Chapter Two
The standard model of authorial intention in the Middle Ages

From the second half of the twentieth century onwards, there seems to be a growing conviction among literary scholars about the inappropriateness of an intentionalist conception of meaning and interpretation (cf. Danneberg and Müller 1983, 104 et passim). As we have seen, a benchmark role is played in that process by Beardsley and Wimsatt's concept of intentional fallacy with its bottom line that the "intention of the author is neither available nor desirable" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, 468). Therefore it is surprising when in relevant works of medievalists one encounters a *medieval* concept of intention that comes very close to intentional fallacy. Even more so, since Wimsatt himself seems to have been completely unaware of possible allies in the Middle Ages which for him were not a time "of literary theory or criticism" (Wimsatt 1975, 175) at all.

The renowned German medievalist Jan-Dirk Müller for example holds in an article concerning the concept of the author in Latin texts of the early and late Middle Ages that there is no authorial intention outside the text that in any sense might be reconstructed. What does exist, is an intention of the text which its author did not necessarily have to know about (Müller 1995, 20 f.: "Es gibt keine irgend zu eruierende Autorintention jenseits des Textes, wohl eine *intentio* des Textes, von der sein Verfasser nichts wissen musste"). Müller's highlighting of the "*intentio* of the text" at the expense of authorial intention, in combination with the unavailability of any concept of authorial intention outside the text and with raising the possibility of the authorial intention structurally falling short of the meaning that can be taken from the text, makes one wonder whether there is any difference in how scholars in the Middle Ages and how many scholars in the twentieth century think about authorial intention. It seems as if already in the Middle Ages authorial intention was "neither available nor desirable".

Müller is not alone with his view. Mary Carruthers argues in exactly the same direction in her seminal book on memory in the Middle Ages when she writes: "there *is* no extra-textual authorial intention – whatever *intentio* there is is contained in the words of the text" (Carruthers 2008, 235). Some pages further on she makes her view on the medieval concept of intention even more explicit: "Authorial intention in itself is given no more weight than that of any subsequent reader who uses the work in his own meditative composition; the important intention is within the work itself, as its *res*, a cluster of meanings which are only

 https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110767858-003

partially revealed in its original statement" (Carruthers 2008, 237). Such a playing out of authorial intention against the intention to be taken from the text sounds – especially in the context of the argument of this book – so modern that the question arises again whether this might be a projection of twentieth-century theoretical concepts back onto medieval thinking. Yet it is possible that in the Middle Ages something changed radically in comparison with what we have seen in Greek and Roman Antiquity – and then fell from sight again in the ensuing centuries. Therefore, I shall first take a closer look at the arguments Mary Carruthers gives for her view – a view, by the way, that Jan-Dirk Müller explicitly agrees with. After that, in a second step, the most relevant sources of medieval thinking about authorial intention in interpretation will be analysed in order to establish the dominant concept of authorial intention in the Middle Ages from the fifth to the fifteenth century.

Intention of the text versus intention of the author?

A passage towards the end of the second book of Petrarch's *Secretum* plays the central role for Carruther's view on authorial intention in the Middle Ages. The English translation by William H. Draper already gives a short summary of this book in its title: *Petrarch's Secret or The Soul's Conflict with Passion. Three Dialogues between himself and S. Augustine*. The *Secretum* examines Petrarch's faith in three dialogues between himself and Augustine, with also "The Lady Truth" present. In the first dialogue, Augustine has explained to Francesco – by using quite some quotations from Cicero, Virgil, Ovid and others – what he does wrong. Being prone to the world of senses, Francesco neglects what must count most: human mortality. What Francesco should do instead is also beyond doubt: striving for faith with all his will. Within the second of these dialogues, then, Francesco presents an allegoric-ethical interpretation of some verses from the beginning of Vergil's *Aeneid*. There, Juno is heading for help so that Aeneas and the other Trojan refugees at sea will be hindered by a storm from reaching their destination. It is king Aeolus she turns to, and before she gets there and addresses him, Virgil introduces Aeolus in twelve verses as the powerful ruler over the winds who binds their rage with his sceptre and keeps them in a giant cave (*Aeneid* I, 52–63). The core of the interpretation by Francesco is that it is the task of reason to temper fury and other heavy passions, the same way as Aeolus tempers the winds. To which Augustine answers:

> Laudo hec, quibus abundare te video, petice narrationis archana. Sive enim id Virgilius ipse sensit, dum scriberet, sive ab omni tali consideratione remotissimus, maritimam his versi-

> bus et nil aliud describere voluit tempestatem; hoc tamen, quod de irarum impetu et rationis imperio dixisti, facete satis et proprie dictum puto. (Dotti 1993, II, 16.9–10)
>
> I cannot but applaud that meaning which I understand you find hidden in the poet's story, familiar as it is to you; for whether Virgil had this in mind when writing, or whether without any such idea he only meant to depict a storm at sea and nothing else, what you have said about the rush of anger and the authority of reason seems to me expressed with equal wit and truth. (Draper 1977, 102)

From this quote Carruthers (2008, 236f.) concludes: "the point is that his interpretation is not attributed to any intention of the man, Vergil, but rather to something understood to reside in the text itself". She then continues with the quote from above: "Authorial intention in itself is given no more weight than that of any subsequent reader who uses the work in his own meditative composition; the important intention is within the work itself, as its *res*, a cluster of meanings which are only partially revealed in its original statement" (Carruthers 2008, 237). However, I think there are some reasons to doubt her interpretation.

To start with, if one looks closely at the quote from Petrarch, then the opposition is not, as Carruthers holds, between the author ("the man, Vergil") and the text ("the text itself"), but between two possible intentions of the author (*sive* ... *sive*). The bottom line of Augustine's judgement is: regardless of whether Virgil intended the one possibility or the other, your interpretation is good. So the interpretation by Francesco is related by Augustine to two possible intentions of Virgil – as opposed to "not attributed to any intention of the man, Vergil". What is more, Augustine nowhere claims the irrelevance of the intention of the author. All he is saying is he approves Francesco's interpretation considering the background of the two possible intentions of Virgil mentioned. So, to phrase it carefully, the quoted passage could be read as: we do not know whether Virgil just wanted to describe a storm or give an allegorical ethical lecture – as opposed to: it does not matter what Virgil thought.

Also the explicit judgment by Augustine on the interpretation by Francesco points in the same direction: *facete satis et proprie dictum puto* ("seems to me expressed with equal wit and truth"). Both *satis* and *proprie* imply a scale and criteria that make a measured relation between text and interpretation possible – but on which level are these criteria situated? On the level of a "res" lying within the text itself, as Carruthers holds; on the level of Virgil's composition and truth; or on the level of Augustine as the didactic teacher who applauds the interpretation by Francesco in a context where Francesco is looking for help, even if Augustine is not completely convinced by the interpretation?

Maybe we will come closer to an answer to these questions if we look at the phrasing with which Francesco has presented his interpretation of the *Aeneid*

passage under scrutiny. After Francesco has elaborated about his suffering, Augustine told him that reason had to guide the lower instincts. Francesco immediately agrees und wants to show to Augustine that he himself has extracted this insight not only from the writings of the philosophers, but also from those of the poets (*quod ut me non tantum ex philosophicis sed ex poeticis etiam scripturis elicuisse pervideas*, II, 16.5). Looking closely at the exact words Francesco uses to give his ensuing interpretation, one can hardly avoid the impression that Francesco obviously believes that he is giving his interpretation in the name of the author, Virgil. All the verb constructions in Francesco's interpretation in the Second Book of *Secretrum* (cf. II, 16.5 – 8) refer to Virgil, and it is Virgil's view he tries to reconstruct: from *posse denotari* ("he may have meant to denote", Draper 1977, 100 f.) via *dedit intellegi* ("he has given us to understand he meant"), *quasi diceret* ("It is as though he said", Draper 1977 101) to *ut* [...] *constaret* [...] *addidit* ("However, lest any one should miss the truth [...] he adds the line", Draper 1977, 102). The grammatical subject of *posse denotari*, *dedit*, *diceret* and *addidit* is always Virgil.

It is interesting, by the way, that in a recent German translation from 2004 the Virgilian grammatical subject is deleted in nearly all these places: "Was sind Länder anders als" (what are countries other than), "dass dies über die Seele und den Zorn [...] gesagt wird" (that this is said about the Soul and the Fury), "bedeuten doch die Berge" (yet mountains mean). In this context, the only remaining reference to Virgil in that translation ("Als wollte Vergil damit sagen", as if Virgil wanted to say,) becomes more like a subjective impression of the interpreter, not an objectivating argument aiming at establishing consensus between an interpretation and an authority, in this case Virgil (cf. Hausmann 2004, 304 f.). This recent translation not only deviates in these places from the Latin, but also from some others I randomly checked: from the British 1911 translation by Draper, from the Dutch (cf. Tazelaar 1990, 89 f.), from a recent Italian (Dotti 1993, 109 – 111) and from an earlier German one (cf. Hefele 1910, 72 f.). Concepts of intention not only seem to steer interpretation, but also translation – but that would be another book.

In order to get back to our main argument: at least as far as Francesco himself is concerned, he does not show any signs of a separation between the intention of the author on the one hand and on the other an intention residing in a text, as its *res*. On the contrary: he seems eager to legitimate his interpretation with an explicit reference to the intention of Virgil. This way he structurally gives much more importance to authorial intention than Carruthers suggests. Neither in Francesco's reaction to Augustine's "either ... or" summary, nor in Augustine's reaction to Francesco's interpretation are there any indications for one party wondering about some different conception of authorial intention in the

mind and practices of the other. Holding this in mind, we cannot but attribute to both a model of interpretation that integrates authorial intention. Indeed Augustine seems to be saying: I do not know whether this was the intention of Virgil, but I can approve of your interpretation. Whether the criterion for the judgment of I-Augustine on Francesco's interpretation ("expressed with equal wit and truth") is taken from Virgil or from the performance of his pupil with regard to Virgil, must remain open at this point.

A final argument can be taken from the *Secretum* as a whole that contradicts Carruthers' (2008, 237) view that "Virgil's intent" should be "unimportant": the high authority ascribed to Virgil in other places in the text. When for example in the preface to the dialogues Francesco encounters personified Truth, he addresses her with a quote form Virgil's *Aeneid* (I, 327–328; cf. Draper 1977, 2). And when the second dialogue with Augustine – the one with the allegorical interpretation of the winds – ends with Francesco very much looking forward to the third, then he decorates his pleasure with a quote from Virgil's *Eclogues*, saying that God's blessing rests on uneven numbers (*numero Deus impare gaudet*) – a quote from "my beloved Virgil" (*Virgilius meus*; Draper 1977, 106). Francesco's evident implicit and explicit admiration for Virgil makes it very unlikely that Petrarch held the view that interpretations of texts by Virgil should *not* regard – let alone: disregard – the intentions of Virgil, or that Virgil's intention would *not* be of any more weight than that "of any subsequent reader" (see above).

If there is any indication of criticism of interpretation on the part of Augustine to be found in this dialogue, then it might be with regard to allegorical interpretation in general. Such a criticism looms at the horizon when one places the passage from Petrarch on the winds from the *Aeneid* in the context of the *sortes Virgilianae*. These "Virgilian lots" refer to the widespread habit in antiquity and early Christianity of finding out the will of the Gods or God by arbitrarily pointing to specific passages of authoritative books, here: those of Virgil. According to Richard Hamilton, however, since the fourteenth century the *sortes Virgilianae* no longer belong in the context of sources of truth, but in one of an "amusing scholarly pastime" (Hamilton 1993, 331). In this light, it is possible to hear some bemusement in Augustine's applause quoted above (*Laudo hec, quibus abundare te video, petice narrationis archana)*, translated by Draper (1977, 102) with: "I cannot but applaud that meaning which I understand you find hidden in the poet's story, familiar as it is to you" (cf. Mann 1984, 31). The translation by Hefele points more explicitly into the same direction, when he translates the open Latin *sive … sive* (whether Virgil wanted either … or…) into scepticism on Augustine's part against Francesco's allegoric interpretation. According to Hefele's translation, Augustine answers explicitly that this is probably just a description of storms at sea: "Fraglich ist freilich, ob Vergil mit diesen

Versen solche Gedanken ausdrücken wollte, oder ob ihm diese nicht ganz ferne lagen. Er wollte wohl nur einen Meeressturm schildern [...]" (Hefele 1910, 73) – which is a very free translation compared with the Latin. Looked at this way, Augustine's agreement could be said to have a clear didactical component: encourage the student who is on the right path, and trust that his further development will make him see for himself the problem of allegorising too easily.

But whether this passage should be read ironically or not: neither from the quoted passage itself, nor from the passage within the text as a whole, nor from the position of Virgil in cultural life around 1350 can we take any indication that Petrarch held a concept of interpretation in which authorial intention played a minor or even irrelevant role. Again, it has turned out that scholars tend to project backwards in time what is regarded as contemporary *state of the art* concepts of intention, despite signals from the historical texts and authors under interpretation that point in other directions. The medievalists quoted above definitely do not stand alone in this regard. Just to give two more examples: an interpretation of the *Secretum* passage very similar to the one by Carruthers' and playing textual intention against authorial intention is given by C.E. Quillen (1998, 207). More generally, the renowned German scholar Joachim Bumke has connected his principal appeal to pay attention to the historical conditions of medieval literary texts with the same principal plea to do so without looking at (supposed) authorial intent (cf. Bumke 1997, 114). This way, research into the medieval concept of authorial intention stops even before it has started. If one tries to avoid such projections and normative obstacles, which concept can then be reconstructed from the most important medieval sources concerning authorial intention in interpretation?

The standard model of authorial intention

Writing and interpreting written texts in the early Middle Ages means: the cloister as the place of reading, interpreting and writing; Latin as the language in which it happens; and Christianity as the framework for all practices. Therefore one could start off from a closer look at Christian religion and the role of the author in interpretation there. Generally speaking, there are quite some passages that give humans the role of being just an instrument of God in the production of sacred texts. An exemplary source in this regard is the commentary on the Bible Book of *Job* by Church Father Saint Gregory the Great. Towards the end of the sixth century Gregory wrote in his *Moralia in Iob:*

> Sed quis haec scripserit, valde supervacue quaeritur, cum tamen auctor libri Spiritus sanctus fideliter credatur. Ipse igitur haec scripsit, qui scribenda dictavit. Ipse scripsit, qui et in illius opere inspirator exstitit, et per scribentis vocem imitanda ad nos ejus facta transmisit. Si magni cuiusdam viri susceptis epistolis legeremus verba, sed quo calamo fuissent scripta quaereremus, ridiculum profecto esset epistolarum auctorem scire sensumque cognoscere, sed quali calamo earum verba impressa fuerint indagare. Cum ergo rem cognoscimus, quia scriptorem quaerimus, quid aliud agimus, nisi legentes litteras, de calamo percontamur? (Migne 1984, I 1)
>
> But the question of who wrote this is rather redundant, because for those who believe, the Holy Ghost is the author [*auctor*] of this book. The real writer of what has been written is the one who dictated to the one who wrote; the real writer is the one who inspired the work of the one writing, and who recommended to us Job's deeds for imitation via the words of the one writing. When we receive the letter of a great man and read his words in it, but then ask, with which pen the words have been written, this will be ridiculous: to know the author [*auctorem scire*] and to understand the meaning of the letter, but still to enquire with which pen the works have been laid down. So when we know the meaning [*rem*], is then asking about the writer [*scriptorem*] not the same as asking about the pen when we read letters? (*my translation, RG*)

After this passage, Gregory takes back parts of his comparison when he acknowledges that in the Book of *Job* there are traces of the author Job – as someone who has become a purified person through his struggle with his sufferings (cf. Minnis 1984, 37). But the basic instrumental understanding of authorship concerning sacred texts can be legitimated with many authoritative quotes, for example referencing Matthew 10:20: "for it will be not you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you". Accordingly, Peter Lombard (who died in 1160 AD) presents David in his commentary on the Psalms as a "trumpet" of the Holy Ghost (cf. Minnis and Scott 1991, 105). The parallels we saw above regarding the ancient Greek model of the Gods speaking through the poet – as in the magnetism metaphor in Plato's *Ion* – or regarding the older Jewish tradition of prophesies visible in the "Oven of Akhnai" story of the Talmud, are obvious: the sacred version in which humans are only instruments seems to have been present in many of the oldest religious conceptualisations of writing and interpreting we have seen so far. And, as the Greek and Jewish historical context touched upon above has shown, it was against the background of this "poetics of truth" that the outlines of more secular practices can be drawn. This also goes for the Christian version.

The contours of a secular medieval concept of authorial intention are already visible in the above quote from Gregory, especially in his comparison. It would make no sense to ask about the pen with which someone wrote a letter if we know the author and understand the letter (*epistolarum auctorem scire sensumque cognoscere*). What Gregory mentions here in one stroke is "knowing of

the author" and "understanding the text", as if these two are inseparable. For Gregory, to have contextual knowledge about the author plays an important role in the understanding of secular writings. But does his brief and implicit formulation allow to add, from our perspective: as far as secular writings are concerned, "knowing the author" and "understanding the text" means knowing the intentions with which he wrote the letter? There is quite some circumstantial evidence that suggests a positive answer to that question.

The most explicit indications concerning a secular concept of authorial intention in the Middle Ages can be taken from the so-called *accessus ad auctores*, the "introductions to authors" – an encyclopaedia of authors for beginners, one might say. Since the end of the eleventh century these played a central role in the medieval teaching of language and literature when introducing students into reading Classical authors. The origin of this genre is usually located in the Virgil commentaries of the fourth century, such as the one by Servius discussed above. The importance of this sort of texts can be taken from their massive use and the differentiation in the course of history, including their application to vernacular authors still in the fifteenth century (cf. Minnis 1984, 15–29; Minnis and Scott 1991, 1–11; Wogan-Browne 1999, 17, 64–72 et passim).

As we have seen in Servius, authorial intention did play an explicit role in the Classical predecessor of the *accessus*. The model used by Servius is not hard to recognise when at the beginning of the twelfth century Conrad of Hirsau writes down a dialogue on authors between a teacher and his student, his *Dialogus Super Auctores*. In it, the teacher explains that the scholars of antiquity asked seven questions when interpreting texts: who the author was, what was the title of the work, to which kind (*qualitas*) it belonged, the intention of the author, the composition and the number of books, and the exposition (*expositio*) of the text. Contemporary interpreters however would concentrate on four aspects: object, authorial intention, aim, and the domain of philosophy to which the work belongs. At least conceptually, authorial intention obviously plays a role in the medieval handling of interpretation. But we can also trace it easily in the practices. In Conrad's introductions to such authors as Juvenal, Homer, Statius, Persius or Virgil we always find explicit remarks concerning their authorial intention (cf. Huygens 1970, 71–131; Minnis and Scott 1991, 39–64). This is also the case in the twenty representative *accessus* chosen for the anthology of *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism:* fourteen of those talk about *intentio auctoris* (or variations like *intentio scribentis*) and six about *intentio operis* (or its variations). The kind of intentions mentioned are rather general, either ethically in the sense of showing the path to the right faith, or more rhetorically-technically, such as showing how to write in a good way (cf. Minnis and Scott 1991, 15–39). At the same time, neither in the kind of intentions, nor in any other way can a

systematic differentiation between authorial intention and intention of the text be reconstructed, as far as I can see. In other words: the terms "intentio auctoris" and "intentio operis" cannot be described as a complementary distribution, as the linguists would have it. As we assumed already on the basis of the quote from Gregory above, in medieval thinking *intentio auctoris* and *intentio operis* seem to be part of a conceptual unity, in which using the one must be understood as metonymically using the other.

One might object at this point that the exchangeability between the two concepts could also be read as an indication that *intentio auctoris* simply means what the signs on the parchment, papyrus or paper mean, i.e. the intention of the text. It might just be a synonym for *intentio operis*, which only "indirectly" points towards their physical origin by some writer, as for example Müller (1995, 20) holds. Yet, when one looks at the extensive and explicit use of the word *auctor* in *intentio auctoris* and in didactic books in general, that does not seem likely. Why should one so often talk about *intentio auctoris* when what one means is nothing but *intentio operis* in the sense of a meaning residing in the text, a *res?* Especially when from the commentary by Boethius on Porphyry onwards, it was perfectly possibly to do so and talk only about *intentio operis* (cf. Minnis 1984, 18), if that was what one meant. But maybe more convincing is the argument that the actual biographical information in the *accessus* does not confirm that *intentio auctoris* might be a synonym for *intentio operis*. Every *accessus* tries to give at least some biographical data, and these can hardly be summarised in general as scarce or irrelevant (cf. Müller 1995, 21). Several introductions not only tell us rudimentary facts such as the author's name, where the author came from, which further works he wrote etc., but these *accessus* also do their best to combine the biography with general authorial intention in a plausible way.

We can read for example in the Sedulius *accessus* about the life of this author of the fifth century AD that he was a pagan who studied philosophy in Italy in the times of Theodosius and Valentinus: "Then he was converted and baptised by a Macedonian priest, and came to Achaia, where he composed this book to demolish the erroneous teaching of the pagans" (Huygens 1970, 28 f.; transl. Minnis and Scott 1991, 19). The combination of the biography of a convert with the central message of Sedulius' *Paschale Carmen* in the sentence quoted above is taken up in the next sentence, stating explicitly that the *intentio* of the text was the destruction of pagan religion and unfolding the path to true faith, which, by the way, in the introduction to this *accessus* ran under the heading of authorial intention (*intentio scribentis*) (cf. Minnis and Scott 1991, 20).

An even more explicit intertwining of biography and intention can be found in the *accessus* concerning Ovid's letters from exile. First we read that the *inten-*

tio auctoris is to convince the recipient to help a friend in need, after which the circumstances of the banning are explained in the context of Ovid's longing to return to Rome (cf. Huygens 1970, 34 f.; Minnis and Scott 1991, 25 f.). In a similar way, the *accessus* on Cicero combines biography, context and intention: first, the prehistory of the text is related, beginning with Cato's formative years in Greece, his return to Rome, the many *sententiae* he uttered in the Senate but never wrote down. Then, after his death, we read that his enemies tried to destroy his legacy, and how his relative Brutus tried to prevent them from doing so. Brutus asked his friend Cicero, whose abilities in the domain of logic he was aware of, to confirm (*confirmare*) Cato's *sententiae* and so make the tricks of his enemies fail. Because Cicero wanted to fulfil this wish, the *accessus* continues, the author (Cicero, that is) had two *intentiones:* his main intention (*principalis intentio*) had been to confirm Cato's *sententiae* and to refute Cato's enemies – another intention (*alia intentio*) however had been to bring his readers teaching and delight. So next to a Classical, general ethical intention, inspired by Horace and his *Ars Poetica* (see above), the *accessus* articulates a more context-bound intention (cf. Huygens 1970, 44 f.; Minnis and Scott 1991, 30).

Against the backdrop of our argument so far, the examples given indicate a continuity between author and text in production and interpretation. Within this continuity, the outlines of an authorial intention outside the text – *ante opus*, before the work, to use the term of Aelius Donatus from the fourth century AD (cf. Brummer 1912, 11; Minnis 1984, 15) – are clearly discernible. Still, authorial intention is always presented in close combination with the work and the context. Therefore, the impression we can take from our examples is that authorial intention, the intention to be attributed to the text and the context of both are conceptualised as a kind of inseparable unity. By the same token, there are quite some texts in the Middle Ages that make this continuity explicit.

Exemplary in this regard is the *Didascalicon* (VI, 11) from around 1127 by Hugh of Saint Victor, whose appeal "was to be echoed over and over again by the theologians of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries" (Minnis and Scott 1991, 67; cf. Illich 1996). In terms of the present book, the following quote contains what can be called the standard model of authorial intention:

> 'Cum igitur divinos libros legimus, in tanta multitudine verorum intellectuum, qui de paucis eruuntur verbis, et sanitate catholicae fidei muniuntur, id potissimum diligamus, quod certum apparuerit eum sensisse quem legimus. Si autem hoc latet, id certe quod circumstantia scripturae non impedit, et cum sana fide concordat. Si autem et scripturae circumstantia pertractari ac discuti non potest, saltem id solum quod fides sana praescribit. Aliud est enim quid potissimum scriptor senserit non dinoscere, aliud a regula pietatis errare. Si utrumque vitetur, perfectae se habet fructus legentis. Si vero utrumque vitari non potest,

> etsi voluntas scriptoris incerta sit, sanae fidei congruam non inutile est eruisse sententiam.' (qtd. from Offergeld 1997, 398)
>
> 'When, therefore, we read the Divine Books, in such a great multitude of true concepts elicited from a few words and fortified by the sound rule of the catholic faith, let us prefer above all what it seems certain that the man we are reading thought. But if this is not evident, let us certainly prefer what the circumstances of the writing do not disallow and what is consonant with sound faith. But if even the circumstances of the writing cannot be explored and examined, let us at least prefer only what sound faith prescribes. For it is one thing not to see what the writer himself thought, another to stray from the rule of piety. If both these things are avoided, the harvest of the reader is a perfect one. But if both cannot be avoided, then, even though the will of the writer may be doubtful, it is not useless to have elicited a deeper meaning consonant with sound faith.' (qtd. from Taylor 1991, 150)

The seminal authority of this passage can be explained to a large extent by the fact that Hugh presents here a quote in quotation marks, to be precise one from Augustine, written towards the end of his life (he died in 430 AD) from *De Genesi ad Litteram Libri Duodecim* (I, 21), on the literal meaning of Genesis in twelve books. At the centre of the quote is clearly a pledge for an orientation towards authorial intention when interpreting. More specifically, the interpreter should take into account what appears certain to have been the opinion of the one we are reading (*quod certum apparuerit eum sensisse quem legimus*). What Hugh/Augustine do establish here is a model of interpretation with a clear hierarchy and authorial intention on top: follow authorial intention is what we as reader first and foremost must chose to do (*id potissimum diligamus*).

The following instructions show that this authorial intention must be placed within the intentional continuum – familiar by now from antiquity – that includes the text, the specific circumstances of writing and the general context, too. For, according to Hugh/Augustine, it can happen that we do not know the intention of the author – then the interpreter should take into account the special circumstances he knows about writing the text (*circumstantia scripturae*). If nothing is known about those, too – i. e., if one does not have any information on biography, information for or against what or whom one has written, at whose request or command etc. – then the minimal request for interpretation is to be in tune with Christian faith (*sana fide*). In other words: the model of interpretation that rises from these lines is one with authorial intention as the guideline for interpretation. This authorial intention can be put into words and can be distinguished from the text and the context, but, normally speaking, authorial intention does form a continuity and a unity with the intention that can be taken out of the text, out of the specific (biographical and textual) and the general context, and with what the reader regards as the intention of author and text.

The model that has been described above with regard to Holy Books (*divinos libros*) is extended in a more general way by Augustine in *De Utilitate Credendi* (On the Advantage of Believing) where he systematically tries to make a distinction between authorial intention and intention reconstructed from the text by the reader. Augustine is most explicit on this difference when he distinguishes three sorts of typical errors in reading. In the first category of errors, one holds something for true that is not, although the author himself had presented another view that was the right and true one. In the second category, both author and reader take something wrong to be true. Finally, the third type is when someone reading a text by someone else comes to an insight that is true, an insight which the one who wrote the text has not had himself (*Tertium est, cum ex alieno scripto intelligitur aliquid veri, cum hoc ille, qui scripsit, non intellexerit*; Hoffmann 1992, 104). Augustine does not deny a certain usefulness (*utilitas*) of this third type and the result of the interpretation is, looked at in isolation, sound (*totus legendi fructus est integer*), but still: it remains an error (*tria sunt erroris, quibus homines errant, cum aliquid legunt*, Hoffmann 1992, 104 ff.). Authorial intention, existing independently from an erroneous interpretation, remains the guideline for a non-erroneous interpretation by the competent reader in Augustine's model.

This guideline can be compared – my words, not Augustine's – with the role of the pole star in navigation. Of course Polaris is sometimes hard to find, it may be invisible due to a cloudy night, one may doubt whether one has taken the right star for it, one even may have taken the wrong one to navigate with: all these problems do not undermine this model of navigation as such. The same goes for Augustine and Hugh of Saint Victor concerning the guideline of authorial intention in interpretation – as it would for medieval thinking on authorial intention in general, it seems. Even if one has made an error in determining the North Star and despite this error, more or less by chance, in the end finds the harbour one has been looking for, this does not establish a new or alternative model for navigation – though a safe arrival is always a pleasure for the one travelling.

The robustness and validity of the standard model is also shown by the fact that, to stay with the comparison, safe arrival in the harbour can obviously be taken as indicating that this was the sailor's intention, and that on his way he used the pole star correctly. Or, more literally speaking: the standard model obviously implies that it can be taken, step by step, in the opposite direction than Hugh/Augustine used it for explicitly. The "Christianisation" of Cato – who died before the birth of Christ – in the Middle Ages is a case in point. The glosses and commentaries on the *Disticha Catonis* from the thirteenth and fourteenth century not only show an interpretation of the text in accordance with Christian faith, but some try to do this by making Cato himself their ally, as Richard Hazelton

has shown. Cato's *carmina* are turned into *carmina sacrorum*, songs of the saints, or into Holy Scripture, *Scripture Sancte*, while adding that this was the better interpretation as well as the intention of the author (*lectura melior et auctoris intentio*; cf. Hazelton 1957, 168). Even if Augustine would have judged this as an error of type three – the undisputed dominance of authorial intention and of the intentional continuity is underlined by this example once more. Errors, faults, lack of knowledge and ambiguity are not seen as a problem of the model or interpretation reconstructed above – only as problems of special cases of interpretation.

A different accent within the standard model in the later Middle Ages

The medieval standard model of interpretation in the explicit version by Hugh of Saint Victor (based on Augustine), conceptualises authorial intention as a mental relation of an individual towards something outside itself. This relation is established in using a written text whose production is situated within the Christian faith as general context. The general context is also the frame for the reception of the text and authorial intention is the most important guideline for interpretation. Therefore, in regular cases, authorial intention is conceptualised as part of an intentional continuity between author, text, context and reader. In that sense authorial intention is always intertwined with the text. This model seems stable and dominant during the long Middle Ages concerning understanding and interpreting what is written.

Accordingly, when he asks what the authorial intention of Aesop from around 600 BC was, the already quoted Conrad of Hirsau answers to his student at the end of the eleventh century:

> Ex ipsa materia patet auctoris intentio, quia per hoc opus variis compactum figmentis voluit et delectare hominumque naturam quasi rationis expertem ex brutorum animantium collatione ad se revocare. Causa finalis lectionis fructus est. (Huygens 1970, 86)
>
> The author's intention is clearly seen from his choice of subject-matter. For through this work, assembled as it is from various invented stories, he wanted to delight and also to recall irrational human nature to its true self by a comparison with brute beasts. The final cause is the profit (*fructus*) to be derived from reading the book. (Minnis and Scott 1991, 48)

The quote resembles what we have read in Horace, not only regarding the general aiming at teaching and delight, but also in the intentional inseparability of authorial intention and subject choice, the way of arranging the text, and how

readers interpret the text. Albertus Magnus expresses about 200 years later in his *Summa Theologiae* the same continuity even more briefly when he writes "intentio dicentis expressa in littera, est litteralis sensus" (Borgnet 1895, 28) – "the intention of the speaker as expressed in the letter is the literal sense" (Minnis 1984, 73). Carruthers (2008, 237) misses the point when she characterises this quote as a "tautology". It is not a tautology in the sense of a needless repetition of the same, but the careful expression of a concept of interpretation in which two intentional entities can be distinguished in principle. Both, *intentio auctoris* and *intentio operis*, form part of an interpretive continuum in which – in regular cases – they point in the same direction, with authorial intention as the guideline for interpretation. Aiming at reconstructing "the intention of the speaker as expressed in the letter" and calling this "literal sense" (which is what Albertus Magnus says) is something completely different than aiming at reconstructing the literal sense as expressed in the letter and adding: Albertus Magnus calls this tautologically "authorial intention", but it remains "literal sense" (which is basically what Carruthers says).

In the same sense, Albertus Magnus' student Thomas Aquinas follows his teacher, Augustine and others, when he distinguishes in his commentary on Paul's *Epistle to the Romans* between commentators who write in accordance with the intention of the apostle and those who deviate from it – and dismisses the latter option (cf. Cai 1953, 59; Minnis 1984, 73). Instead of adding more examples, at this point of the argument it might suffice to state that to the best of my knowledge, I have found no counter-evidence in the Latin sources between the first *accessus* and Petrarch that doubts the validity of the standard model as reconstructed here.

I would argue the same concerning the vernaculars in the late Middle Ages. The case of Reginald Pecock, bishop of St Asaph in Wales (1444 – 1450) and then of Chichester in West Sussex can serve as exemplary since we can trace explicit remarks about authorial intention in interpretation in his defence against the accusation of heresy. In his trial – which led to openly renouncing and burning his works in 1457 – Pecock defended himself with arguments that were presented as a general guideline for interpretation:

> Ferthirmore, sithen an errour or heresye is not the ynke writen neithir the voice spokun, but it is the meenyng or the undirstonding of the writer or speker signified bi thilk ynke writen or bi thilk voice spokun, and also nevere into this daie was enye man holde jugid or condempnid for an errer or an heretyk but if it were founde that his meenyng and undirstonding whiche he had in his writyng or in his speking were errour or heresie, therfore Y desire and aske, for charite, that noon harder or hastier holding or juging be made anentis me. (Wogan-Browne 1999, 99)

According to Pecock, it is not the interpretation of the ink – we might say: the literal text taken by itself – that should be the basis for an interpretation. It should be grounded on the ideas and the intention of the author (*his meenyng and undirstonding*), he argues. And how can this authorial intention be reconstructed? By reading the incriminated passages in the context of the text as a whole and in the context of the other writings of the author:

> And to knowe what myn undirstonding and meenyng is and schal be in wordis of my writingis, Englische and Latyn, certis, oon ful goode weie is to attende to the circumstauncis in the processis [i. e., *in the context of the argument, RG*] whiche Y make there bifore and aftir, and whiche Y make in othire placis of my writingis. (ibid.)

Authorial intention should be the guideline for interpretation, based on an intentional continuum between the incriminated passage, the text as a whole, and the context of other writings of the same author. Even the explicit reference to the model by Augustine is added by Pecock in the end: "For bi this weie Seynt Austyn leerned what was the right meenyng in the wordis of Holi Scripture, as he seith in his book of 83 Questiouns, the [lii] questioun" (Wogan-Browne 1999, 99).

Apparently, the Pecock case can be taken as another exemplary demonstration of the medieval standard model of authorial intention in interpretation. What makes it interesting for the argument of the present book is firstly that it indicates how the conceptual continuity of the dominating model of interpretation is transferred from texts in Latin or Greek to texts in the vernacular. But this shift has consequences. Immediately following his legitimation of the standard model via Augustine, Pecock adds: "And if this weie be not for alle placis of my writings sufficient, recours may be had to my persoon for to aske of me while Y am in this liif." (ibid.) Just follow the standard model of interpretation, and it will turn out that my writings are compatible with Christian faith, Pecock holds. And for those who still doubt it, I will happily explain this myself, he adds. This recourse to authorial intention as something a living author might tell the interpreter has no counterpart in the classical sources, as far as I can see: in interpretation, they generally dealt with authors who could no longer be asked.

Obviously, the position of authorial intention as pole star within the standard model is used by Pecock as a tool to claim more space for specific individual intentions on the content level: here, Pecock's theological ideas which attract the criticism of the Church but which he defends to be compatible with Christian faith. Pecock makes strategic use of the standard model and its primary orientation on authorial intention to legitimise the living author as the best interpreter of his own writing. He departs from the established interpretative convention of

the author as a guideline in interpretation to defend a living writer whose authority is challenged. Looking at the trial this way, the use of the standard model in the Middle Ages with regard to the vernacular shows here its potential to function as an instrument leading to more individual messages – in comparison with the more general ones we saw in antiquity.

But from our present perspective, it also becomes clear that Pecock is only preparing the ground for a tendency towards more individual content in literary writing and interpretation. For what he does in the first place is to emphasise what has *not* been his "entent" (Wogan-Browne 1999, 99), hereby using the term that was in use to translate *intentio* into Middle English since the glosses on the Psalms by Richard Rolles in the early fourteenth century (cf. Minnis 1984, 190 f.). His intention was *not* to be against faith and God's laws. What Pecock did not do was stress his own personal view and defend it. The space for individual positions in the fifteenth century in Britain is clearly still limited in writing and interpretation.

However, this preliminary step towards more individualisation of authorial intention in the medieval standard model is not a rare exception. As we have seen, the prototype of the *accessus ad auctores* often thematised biographical elements and intertwined them with text, context and Christian faith. In the later Middle Ages then, the genre stood at the cradle of the growing interest in Biblical authors such as David or Salomon as humans made of flesh and blood, too. According to the Yale medievalist Alastair Minnis, the most important reason for this development was the reception of Aristotle in Europe from the thirteenth century onwards – as referred to briefly in Chapter One. Especially Aristotle's differentiation between primary intention (God as *causa efficiens*, as unmoved mover) and secondary intention (the human author inspired by God) offered the instruments that were used to shape more space for specific views of the individual authors on the content level (cf. Minnis 1984, 5, 28 f., 72–117). A telling example of this shift is Bonaventura's *Kohelet* commentary *Prooemium commentarii in Ecclesiasten* from the middle of the thirteenth century. Bonaventura defines Salomon's intention as articulated explicitly at the end of his book: to live in fear of God. Bonaventura continues: everything compatible with this intention is said by Salomon himself, everything that is not compatible, Salomon has made other persons say (cf. Minnis 1984, 111).

Similar indications of authorial individuality can be discerned at the level of the secular production of texts, too. One could think of the chivalric romance as an example, traditionally weaving together secular elite ethics, religion, spectacle and humour (cf. van Oostrom 2006, 320 et passim). At the centre of this genre was, until the end of the twelfth century, not the individual view of an author, but serving the norms and values of the elite recipients at the courts and in

the cities (cf. Meves 1976, 98 et passim). From the thirteenth century onwards, however, one finds more and more "explicit self-inclusions" of the authors in their texts (cf. Kimmelman 1999, 235). Although authors such as Rudolf von Ems – writing in the first half of the thirteenth century – still claim to be inspired by God, they insist at the same time on explicitly stressing their own good intentions, as for example in the epilogue of Rudolf's first piece of work, *Der guote Gêrhart* (cf. Asher 1962, 231; Coxon 2001). Similarly, in England around 1400, authors such as John Gower tried to steer the moral reception of their manuscripts with prologues (cf. Minnis 1984, 177 f.) and Geoffrey Chaucer used the exegetical function of the notion *entent* in order to claim a specific intention for all of his work in the vernacular (cf. Copeland 1991, 186 – 188).

I hope I have made my point: during the Middle Ages and especially from the thirteenth century onwards, conceptual instruments were available that might be used for shifting the standard model towards more individual messages. These were basically (1) the standard model with the author as guideline in interpretation, (2) the extension of this model towards the vernacular and by this to living authors and their intentions, and, (3) in this context, using the differentiated Aristotelian conceptional apparatus of intentional interpretation. In principle, this conceptual apparatus could trigger off a tendency in the direction of sharp individual distinctions on the intentional level.

Summarising, the standard model includes an intentional continuity between author, text, context and reader, with the author as primary point of orientation. It became dominant from the fifth to the fifteenth century in writing and interpreting. Its conceptual plausibility for contemporaries was not affected by cases in which they did not have any information about authorial intention or if their information was ambiguous: these special cases did not challenge the model as such. Errors, mistakes, lack of knowledge or deceit may play a role in interpretation. But in the regular course of things, determining one component of this continuity carefully means having reconstructed all the others – and the result was in principle regarded as the intention of the author, which the interpreter aimed at. A playing out of authorial intention against intention taken from the text is not to be found anywhere in the relevant sources, let alone a conceptual opposition in which authorial intention might be seen as irrelevant or only as second best. This model remained dominant during the shift from writing in Latin to writing more and more in the vernacular in the later Middle Ages. In that process indications of a change towards more individualisation in medieval interpretation and writing are visible from the thirteenth century onwards. Authorial intention of *living* authors as a guideline in interpretation can be seen as an important tool to make this process possible. But the indications of an actual use in that direction are sporadic.

Reviewing our argument in the first two chapters, the conceptual foundations for the models of authorial intention have turned out to be strikingly robust for 2000 years, from Greek Antiquity via Rome to the fifteenth century, despite all major changes in history. Secular human responsibility – in opposition to Godly inspiration – is at the basis of the first type of authorial intention in interpretation that has been reconstructed here. At the conceptual core of this type is the intentional unity between the author, text, context and reader: in regular cases, getting one is getting all the others. Nevertheless, shifts have occurred within this type. One, a shift from the level of form, composition, genre, and collective moral towards more attention being paid to the content level and individual views; two, and closely connected to the former, a shift towards a relative hierarchisation within intentional continuity with the author as the focus in interpretation from around 400 AD onwards. These shifts from the Classical to the standard model seem to be intertwined with the ideological and educational contexts in which they functioned.

While ideological and educational continuity, despite all differences, seems to have dominated the relationship between ancient Greece and ancient Rome, as far as our model of intention in interpretation is concerned, this was different from around 400 AD onwards. The birth and rise of Christianity as – compared to Latinity – an alternative system of faith led to a constellation in which the homogeneity of collective moral beliefs was no longer a given, as it had been to a much higher degree in the writings of, let us say, Plato, Aristotle, or Horace. In the context of competing worldviews, the question of which position authors take is less self-evident and it receives significantly more relevance for interpretation, too. Against this backdrop, one might hold that Augustine, located at the juncture between Classical Rome and the Christian Middle Ages, is writing in an ideologically less homogeneous world than 400 years earlier. This ideological heterogeneity lends at least some plausibility to a shift away from the Classical concept towards a more central role for authorial intention as the pole star in interpretation. There is no explicit evidence in the sources for a causal connection between competing worldviews on the one hand and the rise of the standard model with the author as primary point of orientation on the other. But I hope this speculative thought will have made the reader at least curious about what happens with concepts of intention around the time of a similar clash of faith systems, that is: around the splitting up of Christianity from the sixteenth century onwards. This will be discussed in Chapter Three.

Works cited

Asher, John A. (ed.). *Rudolf von Ems. Der guote Gêrhart*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1962.

Borgnet, Auguste (ed.). *Alberti opera omnia*. Vol. 31. Paris: Vives, 1895.

Brummer, Jakob (ed.). *Vitae Vergilianae*. Leipzig: Teubner, 1912.

Bumke, Joachim. "Autor und Werk. Beobachtungen und Überlegungen zur höfischen Epik." *Philologie als Textwissenschaft. Alte und neue Horizonte*. Eds. H. Tervooren and H. Wenzel. *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 116 (1997): 87–114. Special issue.

Cai, Raphael (ed.). S. *Thomae Aquinatis Super epistolas S. Pauli Lectura*. Vol. 1. Turin / Rome: Marietti, 1953.

Carruthers, Mary. *The Book of Memory. A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*. Second edition. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008.

Copeland, Rita. *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991.

Coxon, Sebastian. *The Presentation of Authorship in Medieval German Narrative Literature 1220–1290*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001.

Danneberg, L. and H.-H. Müller, "Der 'intentionale Fehlschluß' – ein Dogma? Systematischer Forschungsbericht zur Kontroverse um eine intentionalistische Konzeption in den Textwissenschaften." *Zeitschrift für allgemeine Wissenschaftstheorie* 14 (1983): 103–137, 376–411.

Dotti, Ugo (ed. and transl.): *Francesco Petrarca. Secretum*. Rome: Archivio Guido Izzi, 1993.

Draper, William H. (ed. and transl.). *Petrarch's Secret or The Soul's Conflict with Passion. Three Dialogues Between Himself and S. Augustine*. Westport, Conn.: Hyperion Press, 1977. [Reprint 1911]

Hamilton, Richard. "Fatal Texts: The sortes vergilianae." *Classical and Modern Literature* 13 (1993): 309–336.

Hausmann, Friederike (transl.). *Francesco Petrarca. Das einsame Leben*. Ed. Franz Josef Wetz. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2004.

Hazelton, Richard. "The Christianization of 'Cato': The *Disticha Catonis* in the Light of Late Mediaeval Commentaries." *Mediaeval Studies* 19 (1957): 157–173.

Hefele, Hermann (ed. and transl.). *Francesco Petrarca. Brief an die Nachwelt. Gespräche über die Weltverachtung. Von seiner und vieler Leute Unwissenheit*. Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1910.

Hoffmann, Andreas (ed.). *Augustinus: De utilitate credendi*. Freiburg: Aschendorff, 1992.

Huygens, R.B.C (ed.). *Accessus ad auctores. Bernard d'Utrecht. Conrad d'Hirsau: Dialogus super auctores*. Leiden: Brill, 1970.

Kimmelman, Burt. *The Poetics of Authorship in the Later Middle Ages. The Emergence of the Modern Literary Persona*. New York etc.: Lang, 1999.

Mann, Nicholas. *Petrarch*. Oxford / New York: Oxford UP, 1984.

Meves, Uwe. *Studien zu König Rother, Herzog Ernst und Grauer Rock (Orendel)*. Frankfurt/M. etc.: Lang, 1976.

Migne, J.-P. (ed.). *Patrologia Latina*. 75: *Sancti Gregorii Papae I, cognomento Magni, opera omni*. Turnhout: Brepols, 1984.

Minnis, Alastair J. *Medieval Theory of Authorship. Scholastic literary attitudes in the later Middle Ages*, London: Scolar Press, 1984.

Minnis, Alastair J. and A.B. Scott (eds.). *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism. C. 1100 – c. 1375. The Commentary-Tradition*. Revised Edition. With assistance of David Wallace. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.

Müller, Jan-Dirk. "Auctor – Actor – Author. Einige Anmerkungen zum Verständnis vom Autor in lateinischen Schriften des frühen und hohen Mittelalters." *Der Autor im Dialog. Beiträge zu Autorität und Autorschaft*. Eds. F.Ph. Ingold and W. Wunderlich. St. Gallen: UVK, 1995. 17 – 31.

Offergeld, Thilo (ed.). *Hugo von Sankt Viktor, Didascalicon de studio legendi / Studienbuch*. Freiburg etc.: Herder, 1997.

Quillen, Carol. E. *Rereading the Renaissance. Petrarch, Augustine, and the Language of Humanism*. Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1998.

Taylor, Jerome (ed. and transl.). *The* Didascalicon *of Hugh of St. Victor. A Medieval Guide to the Arts*. New York: Columbia UP, 1991.

Tazelaar, Chris (ed. and transl.). *Petrarca. De top van de Ventoux. Het Geheim. Godgewijde Ledigheid*. Baarn: Ambo, 1990.

Van Oostrom, Frits. *Stemmen op schrift. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur vanaf het begin tot 1300*. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2006.

Wimsatt, W.K. Jr, and M.C. Beardsley. "The Intentional Fallacy." *The Sewanee Review* 54 (1946): 468 – 488.

Wimsatt, W.K and Cleanth Brooks. *Literary Criticism. A Short History*. New York: Knopf, 1957.

Wogan-Browne, Jocelyn et al. (eds.). *The Idea of the Vernacular. An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory 1280 – 1520*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1999.