LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

This collection makes a new, profound and far-reaching intervention into the rich yet little-explored terrain between Latin scholastic theory and vernacular literature. Written by a multidisciplinary team of leading international authors, the chapters honour and advance Alastair Minnis's field-defining scholarship. A wealth of expert essays refract the nuances of theory through the medium of authoritative Latin and vernacular medieval texts, providing fresh interpretative treatment to known canonical works while also bringing unknown materials to light.

ARDIS BUTTERFIELD is Marie Borroff Professor of English and Professor of French and Music at Yale University. Her books include *Poetry and Music in Medieval France* (Cambridge University Press, 2002) and *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (2009), which won the R. H. Gapper prize for French Studies.

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LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

Interpretation, Invention, Imagination

Essays in Honour of Alastair Minnis

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Contents

Figures

Table

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Preface and Acknowledgements

These essays are offered in honour of Alastair Minnis, and they are meant as an expression of the contributors' sincere and profound gratitude for all he has done for us – and for the field of medieval literary studies – as our teacher, editor, colleague and, more broadly, our guide to what he called scholastic literary attitudes. From his pathbreaking work in *Theory of Authorship*, to his editing (with Ian Johnson) of the massive medieval volume of *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, to monographs on Chaucer and the *Rose* and on medieval ideas of Paradise and Hell, to the anthology of materials which his students affectionately call 'Minnis and Scott', to seminal articles on texts and topics too varied to enumerate here, Alastair has done more than anyone to create and foster the study of medieval literary theory and criticism and to demonstrate how richly rewarding such study can be for readers of later medieval literature. Throughout his scholarship, Alastair models a way of reading – reading works of medieval literature, reading commentary, reading scholastic philosophy and theology, reading manuscripts, reading works of intellectual history – that unerringly points to his training at the hands of his beloved mentors, Beryl Smalley and Malcolm Parkes. This kind of reading is, inevitably, a tall order, but Alastair wears his learning with humility – and with generosity and joviality – and he thereby encourages the rest of us to make the attempt for ourselves. And, for more than three decades, those attempts have found a home and ample and rigorous support, feedback and commentary in the series which Alastair founded and edited, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature.

We look back, now, through the prism of that firmly established series and, of course, through the dauntingly huge and influential corpus of Alastair's published work at what looks like a well-settled narrative of unopposable and naturally flowing achievement, starting, as everyone knows, in 1984 with *Theory of Authorship*. The shock waves and intellectual excitement that *Theory of Authorship* caused in the mid-1980s have

had no equal in the trade since. But, despite the hugely positive reaction to the book, it was not all plain sailing in those early years – as Alastair himself has stressed to each of us. In the 1970s and 1980s, mainstream academic attitudes to medieval literary theory – or even the idea of the possibility of the existence of medieval literary theory – were all too often rather inhospitable. It was a common experience to hear otherwise well-informed literary academics declare that, apart perhaps from rhetoric, there was no such thing as medieval literary theory. It may be surprising, in retrospect, to recognise just how much Alastair had to work against the grain in those early days. It is a testimony not only to the sheer power and weight of his scholarship, but also to the tactful persuasiveness of his personality, that his achievements are now a central pillar of medieval studies.

Alastair's writing is also exemplary insofar as he refuses to imagine the Latin and vernacular materials he studies as existing in any overly simplistic relationship. While attending to the various ways in which some texts and writers are invested with authority (itself a 'waxen nose'), and to the various directions of influence across linguistic boundaries, Alastair persistently refuses to treat Latin material as an inert body imitated (or mined, or whatever metaphor one wants) by the 'lowly' vernacular, just as he seems to have little patience for antagonistic narratives of the 'upstart' vernacular straining against the chains of 'repressive' Latin scholasticism. He does, however, persistently value scholastic Latin material for its cosmopolitanism, its potential to cross national borders and carry ideas across linguistic traditions. It is no accident that his writing takes up major authors in Middle English, French and Italian, while also exploring the appearance of scholastic texts and ideas in medieval Spain, Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands. Where medieval scholasticism is, there Alastair's heart will be also, and medieval scholasticism was seemingly everywhere.

Ian writes:

There is more – much more – to Alastair's personality than persuasiveness. I recall vividly my own (very cordial) first meeting with Alastair, in Malcolm Parkes's room – permanently smoke-filled, as Vincent Gillespie describes below. Malcolm, realising that one of his undergraduates was developing a taste for medieval literary thought, lent me his copy of Yer Man's PhD thesis – the precursor to *Medieval Theory of Authorship*. I was hooked: next stop the University of Bristol with AJM as PhD supervisor. Every meeting with Alastair was a real treat, not only because he was such

an inspirational and entertaining supervisor, but also because he shared his current work with me. During those years in Bristol, I watched my preternaturally energetic mentor, apparently fuelled only by Mars Bars and coffee, rise to the challenges of putting together *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism* – to say nothing of carrying out a wealth of foundational work on theory of imagination or the massive ground-breaking project (with Tim Machan) on the Latin, French and English traditions of the text of, and commentaries on, Boethius. Well into my fifth decade of knowing him, I still don't know how he does it.

Andrew writes:

I want to dwell on Alastair's generosity and joviality. For me, as I think for many of his students, Alastair has made the task of working at the intersection of literary history and the history of ideas not just intellectually rewarding, but also both exciting and remarkably good fun. Recovering the odd mix of the strange and familiar from this material, not shying away from the complexity of it all but taking delight in the contradictions that inevitably arise, and being at once critical and generous with later medieval writers as they worked through sources and ideas that were, similarly, both strange and familiar to them, and as they themselves took intellectual risks – all of this was brilliantly modelled and encouraged, over meals and drinks, at conferences, in the classroom, through countless hours in his office, in New Haven and now in the Scottish Borders. (I am reminded in particular of a recent visit to the Borders, where Florence and Allie found us carrying on, animatedly discussing various points of medieval literary theory, though in the dark – the sun having set at some point in the conversation without our noticing.) I remember Alastair speaking of his wonder at encountering medieval English poetry as an undergraduate studying with Éamonn Ó Carragáin at Queen's University Belfast. The wonder of those early encounters is still, I think, evident in Alastair's research and writing today, impelling him to cast yet more light on the obscurities of later medieval literary and intellectual culture, and inspiring his students to follow his example, aspiring to the virtues of our good, kind and boundlessly curious teacher.

Ardis writes:

My earliest meeting with Alastair was as an MA student in Bristol, where Ian had just started working on his PhD. Alastair's formidable energy burst

Figure 0.1 Alastair with his older daughter, Sarah, in Bristol, 1981.
Photograph by Florence Minnis.

out of his lectures on medieval authorship and it was thrilling to realise that he was sharing brand new research almost as quickly as he was creating it. That short year in Bristol, with Myra Stokes, Ian Bishop and the calm, brilliantly urbane John Burrow, managed to turn me into a medievalist, as well as introduce me to the dramatically beautiful Bristol hills, a health-giving alternative to fenland life in Cambridge (see, for a beautiful example of the former, Figure 0.1). In the years since, Alastair generated constant collegiality and friendship from afar, and it was a huge pleasure to re-connect in closer circumstances when, in one of those unexpected life events, I found myself at Yale.

Andrew and Ian have written eloquently of Alastair's research and scholarship in terms which I entirely share and cannot better. So let me comment instead on the small but vital ways he helped a fellow Brit negotiate life on the East Coast, always with encouragement, often over lunch or dinner, and with a plentiful supply of hilarious anecdotes to add spice and cheerful wisdom to the tasks at hand. As a colleague he was a rock, tireless in his teaching, which included a popular lecture course on medieval literature and the movies – one of Alastair's less well-known areas of fun expertise – and dedicated in his efforts to promote medieval studies. Who of the medievalists at Yale will forget the sight of a beaming Alastair

climbing onto a chair to welcome new graduates and faculty to the Medieval and Renaissance Studies program, wine glass perilously in hand? His gift for supportiveness is phenomenal. And since retirement, if it were possible, it has even increased, as Alastair has learned to wield the communicatory powers of Zoom from his cockpit in the Borders.

To conclude, we are only three amongst many others who are deeply grateful for all that Alastair has so kindly and brilliantly given. The range and depth of his contribution are stupendous – whether, for example, it may have been his invaluable assistance with a book proposal for those (not necessarily from Alastair's own institution) with a newly-minted doctorate; or his subtle negotiating of complex national or international duties; or his unwavering practical-minded support for colleagues or students going through tough times; or, behind the scenes, his delicate solving, with typical finesse, resourcefulness and good humour, of the crises and awkward tangles afflicting various organisations over many years. So many people know that they owe Alastair a great deal. There are many too who don't know quite how much they really owe him. Alastair's intellectual legacy, both acknowledged and unacknowledged, is colossal and generative, and will continue to grow beyond all our lifetimes. This collection's editors and contributors would like to think that this volume will play its own part in (and serve as testimony and tribute to) the continuing tradition sparked by the individual talent of Alastair Minnis.

As all of that would suggest, it would be hard to do justice to Alastair's contributions to the field with any single volume. We have decided to focus ours on the subject that was at the heart of his intervention – medieval literary theory and criticism. More tributes are surely possible, but we hope that ours reflects the unique and singular effect that he has had on medieval literary studies. It is offered with deep admiration, gratitude and affection.

The editors would like to express their warm gratitude to Linda Bree, who responded with such alacrity to our initial idea, being keen to honour Alastair's longstanding work as General Editor for Cambridge University Press with this special volume, and to Emily Hockley, who continued that encouragement as the book was prepared for publication. Grateful thanks also to the contributors for their collegiality and patience with the process of getting the volume into print, to Gina Hurley and Clara Wild for their meticulous research into the breadth and depth of Alastair's fast-moving publication output, and to Florence, for her expert help with the photos. Ian and Ardis want to extend particular thanks to Andrew, who was instrumental in taking care of so much, and for gracing the whole enterprise with his limitless cheerful efficiency over every detail.

Abbreviations and Conventions

AND	*Anglo-Norman Dictionary*, ed. Louise W. Stone, William Rothwell et al., 7 vols (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1977–92)
ANTS	Anglo-Norman Text Society
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
DMLBS	*Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* <logeion.uchicago.edu>
EFA	Beryl Smalley, *English Friars and Antiquity in the Early Fourteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1960)
EETS es/os	Early English Text Society, Extra Series/Original Series
GW	*Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke* (Leipzig: K. W. Hiersemann, 1925–)
IA	*Index Aureliensis: catalogus librorum sedecimo saeculo impressorum* (Baden-Baden: Valentin Koerner, 1965–)
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
Minnis and Scott	A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott (eds), with the assistance of David Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, c. 1100–c. 1375: The Commentary Tradition*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991)
MÆ	*Medium Ævum*
MED	*Middle English Dictionary* <quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary>
MTA	Alastair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, reprinted 2nd edn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010)
ODNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <www.oxforddnb.com>

OED	*Oxford English Dictionary* <www.oed.com>
PL	*Patrologia Latina*, ed. by J.-P. Migne
STC	A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave (eds), *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland and Ireland, and of English Books Printed Abroad, 1475–1640*, 2nd edn, 3 vols (London: Bibliographical Society, 1976–91)
USTC	Universal Short Title Catalogue <ustc.ac.uk>
VLT	Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Thelma Fenster and Delbert W. Russell (eds), *Vernacular Literary Theory from the French of Medieval England: Texts and Translations, c. 1120–c. 1450* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2016)
YLS	*Yearbook of Langland Studies*

Printed sources cited in full here are not repeated in the bibliography at the end of the volume. Decisions concerning Latin orthography have been left to individual authors. Apart from those listed here, the works of Alastair Minnis are cited by short title and year. Citations of the works of Chaucer refer to *The Riverside* edition, unless otherwise noted.

The Career and Contributions of Alastair Minnis

Vincent Gillespie

In the prologue to his commentary on Hosea, the fourteenth-century English 'classicising friar' Robert Holcot borrows from John of Salisbury's *Polycraticus* and Hugh of St Victor's *Didascalicon* to list seven keys to knowledge. The first six are often listed in mnemonic verses from the medieval schools: 'A humble mind, eagerness for inquiry, a tranquil life, silent examination, poverty, a foreign land', and Holcot comments that 'these customarily open the way for many in their reading of difficult materials'.[1] The seventh key, borrowed from Quintilian, is 'love of one's teachers, for they should be loved and honoured as one does parents'. One should not perhaps be surprised that in his remarkable career Alastair Minnis has deployed all seven of these keys to striking effect, nor that this remarkable career and his storied achievements should map so closely onto Holcot and Hugh's understanding of the three kinds of humility necessary in the search for knowledge: 'First, that one should consider no knowledge, nothing written, worthless; secondly, that one should not be ashamed to learn from anyone . . . because it is possible that someone simple knows what you do not; thirdly, that, when one has become skilled in knowledge, one should not disdain others'.[2] This sort of intellectual humility (surely one of the most powerful virtues in many modes of medieval writing) is not material impoverishment, but rather a lack of ego and a sense of modesty in the face of the works of intellectual giants of the past, a kind of beatitudinal poverty of spirit. Alastair's professional life conforms to Holcot's prescriptions remarkably well. Throughout his career he has taught literary scholars the importance of reading deeply, widely, attentively and comprehensively in 'difficult materials', the copious texts

[1] Holcot, *Selections on Minor Prophets*, ed. by Hanna, p. 29. For the verses, see Hugh of St Victor, *Didascalicon*, III.13, tr. by Taylor, p. 94 and n. 61 (at p. 214).
[2] Holcot, *Selections on Minor Prophets*, ed. by Hanna, p. 29, still citing *Didascalicon*, III.13.

and commentaries that underpinned medieval exegetical activity and that flowed into and decisively shaped the formation of secular and vernacular attitudes to the arts of imaginative stimulus written in the medieval period. By drawing our attention to the *multiplex modus* of Scripture, and the ways that medieval commentators reacted to the modes, Alastair built a sturdy and robust bridge between the worlds of exegesis and literary criticism which many subsequent scholars have crossed.[3]

His academic career, driven by Holcot's 'eagerness for inquiry', has taken him from The Queen's University, Belfast to Oxford as a recognised student, and to teaching posts at Queen's, Bristol, York and the 'foreign lands' of Columbus, Ohio and New Haven, before returning in retirement to the Scottish Borders, a geographical liminality that stylishly reflects the way in which, intellectually, Alastair has led the scholarly community into the margins of scholastic discourse and the liminal and overlapping spaces of Latin academic commentary and vernacular literary experiment. His 'silent examination' of manuscripts, containing often difficult and sometimes rebarbative texts, led him to listen to the voices of pages rarely turned by literary scholars, pages written by commentators and exegetes in academic and pastoral contexts, as well as commentators on classical texts as they were read and studied in medieval schools of all levels.

As he says in the preface to his great early monograph, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (1984), he benefited from the existence in Queen's Belfast of a unique department, the Department of Scholastic Philosophy, where Theodore Crowley and James McEvoy guided and shaped his early exposure to those materials. Another colleague at Queen's, A. B. Scott, encouraged and supported his work on later Latin commentaries on classical texts. These scholars were obviously foundational in shaping Alastair's worldview, but it may be his time in Oxford in the 1970s that gave his understanding of the potentials of these materials its distinctive form.

Alastair's love of his teachers is always generously on display in his books and articles, but his Oxford mentors may have had a particularly powerful effect in colouring his scholarly approach and academic methodology. In the mid-1970s, the palaeographer and cultural historian Malcolm Parkes had made his pipe-smoked room over the lodge in Keble College an essential place of resort for visiting medievalists from all over the world. His graduate course on palaeography, for which he kept meticulous registers that now read like a rollcall of international medieval studies from

[3] *MTA*, pp. 126–29.

the 1960s through to the 1990s, were frequently audited by scholars on sabbatical or research visits. In the mid-1970s Parkes was developing his thinking about the concepts of *ordinatio* and *compilatio* and their profound influence on the *mise-en-page* of medieval books and on the structural *imaginaire* of medieval authors, thoughts which resulted in his now classic 1976 essay.[4] At the same time, Mary and Richard Rouse were often in Oxford, and Richard Hunt, Keeper of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian, an expert on medieval grammar teaching, *accessus* and secular commentary, was also talking, teaching and occasionally writing on these materials.[5] So, Alastair's own developing thinking about the nature and *modus agendi* of compilation as an intellectual and bibliographical process was refined in the crucible of lively and high-powered discussions late into the night in Parkes's room, often fuelled by modest quantities of good single malt whisky. The Rouses did not always agree with the Parkesian view, and Alastair was able to calibrate his thinking by reference to both these adamantine intellectual forces.

Though Alastair venerated Malcolm in suitably Holcotian fashion as an academic foster parent, Oxford was also home to another major influence on his intellectual development: the great scholar of biblical exegesis, Beryl Smalley. Smalley's work on the classicising friars, *English Friars and Antiquity* (1960), and on Bible commentary more generally, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (1940), had brought many medieval exegetes blinking shyly into the light of modern critical scrutiny, and had recognised (sometimes rather disapprovingly) that they were writing commentary inflected with literary taste and imaginative flair. Smalley saw in the younger Minnis someone with a natural affinity for the exegetical mode of thought. Parkes delightedly reported her saying to him: 'Alastair thinks he is a literary critic, but he is really an historian of exegesis'. The reality was, of course, that he was both, and his subsequent career has shown him to be a genuine pontifex, crafting hugely productive conversations between both scholarly disciplines. A third figure of great influence in these Oxford years was Pamela Gradon, whose remarkable *Form and Style in Early English Literature* (1971) is now unjustly neglected but was widely read in those Oxford years. Gradon brought high intellectual seriousness and sublime learning to bear on vernacular texts and their *modi tractandi* in ways that in some respects anticipated Alastair's more extensive thoughts on these subjects.

[4] Parkes, '*Ordinatio* and *Compilatio*'.
[5] See, e.g., Rouse and Rouse, *Preachers, Florilegia and Sermons*.

It would have been during these mid-1970s years that I first met Alastair. I was an undergraduate at Keble, and in 1975 began graduate work with Douglas Gray and with the assistance of Parkes's rumbustiously iconoclastic but often acutely insightful interventions. Alastair was already showing the intellectual generosity that has shone throughout his career, and displayed a Holcotian humility in his willingness to talk to a very uncertain new graduate as I took my first tentative and unstable steps into research. What struck me then still strikes me today, decades later: his gentle willingness to listen intently to what one has to say without any desire to foist his point of view or to prejudge the outcome of a scholarly enquiry. This is indeed intellectual humility of a very high order. Despite already establishing himself as a young scholar who Knew Things, he would listen and talk as an equal, open to the idea that his interlocutor might know something he didn't or might benefit from something he did. Alastair's success as a teacher, mentor, administrator and scholar over many years and on several continents is founded on that same openness to conversation, learning, shared excitement and the spirit of enquiry and scholarly adventure. The range of topics explored in his many monographs reveals how productive that curiosity-led research can be when founded on attentive listening, silent reading and careful and highly discriminating questioning of his sources.

During the summers of 1976 and 1977, I was working as a night porter in Keble College. Malcolm Parkes, Alastair and other friends would often drop in for a chat and a coffee to pass the time. One evening has remained particularly vividly engraved in my memory. Many of my generation of graduates had become excited by the way that Parkes, Minnis and others (especially Judson Boyce Allen,[6] himself a frequent Oxford visitor and contributor to the informal King's Arms coffee seminar) were opening up new modes of thinking about medieval exegesis as a potential tool to use in the study of the vernacular literatures of medieval Europe. But the materials were hard to access, frequently only dabbled in superficially and often written in challengingly inaccessible Latin. The field needed an approach that was more rigorous and systematic. So, one balmy summer evening, Alastair and David Thomson (then a graduate working on medieval grammar and later Archdeacon of Carlisle and Bishop of Huntingdon) sat in Keble lodge with me while they drafted out a list of commentary texts that ought to be made available in translation for the use of scholars. In the event, Alastair had the motivation and momentum to see that

[6] See Allen, *Friar as Critic*, idem, *Ethical Poetic*.

project through to the hugely influential, ground-breaking anthology of translated materials, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, c. 1100–c. 1375: The Commentary Tradition* (1988), co-edited with Brian Scott and assisted by David Wallace – a volume fittingly dedicated to the memory of Beryl Smalley. The origins and early shape of this volume were firmly rooted in the exciting intellectual milieu of Oxford in those years, and perhaps even in the less exciting and rather dingy milieu of a college lodge.

The preface to the 1988 second edition of *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, which drew from Alastair's doctoral thesis, argued that 'scholastic scriptural exegesis was a central force in the reshaping of literary values in the later Middle Ages' (p. vii). That whole preface is a valuable manifesto for Alastair's continuing literary agenda as it has spread and developed to encompass not just Middle English but also Old French, Italian and other European vernaculars. Like the medieval scholars and commentators he has done so much to illuminate, Alastair has moved around the intellectual centres and cultural synapses of medieval Europe with comfort and expertise, his Latinity (like theirs) ensuring a secure scholarly base-camp for his explorations of their vernacular literatures. His first monograph, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity* (1982), for example, offers the simple observation that, in the *Knight's Tale* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer creates a powerfully disciplined and self-contained imaginative syllogism to explore what living and thinking like a pagan might entail in terms of the ethics and pragmatics of daily life. This allows Alastair to create an empathetic context in which to read the actions of the characters and to explore their ideological and emotional horizons. His later study, *Fallible Authors* (2007), similarly explores the interstices of literary authority and credibility, brilliantly allowing scholastic notions of sacerdotal authority and the *magisterium predicatoris* to create an intellectual scaffolding for explorations of the fallible utterances of the Pardoner and Wife of Bath.

His editorial labour with Ian Johnson on *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, II, *The Middle Ages* (2005) required heroic reserves of patience and tolerance (and that was just with my chapter), but the volume is a landmark in the transformation of our understanding of the literary attitudes and cultures of the Middle Ages, and the contributors, drawn from a huge range of disciplines and languages, were shepherded and guided by editorial work that was not just enthusiastic and engaged, but also already in command of the field as well as the respect of the authors. If his book on the *Roman de la Rose* was called *Magister Amoris*, one might without exaggeration describe Alastair as *Magister Lectoris* and as, a *magister*

lectionis – he has taught generations of students and scholars how to approach their texts with rigour, attentiveness and synthetic power, how to think across and between commentary traditions with discrimination and discernment. His work is full of a beautifully calibrated, rigorously controlled and intellectually hospitable understanding of the broader implications of medieval and contemporary acts of exegetical engagement and scholarly *lectio*.

It is perhaps not accidental that many of his favoured exegetical treatises are affiliated to members of the mendicant orders. In their interpretive synapse, created from a tension between fidelity to Scripture and tradition, on the one hand, and practical application of the resulting acts of interpretation, on the other, a tension so characteristic of the mendicant pastoral theology of the thirteenth-century schools, the *modi agendi* of such texts offer an intriguing parallel to the agile blend of magisterial command and open-minded attention to lexical and literary detail that one finds in so much of Alastair's writing. He too combines the rigorous and the pastoral, the theoretical and the applied, in his writing, speaking and teaching. All are characterised by acts of imaginative association nurtured in a rich tilth of a profound understanding of the broader intellectual, exegetical and pastoral trends and developments of the cultural and academic milieux underpinning (however remotely and indirectly) nearly all medieval vernacular literary production. It is entirely fitting that his 2009 monograph was called *Translations of Authority in Medieval English Literature: Valuing the Vernacular*.

Throughout his long career, Alastair has consistently modelled professional best practice: as a teacher, a graduate supervisor, a collaborator, an editor, an administrator, an academic politician, a defender of the discipline and a tireless advocate for our work. His work in York's Centre for Medieval Studies sustained and extended the pioneering interdisciplinary teaching and research of Derek Pearsall and Elizabeth Salter, perhaps especially the York Manuscripts Conferences, where many of us cut our paper-giving teeth. His role as General Editor of Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, from its inception in 1986 until very recently, established that series as one of the finest in the field, and his editorial midwifery gave sharper critical voices to several generations of scholars. He has rightly received most of the glittering prizes our profession can offer, given most of the starriest named lectures in the gift of our field and taught in Denmark, Iceland, The Netherlands, Belgium, France, Italy, Switzerland, Spain, Germany, Finland, Japan, Taiwan, China, Australia, New Zealand and Jerusalem.

Alastair's work is characterised by collegiality and communitarianism, and a lively sense of humour and fun always on display in person and occasionally in print. His work for the early days of the UK Council for College and University English (CCUE, now University and College English), charged with the defence of and advocacy for the subject, and his election in 2000 as a Founding Fellow of the UK's English Association speak to his early and ongoing commitment to the health of the subject. His later roles in the Medieval Academy of America and in the leadership of the New Chaucer Society show how that commitment continued to flourish after his move to the United States. (More recently, it has manifested itself in community involvement in his new home village in the Scottish Borders.) Throughout his career, Alastair has spoken up for medieval studies as a broad intellectual church, capable of powerful and innovative acts of interpretative synthesis, acts that he himself demonstrated by example as well as by precept. He is a tireless peace weaver in our profession and seeks to build consensus and a sense of common purpose. I have watched him at many conferences over the years, encouraging, supporting, gently redirecting generations of graduate students and early career scholars, and expressing enthusiasm as new corridors of thought open up to him. He listens intently, speaks deliberately and with care for the magisterial impact of his words, and can be as excited by the work of a new graduate as by that of an established master.

As part of his retirement from Yale, his beloved colleague Roberta Frank produced a touching tribute, and one story in particular beautifully illustrates the *fama* and renown of Professor Minnis.[7] As Professor Frank tells the tale, at the Kalamazoo conference a few years ago, Alastair and his old friend Terry Jones (of Monty Python fame) were chatting at a bar when three young people slowly and hesitantly, eyes wide in astonishment, approached the two of them. Terry sighed, used to this; they came closer: 'Are you?', one stuttered, ' . . . might you be . . . *Alastair Minnis*?' Although Alastair would probably maintain with his medieval *magistri* that the only good *auctor* is a dead *auctor*, he is most definitely an eminent *actor*, a primary efficient cause of much that is good in our discipline. And retirement shows no slackening of his productivity, as he addresses topics as varied as *From Eden to Eternity: Creations of Paradise in the Later Middle*

[7] Roberta Frank, 'Alastair J. Minnis, Douglas Tracy Smith Professor of English', Yale Faculty Retirement Tributes (2019), https://fas.yale.edu/book/faculty-retirement-tributes-2019/alastair-j-minnis (last accessed 23 January 2022). I am indebted to this account for some of the details included here.

Ages (2015), *Hellish Imaginations from Augustine to Dante: An Essay in Metaphor and Materiality* (2020) and *Phantom Pains and Prosthetic Narratives: From George Dedlow to Dante* (2021).

Leonard Boyle, the great Dominican palaeographer and Prefect of the Vatican Library, and another frequent visitor to the Oxford of the 1970s, has on his tombstone in the extraordinary Irish Dominican church of San Clemente in Rome another exhortation from Hugh's *Didascalicon*: 'Omnia disce: postea videbis nihil esse superfluum' ('Learn everything, and later you will see that nothing is superfluous').[8] Alastair's prodigious published output eloquently recalls his beloved Chaucer's repurposing in the *Retractions* of the Pauline dictum (Romans 15.4): 'All that is writen is writen for oure doctrine, and that is myn entente' (10.1082). In the *Didascalicon*, Hugh also says 'the wise student . . . gladly hears all, reads all and looks down upon no writing, no person, no teaching'.[9] That enthusiasm, egalitarianism and joy of learning are the hallmark of Alastair as a teacher and a scholar, and we have all benefited richly from it. After a scholarly lifetime spent skilfully inserting the keys of knowledge into so many locked and forbidding texts and of personally embodying the Victorine and Holcotian ideals of scholarly humility, this volume allows some of Alastair Minnis's friends to say thank you to one of the good guys, someone that Cato and Quintilian would certainly recognise as *vir bonus dicendi peritus* ('a good man, skilled in speech').[10]

[8] *Didascalicon*, VI.3, tr. by Taylor, p. 137. [9] *Ibid.*, III.13, tr. by Taylor, p. 95.
[10] Quintilian, *Orator's Education*, XII.1.1, ed. by Russell, v, 196.