

A. C. SPEARING

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AUTOGRAPHS

The "I" of the Text



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P R E F A C E



This book originated as the Robert M. Conway Lectures in Medieval Studies given at the University of Notre Dame in October 2007. I was honored to be invited to give these lectures, and I am most grateful to Tom Noble, then director of the Medieval Institute at Notre Dame, to his wife, and to his colleagues for their generous hospitality during my stay there. I am also grateful to those who heard the lectures for their searching questions and valuable suggestions, which have helped to make the book less inadequate than it would otherwise be. I owe special debts of thanks to Roberta Baranowski, associate director of the Medieval Institute, for much good-natured practical help and many entertaining e-mail messages, and to Barbara Hanrahan, then director of the University of Notre Dame Press, for her warm encouragement and shrewd guidance when I was struggling to plan the book.

The tortuous process of converting and enlarging three lectures into a book that often bears little resemblance to its original form has been eased, and the book itself much improved, by the kind colleagues and friends who have read drafts and discussed problems with me. My obligations are too many to be recorded in detail, but I should like to thank Peter Baker, Cristina Cervone, Deborah McGrady, Gary Saul Morson, and especially Elizabeth Fowler. I am most grateful to Elizabeth Spearing, who stepped forward at a crucial moment, read the whole, and made invaluable suggestions for improvement. Some more specific debts are recorded in notes to the text. It goes without saying that the book's faults are my responsibility alone.

Some parts of the book's argument and occasional ideas and sentences have previously appeared in the following: "The Poetic

Subject from Chaucer to Spenser" in *Subjects on the World's Stage: Essays on British Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. David G. Allen and Robert A. White (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995), 13–37; "Textual Performance: Chaucerian Prologues and the French *Dit*," in *Text and Voice: The Rhetoric of Authority in the Middle Ages*, ed. Marianne Børch (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2004), 21–45; and "Was Chaucer a Poet?" *Poetica* 73 (2010): 41–54. I am grateful respectively to Associated University Presses, to Professor Marianne Børch, and to Professor Toshiyuki Takamiya for permission to reuse this material here. Some material also derives from A. C. Spearing, "Dream Poems," in *Chaucer: Contemporary Approaches*, ed. Susanna Fein and David Raybin, 159–78 (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010); copyright © 2010 by the Pennsylvania State University Press; reprinted by permission of the Pennsylvania State University Press.

In quoting from medieval texts I have silently modified editorial spelling and punctuation where I thought that would aid understanding; this goes against the grain of medieval scholarship, and with good reason, but I persist in hoping that some nonspecialists might be willing to learn more about premodern literature. Further, in the hope that the book might find a few nonmedievalist readers who are interested in the theoretical issues I discuss—issues that I believe ought to be the concern of others besides medievalists—I have added modern translations (my own unless otherwise specified) of all medieval texts quoted in the original, except those, generally very brief, whose meaning seemed obvious.