How far do dream poems or visions interrogate and/or reinforce ideas of authority?

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Geoffrey Chaucer's *The House of Fame* (1379-80), Robert Henryson's *The Lion and the Mouse* (circa.1480) and James I of Scotland's *The Kingis Quair* (1423-24), all interrogate ideas of authority. Through their exploration of multiple authority figures, texts, and traditions, these dream-vision poems examine the nature of texts, and problematise literary authorities to different extents.

In *The House of Fame*, Chaucer presents a variety of literary authorities to sceptically interrogate. As Windeatt states the prologues of dream-visions establish a theme which is 'played off' throughout the poem, Chaucer's proem explores the nature and causes of dreams: 'Why this a drem, why that a swevern' (9).[1] Continuing for 52-lines, the extended *dubitatio* not only parodies the opening of *Le Roman de la Rose*, but destabilises Macrobian dream-theory: by presenting dreams as binary oppositions, the profusion of possibilities 'disrupt[s] any sense of certainty', moving the reader to a state of unobtainable truth.[2] Thus, Chaucer undermines Macrobian authority to highlight 'the artificiality and essential arbitrariness of fictions'.[3] Furthermore, when the narrator recounts Virgil's *Aeneid*, he translates Virgil's opening, but continues with Ovid's rendition of Dido's perspective. Indicating that these texts contradict and undermine each other, this mixing of opposing sources creates a 'slippage in their authority' as Chaucer foregrounds 'the conflict between *auctoritee* and *truth*'.[4] This unreliability of literature is furthered when the narrator recalls '…how fals and reccheles / Was to Breseyda Achilles, And Paris to Oenone; And Jason to Isiphile…In certeyn, as the book us tellis' (397-426). Presented with multiple *exemplums in vacuo*, whilst the extended rhetorical listing conveys 'the blinkered view of literary tradition as unambiguously supporting one side or the other', ending with 'In certeyn, as the book us tellis', Chaucer problematises the trust readers put in literature by emphasising the discrepancies of stories.[5]

Having highlighted the dubious truth value in literature, the narrator desires new textual authorities. Clemen indicates the medieval poet was primarily concerned with 'giving due consideration to prescribed forms and genres', however, Chaucer plays with the conventions of the authorial Epic genre: 'O God of science and of lyght, Appollo / thurgh thy grete myght…Unto the nexte laure y see, / And kysse yt…Now entre in my brest anoon!' (1091-1109)[6] As Justman argues 'citation of authority in Chaucer is a matter of parody [or] dispute', whilst Chaucer conforms to using formulaic phrases like 'entre in my brest anoon', he impersonates Dante's popular invocation to Apollo and undermines his imaginative arrogance

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[1] Barry Windeatt, 'Literary structures in Chaucer', in *The Cambridge Chaucer Companion*, ed. by Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.196.
Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The House of Fame', in *Riverside Chaucer* ed. by Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.347.

[2] Robert Clifford, "'A Man of Great Auctorite': The Search for Truth in Textual Authority in Geoffrey Chaucer's The House of Fame", *Manchester University Press*, 81:1 (1999), 155-165 (p.158).

[3] Katherine Terrell, "Reallocation of Hermeneutic Authority in Chaucer's 'House of Fame'", *The Chaucer Review*, 31:3 (1997), 279–290 (p.280).

[4] Clifford, p.163.
Wolfgang Clemen, *Chaucer's Early Poetry* (London: Methuen & Co, 1963), p.113.

[5] Priscilla Martin, *Chaucer's Women* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.207.

[6] Clemen, pp.2-3.

with comedy.[7] Thus, subverting expectations of authority, Chaucer advocates the need to reinterpret these authorial genres and produce new texts. Consequently, when the narrator leaves the temple of Venus looking for answers in Book I, he is faced with 'a large feld…Withouten toun, or hous, or tree' (482-4). Unlike Kane who states such fluctuations in the story reflect Chaucer's 'lacking full critical self-assurance', King suggests the desert setting symbolises 'the wasteland of a poem robbed of its confidence in tradition'.[8] Accordingly, this *aventure* section indicates the narrator's search for 'somme newe tydynges' and authorities as 'The flight into the skies is an ancient religious and literary motif [for]…greater knowledge' (1886).[9] Therefore, because the Eagle is inspired by Dante, Boitani highlights an 'old book' inevitably produces a 'new' book, and this layering of sources not only foregrounds the impossibility of retrieving truth in literature, but in applying 'fresh motives' to traditional frameworks, Chaucer expresses his desire for new authorities.[10]

As figures of authority are of central importance to the dream-vision genre, in *The House of Fame*, Chaucer undermines these figures to question the value of authority. Describing his approach to Fame's palace 'That stood upon so hygh a roche', the narrator declares: "up I clomb with alle payne…A roche of yse, and not of stel. / Thoughte I, 'By Seynt Thomas of Kent, / This were a feble fundament'" (1116-32). Whilst this comical trek battling the treacherous foundations reflects the difficult pursuit of fame, and the symbolic resonance of ice encapsulates the ephemeral notion of fame, Chaucer is in fact borrowing from the typography of Fortune. Boethius was the 'first writer to associate [Fortune] with an unstable physical environment…detailing her caprice'.[11] His work inspired other texts like the fourteenth-century poem *Le dit de la panthere* in which Margival situates Fortune's castle on a mountain of ice.[12] Therefore, representing this similarity to Fortune, Chaucer hints that Fame is 'as arbitrary and ephemeral in her favours as her divine sister', demeaning her authority.[13] Whilst her fluctuating stature reflects the aggrandising power of fame: 'she was so lyte…But thus sone…with hir hed she touched hevene' (1369-75), this quality also references Boethius's Philosophia. Using Philosophia as a template for fickle Fame, Chaucer destabilises Boethius's idea of a wise philosophical authority. Hence, describing 'as feele eyen hadde she / As fetheres upon foules be…fele upstondyng eres / And tonges, as on bestes heres' (1381-90), the enjambement stylistically reinforces Fame's ghastly number of eyes and tongues as Chaucer also draws on characteristics of Virgilian Rumour. Because Fame is based on these figures from canonical texts, their association with arbitrary fame 'depletes any sense of power held by [these] textual authorities'.[14] Thus, contradicting Petrarch and Bocaccio who believed that worldly fame was to be a 'legitimate object of poetic aspiration', Fame's problematic characterisation 'destabilises the *auctoritas* of the ancient poets' as Chaucer complicates the value of literary authorities.[15]

Unlike Chaucer's speculative approach, Henryson adopts a distinctly negative portrayal of literary authority to simultaneously interrogate political authorities. Working to establish, and later undermine these authorities, Henryson's *The Lion and the Mouse* sets up the dream-vision framework to coerce the audience into believing the power of literary authority. In keeping with the visionary style, the poem begins set 'In middis of June, that sweit

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[7] Stewart Justman, 'Medieval Monism and Abuse of Authority in Chaucer', *The Chaucer Review*, 11:2 (1976), 95–111 (p.96).

[8] George Kane, *Chaucer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.37.
  Pamela. M. King, 'Chaucer, Chaucerians and the theme of poetry', in *Chaucer and Fifteenth-century poetry* ed. by Julia Boffey and Janet Cowen (Exeter: Short Run Press, 1991), p.4.

[9] Derek Brewer, *A New Introduction to Chaucer*, 2nd edn (London: Longman, 1998), p.129.

[10] Piero Boitani, 'Old books brought to life in dreams', in *The Cambridge Chaucer Companion*, p.44.
  Clemen, p.114.

[11] Christiania Whitehead, *Castles of the mind* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), p.162.

[12] Nicole de Margival, *Le Dit de la panthère,* ed. by B. Ribémont (Paris, 2000).

[13] Whitehead, p.178.

[14] Clifford, p.164.

[15] Whitehead, p.180.
  Ibid.

season' (1321-8).[16] Establishing a promising atmosphere of bliss, words like 'delitious…plenteous…paradice' create an Edenic opening to an apparently hopeful tale (1329,1332,1337). As Aesop enters wearing a gown 'quhyte as milk / His chymmeris wes of chambelate purpour broun, / His hude of scarlet bordowrit weill with silk' (1349-51), this elaborate dress compiled of materials including silk and camel's hair reflects his authoritative status appropriate for his title of 'maister Esope, poet lawriate' (1377). Equating the words 'poet lawriate' with 'maister', Aesop is bestowed with a grand authority as the regal connotations of the colour 'purpour broun' assigns a majestic status to writers. Therefore, revealing he is 'of gentill blude…In civile law studyit…And now my winning is in hevin for ay' (1370-4), these descriptions all contrast with Caxton's depiction of the author as 'most deformed…euill shapen…[and] dumb'.[17] As a result, it is clear Henryson is aggrandising Aesop's literary status as a poet which is furthered through his scholastic appearance: 'Ane roll of paper in his hand he bair / Ane swannis pen stikand under his eir, / Ane inkhorne with ane prettie gilt pennair' (1356-8). These fine details attributed to Aesop's writing tools assign a rich and respected authority to authorship and literature.

Having said this, whilst Aesop is set up physically as a figure of superior status, his words of authority no longer resonate. When asked to tell a fable, Aesop identifies the issue with his authority: '…quhat is it worth to tell ane fenyeit tail / Quhen haly preiching may nathing availl?' (1389-90) As the rhyming couplet falls on 'tail' and 'avail', Henryson reinforces the powerlessness of all literature as drawing 'a parallel between fable-telling and preaching…[he] casts doubt on…[both] instructive enterprises'.[18] Moreover, as McKenna notes Henryson's tragic figures obtain 'a godlike capacity' posed against the question of 'What can such a capacity accomplish?', Aesop's arguable tragic status is revealed when he recognises: 'The eir is deif, the hart is hard as stane' (1393).[19] This focus on 'eir' and 'hart' places responsibility on the readers as Aesop's moral instructions are lost upon the state of humanity. Hence, whilst Gopen notes the dream-vision form produces 'Henryson's utopian vision' where mercy and justice prevail, Machan explains that because Aesop is rendered part of the fiction, the authority "imputed to him as an 'Auctor'" is undermined as dreamers must eventually wake up and return to reality.[20]

Destabilising Aesop's authority, this powerlessness of literary authority is likewise reflected in the unheeding behaviour of the fable's protagonist. Initially given a status of authority, the lion is referred to as 'nobill lyoun…lord of hie honour…king of bestis coronate' (855,1500,1462). Whilst this authority is reflective of his potent status as king of the jungle, the inclusion of words such as 'nobill', 'lord' and 'coronate' also suggest the lion is a symbol of kingship as he declares 'I wae baith lord and king / Of beistis', underlining a distinction between 'lord' of the court and 'king' of the jungle (1430-1). In contrast, whilst the mouse is branded an 'unworthie thing' by the lion (1427), Aesop renders her more spiritually authoritative as she becomes his mouthpiece:

In everie juge mercy and reuth suld be…
Without mercie, justice is crueltie

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[16] Robert Henryson, 'The Lion and the Mouse', in *Robert Henryson, The Complete Works: Fables* ed. by David J. Parkinson (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2010), *Robbins Library Digital Projects* [accessed 11 April 2018]

[17] William Caxton, *The Fables of Esop* (London:1596), sig.Ar, *Early English Books Online* [accessed 8 May 2018]

[18] Sally Mapstone, 'Robert Henryson', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature 1100–1500*, ed. by Larry Scanlon (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.246.

[19] Steven R. McKenna, *Robert Henryson's Tragic Vision* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1994), p.135.

[20] George D. Gopen, "The Essential Seriousness of Robert Henryson's 'Moral Fables': A Study in Structure", *Studies in Philology*, 82:1 (1985), 42-59 (p.55).
  Tim William Machan, "Robert Henryson and Father Aesop: Authority in the Moral Fables'", *Studies in the Age of Chaucer,* 12 (1990), 193-214 (p.209).

> As said is in the lawis spirituall.
> Quhen rigour sittis in the tribunall,
> The equitie of law quha may sustene? (1468-73)

Writing during the severe reign of King James III, this personification of rigour combined with the rhetorical question offers a didactic exploration into the authorial principles of kingship. Indeed, the internal rhyme falling on 'mercie' and 'crueltie' highlights the reality of ruling without 'reuth', or 'compassion', as the mouse envisages a more just 'tribunall' court informed by the 'lawis spirituall'.[21] However, despite the mouse's appeal to intellect, she finally convinces the lion not to eat her by appealing to his 'stomok' (1492). As this detail diverges from Henryson's source text, the *Elegiac Romulus*, Smith argues Henryson problematises the 'moral living taught by earlier examples of the fable genre'.[22] Thus, because 'political treatises of fifteenth-century Scotland use…natural imagery…[to] set a high ethical standard for princely governance', Henryson's fable diverges from tradition and exposes 'the relentless force of bestial appetite in humans and animals alike' as the freed lion returns to the hunt, and 'slew baith tayme and wyld, as he wes wont' (1512).[23] Therefore, presenting a pessimistic view of the world, the lion ignores the mouse's advice and subsequently becomes a lazy ruler: 'Quhilk suld be walkrife gyde and governour…To reule and steir the land and justice keip, / Bot lyis still in lustis, sleuth, and sleip' (1576-79). As the sibilance reinforces the lion's laziness, the rhyming couplet 'keip' and 'sleip' caustically highlights the failures in the expectations and behaviours of the king that are built up in the stanza. This prevailing sense of disappointment and hopelessness is reflected in the structure of the *Fabillis* which continues after *The Lion and the Mouse* with an increasing cynicism to an ending of utter despair, demonstrating that ultimately authorial literature cannot neutralise the insidious behaviours of humanity.

In a similar way to Henryson, James's *The Kingis Quair* differs from his authority text to highlight all individuals and experiences are different. Encapsulated in the opening line, the narrator describes 'The rody sterres twynklyng as the fyre…slepe for craft in might I no more…Bot toke a boke to rede apon quhile' (1-14).[24] This 'pattern of restless movement' combined with picking up Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae* connects this sense of change to literature, symbolising the narrator's desire to be original.[25] Moreover, this book framing highlights how literary authority becomes 'a mirror of life' as the narrator compares his own experiences with Boethius's.[26] In fact, James's narrator takes issue with Boethius's insurmountable virtue: 'Enditing in his faire Latyne tong, / So full of fruyte and rethorikly pykit, / Quhich to declare my scole is over young' (44-46). As the narrator recognises his inadequate moral compass, this recurring image of 'Unrypit fruyte' as a symbol of learning immediately establishes the theme of maturity, both moral and philosophical, independent of a literary authority (93). Thus, looking for 'Sum newe thing to write', he reinterprets Boethius's authority and begins his own story (89).

As *The Kingis Quair* is considered a bricolage of multiple authority texts, it diverges from its Boethian influence in certain areas as James reinterprets authority to achieve a different objective. Whilst Fortune is certainly not supposed to be considered an authority figure as in *Consolatione*, in *The Kingis Quair*, she is given an authoritative status. Unlike the other goddesses, the narrator details his journey to Fortune: 'Endlang a river pleasant to

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[21] Middle English Dictionary < http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED37312> [accessed 19 April]

[22] Greta Smith, "Readership, the Fables of the Elegiac Romulus, and the 'Moral Fabillis' of Robert Henryson", *Philological Quarterly*, 94:1/2 (2015), 51-69 (p.52).

[23] Laura Wang, 'Robert Henryson and the Animal in the Mirror', *The Review of English Studies*, 66:273 (2015), 20–39 (p.20).
Ibid.

[24] James I of Scotland, 'The Kingis Quair', in *Fifteenth-Century English Dream Visions* ed. by Julia Boffey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.94.

[25] Helen Phillips 'Frames and Narrators in Chaucerian Poetry', in *The Long Fifteenth Century* ed. by Helen Cooper and Sally Mapstone (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p.84.

[26] King, p.12.

behold, / Enbroudin all with fresche flouris gay…The cristall water ran so clere and cold' (1059-62). Introducing a *locus amoenus* common in dream-visions which favours 'fresh water…lush plants and trees', this idyllic landscape differs to Boethius's images of 'mountains lashed by winds and waves', and Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudanius* which was the first text to describe Fortune's home featuring 'Two rivers of sweet and poisonous water'.[27] In fact, the alliteration underlines that 'The cristall water ran so clere and cold', emphasising James's departure from traditional sources. Within this landscape, he also notes: 'treis saw I, full of levis grene, / That full of fruyte delitable were to sene' (1075-6). These images of blooming trees and ripened fruit symbolise the narrator's developing maturity as the textual framing indicates that Fortune will be benevolent to those who learn from Venus and Minerva. Introduced standing at her wheel, Fortune is described as wearing: 'A mantill…That furrit was with eremyn full quhite (1120-21). Whilst Venus also wears 'a mantill' signifying their equal statuses (671), ermine is a white fur traditionally used for trimming the ceremonial robes of judges.[28] Thus, portraying Fortune's respected and dependable judgement, perhaps ironically, James endows her with a superior authority. Not only through her appearance is she authoritative, but the text seems to have a predestination of encountering Fortune as the final authority figure: The 'sudayn weltering' of Fortune's 'sloppar' wheel recalls the waves of the tempestuous sea (1135-6): 'Upon the wavis weltering to and fro, / So infortunate was us' that began his journey (162-3). This progression towards Fortune becomes an instruction manual for kingship as 'bad fortune is likened with...youthful self-government [and] good fortune with a prudent God-fearing kingship', thus, culminating with a positive reversal of fortune, Mapstone suggests this corresponds with James's approach towards governance as 'James presented himself as a restorer of order and peace'.[29] Therefore, because the authorial advice is received within the dream, this demonstrates that James's sense of 'regulatory principles of self-government came essentially from within himself', and because the narrator's thankful address appears outside of the dream, the poem ends in a mood of "Boethian 'felicitee'" to indicate that the narrator has learnt from his experience and the advice of the authority figures, proving him worthy of kingship.[30]

In conclusion, the authors interrogate literary authorities for different purposes. As the narrators encounter multiple authorities, texts, and figures, whereas James commemorates and reinterprets these authorities, Chaucer problematises the truth value of literature, and Henryson complicates the power of literature. Yet, in desiring to diverge from their sources to produce new texts and explore new themes, they all establish their own literary authorities.

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[27] Boffey, *Fifteenth-Century English Dream Visions*, p.142.
   Whitehead, p.162.
[28] Oxford English Dictionary <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ermine> [accessed 19 April 2018]
[29] Sally Mapstone, 'Kingship and the *Kingis Quair*', in *The Long Fifteenth Century*, p.62.
   Ibid., p.65.
   Michael Brown, *James I* (Edinburgh, 1994), p.117.
[30] Mapstone, 'Kingship', p.60.
   Julia Boffey, "Chaucerian Prisoners: The context of 'The Kingis Quair'", in *Chaucer and Fifteenth-Century Poetry*, p.93.

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