even earlier, in the *vita* by Donatus, we find the account of Virgil (with the aid of Maecenas) reciting the whole of the *Georgics* to Augustus after Actium, a performance that was 'attractive and strangely seductive'.[23] The notion of an author pausing to catch his breath in between books extends this line of thinking. It might be tempting, then, to read this gloss together with what follows it – that is, while the poet catches his breath, his audience can take a break as well, and they can begin to commit what they have heard to memory. And yet, when the glossator describes the memorisation of the text and the threat of boredom, he surely has in mind the experience of medieval readers, not ancient auditors – a point made even more clearly in William of Conches's version of the gloss, where to these explanations are added the benefits of rapid (readerly) consultation. Here we have, in other words, what began (and should now be read) as two distinct scholia, perhaps added to the margins of the classical text at different times, perhaps even in different hands. They are two distinct interpretive options. The second gloss repeats what was becoming a more widely shared technical account of the *ordinatio* or *forma tractatus* of multi-book texts, one that evokes the study of the text as written object. The first, in contrast, while apparently assuming ideas of

[21] To borrow a phrase from Woods, *Weeping for Dido*, p. 4, whose approach has inspired much of this discussion.
[22] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, XVIII.XLIV.1, ed. by Lindsay. See Kelly, *Ideas and Forms*, pp. 42–44 and 133–34.
[23] Translated in Ziolkowski and Putnam (eds), *The Virgilian Tradition*, pp. 165 and 192, the latter part of a larger catalogue of the poet's recitations.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org