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Reading Scribal Intervention in the Squire-Wife of Bath Link of MS Lansdowne 851

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For modern textual criticism, the bare fact of scribal intervention in medieval manuscripts has always been a difficult matter. Its existence creates for commentators the bibliographic equivalent of the Uncertainty Principle: as the primary means of textual transmission in the Middle Ages, scribes were necessary for the preservation of texts, but their participation also altered that which they recorded. Despite their care, scribes inevitably produced errors and were in possession of individual personalities and histories that could influence their work, conditions which frustrate those seeking a work's 'best text' — by which is usually meant the authorial version.[1] Such editors often face an irony in that their intent to seek out, preserve, and celebrate the self-expression and originality of one writer — the author — leads them to deplore the same qualities in another. Yet no matter how hard one may wish to achieve the author's voice unmediated, in the absence of an autograph, to engage a text one must engage its scribe(s).

Yet taking scribal readings into account complicates textual interpretation enormously. Most obviously, it multiplies the number of 'texts' available to the scholar, since, from this perspective, every manuscript offers a unique reading. As D. F. McKenzie has observed, in privileging textual variation, 'each reading is peculiar to its occasion, each can be at least partially recovered from the physical forms of the text, and the differences in readings constitute an informative history'.[2] Instead of winnowing exemplars into an authoritative 'best text', the goal is to proliferate the number of worthwhile readings based on scribes' and other

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[1] See, for example, Eugène Vinaver, 'Principles of Textual Emendation', in *Studies in French Language and Mediæval Literature Presented to Mildred K. Pope by Pupils, Colleagues and Friends*, ed. by Mildred K. Pope (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1939), pp. 351–69 and Brian Blakely, 'The Scribal Process', in *Medieval Miscellany Presented to Eugène Vinaver by Pupils, Colleagues and Friends*, ed. by F. Whitehead, A. H. Diverres and F. E. Sutcliffe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1965), pp. 19–27. Ralph Hanna III looks critically at this editorial philosophy in 'Problems of "Best Text" Editing and the Hengwrt Manuscript of *The Canterbury Tales*', in *Manuscripts and Texts: Editorial Problems in Later Middle English Literature*, ed. by Derek Albert Pearsall (Cambridge: Brewer, 1987), pp. 87–94. See also Leonard E. Boyle, 'Optimist and Recensionist: "Common Errors" or "Common Variations"?' in *Latin Script and Letters, A.D. 400–900: Festschrift Presented to Ludwig Bieler on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday*, ed. by John J. O'Meara and Bernd Naumann (Leiden: Brill, 1976), pp. 264–74 and Anne Hudson, 'Middle English', in *Editing Medieval Texts: English, French and Latin Written in England*, ed. by A. J. Rigg (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1977), pp. 34–57.

[2] D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 19. For other important examinations of the implications of textual variation, see Paul Zumthor, *Essai de Poétique*

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readers' reactions to an author's work through their engagement with (and alteration of) their texts. Additionally, the consideration of scribal work, as Tim William Machan points out, must be sensitive to the particularly medieval ways in which writers and scribes viewed their efforts.[3] Literary interpretation of scribal intervention in a medieval text, therefore, must hold two considerations in mind: the precise conditions of a manuscript's creation so as to pursue scribal intent, and their engagement with an earlier work with a separate context. Just as the copied work of a medieval author can never be encountered unmediated, neither too can a scribe's, since scribal activity is by definition working with another's words. Any work of scribal originality, therefore, is coloured by its reliance on its earlier authority and all the complications this entails.

The extent and importance of textual variation can differ widely. However, the tension between the text a scribe receives and the text he eventually produces provides a space for potential reinterpretation and reinvention. Ralph Hanna III has identified the need for scholars to cultivate an understanding of the 'scribal poetics' that arise in such spaces, if only to better identify the efforts of original authors.[4] Scholars of medieval history writing, in particular, have found a space for a scribal authority separate from and complementary to the *auctoritas* ascribed to authors.[5] As Matthew Fisher notes, scribes were often called upon to perform two contradictory tasks, to reproduce a text faithfully and yet also to correct whatever flaws it may have.[6] In striking the proper balance between these twin demands, the most crucial questions — what constitutes a flaw? What is the necessary remedy? — were in turn subject to a variety of considerations that relied upon the state of their exemplars and the desires of their patrons. This is turn affects the critical approach to their works. As Hanna puts it elsewhere,

> in editorial terms, 'authority' is quite intentionally dispersed in unique ways, most of the
> time not the property of an individual we identify as the literary workman today: variation
> does not simply inhere naturally in a literary text *per se* […] but is also the product of

Médiévale Variante (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), pp. 64–106; Bernard Cerquiglini, *Éloge de la Variante* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1981), pp. 62 and 110–11; Jerome McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); and the 1990 'New Philology' issue of *Speculum*.

3   Tim William Machan, *Textual Criticism and the Middle English Text* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), pp. 168–69. Derek Pearsall is generally more critical in 'Variants vs. Variance', in *Probable Truth: Editing Medieval Texts from Britain in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Vincent Gillespie and Anne Hudson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 197–205.

4   Ralph Hanna III, 'Authorial Versions, Rolling Revision, Scribal Error? Or, The Truth About *Truth*', in *Pursuing History: Middle English Manuscripts and Their Texts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 159–73 (pp. 159–60).

5   Sigbjørn Olsen Sønnesyn, 'Obedient Creativity and Idiosyncratic Copying: Tradition and Individuality in the Works of William of Malmesbury and John of Salisbury', in *Modes of Authorship in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Slavica Ranković (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2012), pp. 113–32 (pp. 118–20). For *auctoritas*, see J. A. Burrow, *Medieval Writers and Their Work: Middle English Literature and its Background 1100–1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 29–30; A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, 2nd edn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), p. 94; Tim William Machan, 'Middle English Text Production and Modern Textual Criticism', in *Crux and Controversy in Middle English Textual Criticism*, ed. by A. J. Minnis and Charlotte Brewer (Cambridge: Brewer, 1992), pp. 1–18 (pp. 6–7); Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'Authorizing Text and Writer', in *The Idea of the Vernacular*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, and Ruth Evans (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 1–19 (pp. 3–8) and Glending Olson, 'Author, Scribe, and Curse: The Genre of Adam Scriveyn', *The Chaucer Review*, 42 (2008), pp. 284–97 (p. 290).

6   Matthew Fisher, *Scribal Authorship and the Writing of History in Medieval England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012), p. 22.

> work done under a specific mode of production, a set of material circumstances, a specific confluence between a piece of writing, a patron, and a variety of manual tasks.[7]

Scribes can be seen in medieval manuscripts struggling with their texts and engaging in a form of creativity that is intimately dependent on others' work as well as others' desires for that work; deriving meaning from that evidence constitutes its own struggle as well on the part of the modern scholar. Focusing on a scribe allows for a greater historical context for a text; yet historical context is precisely what is needed — and so often lacking — to make full sense of a scribe's contribution to his or her text.

   All of these considerations can be seen operating in the unique link between the *Squire's Tale* and the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* in the *Canterbury Tales* of British Library MS Lansdowne 851. This manuscript, which is one of the earliest we have of the *Canterbury Tales* (c. 1400×25), is an object whose design and creation were done with deliberation. It was intended as a work of visual art along with its literary contents, for at 250×200 mm with a 240×135 frame, it left ample room in the vertical margins for decorations done in blue, mauve, magenta, green, gold, yellow and red. Its script is uniform, too, with a single scribe whose *anglicana formata* hand betrays some northern and western regionalisms but for the most part suggests a professional London scribe.[8] And it was for the gap between the tales of the Wife of Bath and the Squire that this scribe invented a short 11-line interlude that attempts to create a suitable end to the Squire's unfinished tale. This in itself is an act of creation, but what makes the Squire-Wife of Bath link so notable is how it interacts with the original text, and how the scribe's solution to a practical problem creates the opportunity to completely reinterpret the *Squire's Tale*. By leveraging what many modern scholars perceive as flaws in his tale — its excessive *occupatio*, its lack of focus, and the unwieldy size of the story it aims to tell — the Lansdowne scribe creates a swift, fitting end to the work that has the potential as well to revise the portrait of the Squire. Moreover, by appreciating the likely pressures and conditions of scribal work on Lansdowne, and also treating the scribe's contribution with the same seriousness as we would an author's, we can gain a valuable insight into the hybrid task he and other scribes set for themselves when they set out to reconcile their often incomplete exemplars with the expectations placed upon the final product. The result is art that not only relies upon the work it is embedded within, but that interacts with it in startling ways.

   Numerous manuscripts of the *Tales* include interpolations,[9] but Lansdowne 851 is particularly notable for this feature. An early representative of Manly and Rickert's group *c*, its exemplar was likely Corpus Christi College Oxford MS 198 or else something very much like it.[10] Manuscripts from this line order the tales differently than the arrangements of either Ellesmere or Hengwrt,[11] and typically contain fewer links between tales such as those

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[7]   Ralph Hanna III, 'Producing Manuscripts and Editions', in *Crux and Controversy in Middle English Textual Criticism*, ed. by A. J. Minnis and Charlotte Brewer (Cambridge: Brewer, 1992), pp. 109–30 (p. 122). See also Daniel Wakelin, 'Writing the Words', in *The Production of Books in England 1350–1500*, ed. by Alexandra Gillespie and Daniel Wakelin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 34–58 (pp. 49–50).

[8]   John M. Manly and Edith Rickert, *The Text of the Canterbury Tales, Studied on the Basis of All Known Manuscripts*, 8 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940), I 304–8 and M. C. Seymour, *A Catalogue of Chaucer Manuscripts*, 2 vols (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995–97), II 131–35.

[9]   For an account of these, see William McCormick and Janet E. Heseltine, *The Manuscripts of Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), pp. xxv–xxxii and Seymour, *A Catalogue of Chaucer Manuscripts*, II, 21–26.

[10] Norman Blake, *The Textual Tradition of the Canterbury Tales* (London: Arnold, 1985), p. 119.

[11] Their orders, however, are not unusual among the extant manuscripts, and in fact are more numerous if one pairs

of the Cook and *Gamelyn*, the Squire and the Wife of Bath, the Canon's Yeoman and the Physician, and the Pardoner and the Shipman. In the case of Lansdowne, the scribe attempts to smooth over these gaps with several interpolations unique to the manuscript. For some of these points in the text, the solution may have been exceptional but the dilemma was not. The *Cook's Tale* and the *Squire's Tale*, being unfinished, often presented a problem to scribes wishing to record complete versions of the *Tales*. The extant copies can attest to the variety of scribal reactions to this challenge, from leaving space blank to inserting other material to just ignoring it entirely.[12] In the case of the *Cook's Tale*, Lansdowne is one of twenty-five existing manuscripts that uses the *Tale of Gamelyn* to 'fix' the entry, although (as Lansdowne also attests) this does not necessarily obviate the need for a transition.[13] However, compared to the aborted *Cook's Tale*, the *Squire's Tale* was relatively complete, making the insertion of an entirely new story untenable.[14] Moreover, the Lansdowne scribe's exemplar lacked the interruption of the Squire by one of the other pilgrims, depriving the scribe of a plausible transition.[15]

His response here, as with the other awkward transitions, was to invent a link. Discarding (or lacking) the two short lines of the 'Tercia Pars' found in other versions,[16] he brings the tale to a swift end:

> Bot I wil here nowe maake a knotte
> To the time it come next to my lotte.
> For here be felawes behinde, an hepe treulye,
> That wolden talke ful besilye
> And have her sporte as wele as I.
> And the daie passeth fast, certanly.
> Therfore, Hooste, taketh nowe goode heede
> Who schall next tell, and late him speede.[17]

After this the text proclaims: 'explicit fabula Armigeri incipit prologus Uxoris de Bath' ('the Squire's Tale ends; the Wife of Bath's Prologue begins'), and the Wife of Bath takes over with four more invented lines to complete the transition:[18]

> Than schortly answearde the Wife of Bathe
> And swore a wonder grete hathe,

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group *c* with the closely related group *d*. See Seymour, *A Catalogue of Chaucer Manuscripts*, II, 2–9.

[12] See Stephen Partridge, 'Minding the Gaps: Interpreting the Manuscript Evidence of the Cook's Tale and the Squire's Tale', in *The English Medieval Book: Studies in Memory of Jeremy Griffiths*, ed. by A. S. G. Edwards, Vincent Gillespie, and Ralph Hanna (London: British Library, 2000), pp. 51–85.

[13] Partridge, 'Minding the Gaps', p. 55.

[14] The one exception to this is in Christ Church Oxford MS 152, where a later hand added a work by Hoccleve to the gap left by the original scribe. Even here, however, the tale is meant to be the Plowman's, not the Squire's. Partridge, 'Minding the Gaps', p. 61.

[15] Seymour, *A Catalogue of Chaucer Manuscripts*, II, 4–5. For how the *Squire's Tale* came to occupy a place between the *Man of Law's Tale* and *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* in Lansdowne, and why it lacks a natural link, see the discussion of the Corpus Christi College Oxford MS 198 — which was a likely precursor to Lansdowne — in Blake, *The Textual Tradition of the Canterbury Tales*, pp. 97–98.

[16] It is common among the extant manuscripts for the two-line 'Tercia Pars' of the *Squire's Tale* to be omitted. See Partridge, 'Minding the Gaps', p. 62.

[17] 'Spurious Links', in *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions*, ed. by John M. Bowers (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), pp. 41–53 (pp. 43–44). These lines can be found on folio 87r of the manuscript.

[18] 'Spurious Links', p. 44.

> 'Be Goddes bones, I wil tel next!
> 'I will nouht glose, bot saye the text'

It is possible that the links of the *Canterbury Tales* contain variations that reflect Chaucer's editing, just as the tales do;[19] even so, it would be quite a remarkable circumstance if Lansdowne 851 alone preserved Chaucer's words here. Yet consider the achievement of these eight lines as the product of an anonymous scribe. In his effort to bridge the gap between the *Squire's Tale* and the *Prologue* of the Wife of Bath, he makes alterations to the text that, as we shall see, reconfigure the possible interpretations of the work. He does so effectively, however, only by carefully reading and comprehending the text that he copies, as this interpolation also attests. The reception of the *Squire's Tale* has varied greatly over the centuries as tastes have changed and different aspects of the work have been emphasized. It was highly valued in the Renaissance by Spenser and Milton for its rhetoric and subject,[20] though much of the current assessment of the *Squire's Tale* is less straightforwardly admiring. The general consensus is that the Squire, as written, is overmatched by his material. He has no apparent feel for pacing or plot, is prone to go off on tangents, and may very well have committed a serious social gaffe when he embarks upon a story of Canacee after the Man of Law has expressly condemned her tale. Just when it looks as if the story may come to an ignominious but merciful conclusion, the Squire declares his ambition to tell a story with seemingly no end.[21] Seth Lerer argues that the youth's failure is particularly acute in that he is purposefully attempting to match his father's performance,[22] and a comparison between the two is especially easy to make in Lansdowne, since like most Chaucer manuscripts it places the *Squire's Tale* relatively close to the *Knight's* (it immediately follows the Man of Law, which makes the Squire's invocation of Canacee seem even more impolitic). One fifteenth-century reader's reaction highlights the contrast between the father and son storytellers. Jean d'Orléans, comte d'Angoulême, a hostage held in England from 1412 to 1445, owned and marked a copy of the *Canterbury Tales*, known today as the Paris MS. While he considers the *Knight's Tale* 'valde bona' ('quite good'), he had his scribe cease copying the *Squire's Tale* after only a few dozen lines and explains in a marginal note that 'ista fabula est valde absurda in terminis et ideo' ('this story is extremely ridiculous in its conclusion and its theme').[23]

The Comte's rejection is but an opinion of one; moreover, the absurd quality that Jean d'Orléans identifies in the work may very well have been intentional. That the Squire's contribution is poorly executed and overlong makes necessary the interruption of the Franklin

[19] Norman Blake, 'The Links in the Canterbury Tales', in *New Perspectives on Middle English Texts: A Festschrift for R. A. Waldron*, ed. by Susan Powell and Jeremy J. Smith (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), pp. 107–18 (p. 109).

[20] Gardiner Stillwell, 'Chaucer in Tartary', *Review of English Studies*, 24 (1948), 177–88 (pp. 177–78) and David Lawton, *Chaucer's Narrators* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1985), pp. 107–8.

[21] Chaucer, *SqT*, lines 661–70. Important commentaries on the *Squire's Tale* include Stillwell, 'Chaucer in Tartary', pp. 177–88; D. A. Pearsall, 'The Squire as Story-Teller', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 34 (1964), 82–92; Robert S. Haller, 'Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* and the Uses of Rhetoric', *Modern Philology*, 62 (1965), 285–95; John P. McCall, 'The Squire in Wonderland', *The Chaucer Review*, 1 (1966), 103–9; Stanley J. Kahrl, 'Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* and the Decline of Chivalry', *The Chaucer Review*, 7 (1973), 194–209; and Lawton, *Chaucer's Narrators*, pp. 106–29. For a thorough analysis of the significance of Canacee, see Elizabeth Scala, 'Canacee and the Chaucer Canon: Incest and Other Unnarratables', *The Chaucer Review*, 30 (1995), 15–39.

[22] Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and his Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 57; also Kahrl, 'Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* and the Decline of Chivalry', pp. 207–9.

[23] Paul Strohm, 'Jean of Angoulême: A Fifteenth-Century Reader of Chaucer', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 72 (1971), 69–76 (p. 72). *Terminis* is difficult to translate. It could indicate either the parameters of the story or else its word choices.

or Merchant in the manuscripts that preserve these versions.[24] If so, however, then this reading of the Squire is precisely what the Lansdowne scribe contradicts in his interpolation. Consider Chaucer's use of *occupatio* in the *Squire's Tale*. It is one of the rhetorical features for which Chaucer's verse has often been praised, and the *Squire's Tale* contains many examples. Multiple scholars, however, have argued that its frequency here is not to the piece's benefit, as *occupatio* proves deadly in the hands of the Squire.[25] Here he attempts to employ the form to move his story along:

> The knotte why that every tale is toold,
> If it be taried til that lust be coold
> Of hem that han it after herkned yoore,
> The savour passeth ever lenger the moore,
> For fulsomnesse of his prolixitee;
> And by the same resoun, thynketh me,
> I sholde to the knotte condescende,
> And maken of hir walkyng soone an ende.[26]

The passage is an illustrative example of the Squire's self-defeating tendency as a storyteller. Perceiving that he is lagging, he attempts to swiftly summarize the current episode and move on to the next. However, he is so self-conscious of his need to make a 'knotte' and move on that he cannot resist commenting on it, stretching what should be a simple transition into a laborious metatextual explanation of a matter that requires none. By trying to shorten his story he effectively lengthens it in a way that explicitly calls attention to his failure.

The Lansdowne scribe recalls this tendency when he has the Squire once again voice his desire to make a 'knotte' in his work. The repetition of a tale's key words or ideas seems to have been the scribe's preferred strategy when composing new lines to link various passages. He does the same later in the same link when he has Alisoun say 'glose' and again when he has the Host repeat terms and imagery from the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* in the spurious transition between that story and that of the Physician.[27] In this case, however, his choice of reference calls back not only to Chaucer's voice but to the particular failings of his narrator. This is important, as the scribe's addition has the effect — intended or not — of rehabilitating the Squire. The Squire is criticized by modern critics for a great many perceived shortcomings, but the final straw for many has been his stated ambitions at the end of his 'Secunda Pars' ('second part'), when he breaks off in his story of Canacee and the falcon — with the promise to return to it later — to 'speken of aventures and of batailles':[28]

> First wol I telle yow of Cambyuskan,
> That in his tyme many a citee wan;
> And after wol I speke of Algarsif,

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[24] As Marjorie Curry Woods points out, medieval audiences were familiar with the use of rhetoric for parodic purposes. 'In a Nutshell: *Verba* and *Sententia* and Matter and Form in Medieval Composition Theory', in *The Uses of Manuscripts in Literary Studies: Essays in Memory of Judson Boyce Allen*, ed. by Charlotte Cook Morse, Penelope Reed Doob, and Marjorie Curry Woods (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), pp. 19–39 (p. 32).

[25] For a discussion of the Squire's *occupatio*, see Haller, 'Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* and the Uses of Rhetoric', p. 288; Kahrl, 'Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* and the Decline of Chivalry', pp. 201–2; and Lawton, *Chaucer's Narrators*, pp. 118–23.

[26] Chaucer, *SqT*, lines 401–8.

[27] 'Spurious Links', p. 44.

[28] Chaucer, *SqT*, lines 651–60.

> How that he wan Theodora to his wif,
> For whom ful ofte in greet peril he was,
> Ne hadde he ben holpen by the steede of bras;
> And after wol I speke of Cambalo,
> That faught in lystes with the bretheren two
> For Canacee er that he myghte hire wynne.
> And ther I lefte I wol ayeyn begynne.[29]

Suddenly this already rambling work has ballooned into something wholly unmanageable, especially for a narrator as prone to long-windedness and tangential *occupatio* as the Squire. As Derek Pearsall says ominously, 'the tale is growing, as romances tend to do, almost of their own will, into a monstrous oriental saga, and the Squire is no longer in control'.[30] However, the Lansdowne scribe places the Squire firmly back in charge of his runaway narrative. And he is only able to do so by being an attentive, perceptive reader of the *Canterbury Tales*.

William Kamowski has a more sympathetic reading of the *Squire's Tale*, particularly of the moment above where the Squire declares his ambitions. He sees it as a part of many rhetorical devices employed by Chaucer to slow the story down, hint at intriguing details but decline to indulge, and therefore build anticipation as well as encourage readers to fill in the gaps of the narrative with their own imaginings. Ultimately, the abortive ending to the tale is the last and most dramatic of these tricks.[31] Of course, whether this is a virtue or a fault of the poem depends on one's taste, and on the tale's execution; as Kamowski acknowledges, this may not be true for the *Squire's Tale*.[32] Yet the disappointment of the unfulfilled promise of the Squire is precisely what the scribe of Lansdowne appears to be combating directly in his intervention in the text, and he uses the withholding tendency of the Squire that Kamowski identifies to do it. As we see, immediately after his promise to 'ayeyn begynne' in the Lansdowne manuscript, the Squire expressly declines to do so, instead here declaring his intention to 'maake a knotte'. However, he follows right after with the assurance that the story will continue at 'the time it come next to my lotte'.[33] Here the Lansdowne scribe invokes the structure of the entire *Canterbury Tales* to excuse the unfinished nature of the *Squire's Tale*. As Harry Bailly declares in the *General Prologue*, each pilgrim is to tell four stories apiece — two on the way to Canterbury, and two on the return.[34] This, obviously, is not the form in which the *Canterbury Tales* ultimately appeared. Several characters (the Five Guildsmen, the Plowman, the Knight's Yeoman, and the Nun's other two priests) introduced in the *General Prologue* do not even get one tale to tell, and none, save Chaucer, get a second. Yet the Lansdowne scribe recalled the initial ambitions of the work and had the Squire not only invoke them but use them to his storytelling advantage. In stating his synopsis for the remainder of his tale, the Squire divides it into three parts: that concerning Cambyuskan, that of Algarsif, and that of Cambalo (one assumes that the conclusion to Canacee's encounter with the falcon will occur during the Cambalo episode as the Squire seems to imply[35]). While Pearsall is right in that the Squire's intentions are far too ambitious for one of the *Tales*, they may do if spread around,

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[29] Chaucer, *SqT*, lines 661–70.
[30] Pearsall, 'The Squire as Story-Teller', p. 90.
[31] William Kamowski, 'Trading the "Knotte" for Loose Ends: The *Squire's Tale* and the Poetics of Chaucerian Fragments', *Style*, 31 (1997), 391–412 (pp. 392–95).
[32] Kamowski, 'Trading the "Knotte" for Loose Ends', pp. 394–95.
[33] 'Spurious Links', p. 43.
[34] Chaucer, *GP*, lines 788–809.
[35] Chaucer, *SqT*, lines 652–57.

and with his story roughly one-quarter over and three turns ahead of him, the Squire is now well-positioned to conclude his yarn. Moreover, by transforming his final words into a 'teaser', as it were, the Lansdowne scribe removes the suspicion that the Squire has taken on a project he has no hope in completing and instead uses this portion of the story to stimulate interest in its later instalments. This new ending becomes yet another device in heightening the readers' anticipation, just as the rest of the poem has primed them throughout. Of course, in suggesting a second turn for the Squire the Lansdowne scribe is promoting a fantasy, and on these grounds Partridge criticizes the Lansdowne scribe for promising something he cannot provide.[36] Yet as Charles A. Owen, Jr. notes of the various Chaucer manuscripts, 'the text of the *Canterbury Tales* nowhere supports the theory […] that Chaucer abandoned the homeward journey'.[37] If scribes had only their collection of exemplars as their guide, rather than the whole of the extant *Canterbury Tales* corpus, they might very well have expected a more complete version of the collection to exist somewhere. When they encountered a lacuna in their text, not all could say with confidence, as Adam Pynkhurst does in one instance in Hengwrt, 'Of This Cokes Tale Maked Chaucer Namoore'. What's more, a scribe's full degree of access to alternative exemplars can never fully be known. Those with access to Ellesmere or its descendants, for example, would have a quote from the Host revising the parameters of the pilgrims' game ('ech of yow moot tellen atte leste/ A tale or two, or breken his behest'[38]). Yet if the Lansdowne scribe had access to these lines he would have had no need to create his own link between the *Squire's Tale* and the next, and so he improvised using the information he had at hand. Experience also likely led scribes to expect incomplete exemplars to exist elsewhere in fuller forms. Chaucer's *Tales*, like other medieval texts, circulated in numerous versions, together and in fragments. Poor-quality, incomplete, or disordered exemplars were not necessarily unusual, but they typically left more of the responsibility in the scribes' hands of how to order and present the text.[39] The existence of gaps and blank folios in the manuscripts attests to the expectation (or hope) on the part of scribes that a more complete exemplar existed and may fall into their hands some day. Fifteenth-century extensions of the *Canterbury Tales* such as Lydgate's opening to the *Siege of Thebes* and the *Canterbury Interlude* before the *Tale of Beryn* also reveal an audience that was able to entertain the notion of — if it did not just simply expect — a return journey for the pilgrims, and more chances at a story.[40] After all, the *General Prologue* retains the promise of the *Tales'* original structure as well, so its persistence elsewhere perhaps should not occasion comment.

The Lansdowne scribe is therefore manipulating his material to change the characterization of his copy of the *Canterbury Tales* through the insertion of original material. Yet this is a provisional originality, dependent on his exemplar's author, Chaucer: Chaucer's words, his poetic forms, and the content of the *General Prologue* are all manipulated to create the product of the Lansdowne scribe. This is different from Chaucer's own acknowledgement of sources because of scribes' usual practice of camouflaging their contributions. Chaucer states

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[36] Partridge, 'Minding the Gaps', pp. 55–56.
[37] Charles A. Owen, Jr., 'The Alternative Reading of *The Canterbury Tales*: Chaucer's Text and the Early Manuscripts', *PMLA*, 97 (1982), 237–50 (p. 247).
[38] Chaucer, *SqT*, lines 697–98.
[39] N. F. Blake, 'Geoffrey Chaucer: Textual Transmission and Editing', in *Crux and Controversy in Middle English Textual Criticism*, ed. by A. J. Minnis and Charlotte Brewer (Cambridge: Brewer, 1992), pp. 19–38 (p. 21).
[40] John M. Bowers, '*The Tale of Beryn* and *The Seige of Thebes*: Alternative Ideas of the *Canterbury Tales*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 7 (1985), 23–50 (pp. 26–37).

frankly that he is taking others' work in several of his adaptations of earlier material.[41] Yet just as his discussion of the scribe's role serves to distinguish him as the creator of the work, by acknowledging his sources Chaucer asserts ownership of the material since the product — which in truth differs greatly from its antecedents — is his. Moreover, even as he names authorities Chaucer also neglects to mention many of his closest sources, which obscures those with the greatest claims of influence over his work and increases the impression of his own originality. In contrast, scribes do not attach their names to texts and ascribe them wholly to their *auctores*, no matter what the scribal contribution. In comparing authorial and scribal poetics, therefore, the desire for self-effacement — and the mimicry it inspires — is a crucial distinction.

The usual scribal impulse to remain in the background also makes it difficult to determine scribes' intent. Of course, this is a tricky matter with known authors as well, but what goes for a named writer such as Chaucer would seem to go double for a scribe.[42] Fisher has made an effort towards addressing this challenge, but he illustrates its difficulty by choosing scribes — Thomas Hoccleve, the Harley Scribe, and Ranulf Higden — who are unlike the typical scribe in the extent that their biographies or writing practices are known.[43] Yet Hoccleve, who reveals so much about himself in his poetry, calls no attention to himself when acting as a scribe, and most of his professional brethren were the same. Just as most scribal changes are not intended to call attention to themselves, they are also not designed to say anything about the person holding the pen, nor their editorial decisions.[44] Scribes are also usually silent on the state of their materials, which frustrates efforts to learn more about the text. It is possible, for example, though unlikely, that the Lansdowne links are from a lost exemplar, making their composer even more of a mystery. What could ever be known about his intentions with the physical copy of his text lost?[45] Does the scribe reflect his own desires or a patron's in his efforts?[46] Such questions come to bear when assessing a scribe's contribution to a text, but are very difficult to determine in most cases. For Lansdowne, it cannot be said definitively that the Lansdowne scribe meant to rehabilitate the Squire in the process of forging a link between his tale and the next. It may just be an unintentional side effect. Yet why did he invent the links at all? The answers likely depend on unknowns — the origin of the manuscript, its patron (if any), and his or her preferences.

Tentative conclusions can be proposed, however. In recent years, palaeography and codicology have become increasingly important in textual interpretation, and in many cases they have advanced our knowledge not only of the contents of manuscripts but also of their scribes. Most prominent is the 2006 identification of the scribe of Hengwrt and Ellesmere,

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[41] Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, lines 1.394 and 5.1653; *Anelida and Arcite*, line 21; *ClPro*, lines 21–56 and *PhysT*, line 1.

[42] Hanna, 'Producing Manuscripts and Editions', p. 125.

[43] Matthew Fisher, 'When Variants Aren't: Authors as Scribes in Some English Manuscripts', in *Probable Truth: Editing Medieval Texts from Britain in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Vincent Gillespie and Anne Hudson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 207–22.

[44] As Anne Hudson says about a hypothetical *Piers Plowman* scribe, 'it would require heroic patience to discover what any individual medieval scribe made of the poem'. This statement can be extended to most of his compatriots. Hudson, 'Middle English', p. 43. See also Hanna, 'Problems of "Best Text" Editing', pp. 89–90.

[45] A. I. Doyle, 'Retrospect and Prospect', in *Manuscripts and Readers in Fifteenth-Century England: The Literary Implications of Manuscript Study*, ed. by Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Brewer, 1983), pp. 142–46 (p. 145).

[46] Machan, *Textual Criticism and the Middle English Text*, p. 171 and Hanna, 'Producing Manuscripts and Editions', p. 75.

which almost immediately impacted the debate over the primacy of either manuscript.[47] A consideration of Lansdowne's physical features will not reveal the name of its scribe, but may give some indication of his working conditions, which in turn may give some insight into his reasoning. Specifically, by connecting the importance of Lansdowne as an art object to the prevailing tastes of the time, it is possible to make a tentative argument for the presence of its unique links in the manuscript.

The scribe of Lansdowne 851 likely had a patron. As already noted, it was designed to create a pleasing visual presentation, and is heavily ornamented, with a famous portrait of Chaucer in its first historiated initial.[48] This was, in other words, a deluxe copy, produced for a patron for their own private enjoyment or to display to 'call attention to their own status as patrons of letters'.[49] Those commissioning such works in the early fifteenth century represented a new market for Chaucer's poetry, one which intended to demonstrate its newfound wealth and sophistication through such luxury objects. Pearsall characterizes the shift in patronage as moving from 'court poetry', where the intended recipients for Chaucer's verse were members of the king's court, to 'courtly poetry', where the audience was broader and unaristocratic.[50] The merchant class became the primary audience for Chaucer's work, and in their adoption of his verse they sought to copy the tastes and trappings of court. Yet in their own ideas of what constituted courtly culture, these new patrons were ultimately more conservative than the actual lords and ladies from Chaucer's generation. Innovations in form and social impropriety were unpopular with this new group, and some of Chaucer's verse fell out of favour as a result.[51] In other cases, the material was edited to conform to expectations, a process that Seth Lerer, borrowing from Lee Patterson, describes as 'disambiguating' — obscuring or excising original material so as to avoid the troublesome implications of challenging themes.[52]

Scholars have drawn a connection between the tastes of early fifteenth-century patrons and the physical appearance of their books. Just as society had to be properly ordered, so too must its texts. The *Canterbury Tales*, then, which existed in several fragments and in several orders, with several tales which could easily be considered subversive, would find it particularly difficult to conform to this preference. Many of the 'worst' tales, from this point of view, were both disorganized and disrespectful. The *Cook's Tale* is an obvious example. Daniel J. Pinti draws its form and content together expressly, seeing both Perkyn Revelour and his story as 'unfinished', the implication being that if one allows one's books to be disorderly, one may

[47] Linne R. Mooney, 'Chaucer's Scribe', *Speculum*, 81 (2006), pp. 97–138. Critical responses to that article and assessments of its impact on the Hengwrt/Ellesmere question include Estelle Stubbs, ' "Here's One I Prepared Earlier": The Work of Scribe D on Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 198', *The Review of English Studies*, 58 (2007), 133–53; Alexandra Gillespie, 'Reading Chaucer's Words to Adam', *The Chaucer Review*, 42 (2008), 269–83; Simon Horobin, 'Adam Pinkhurst, Geoffrey Chaucer, and the Hengwrt Manuscript of the *Canterbury Tales*', *The Chaucer Review*, 44 (2010), 351–67; and Jordi Sánchez-Martí, 'Adam Pynkhurst's "Necglygence and Rape", Reassessed', *English Studies*, 92 (2011), 360–74.

[48] Seymour, *A Catalogue of Chaucer Manuscripts*, ii, 131 and 134. See also Manly and Rickert, *The Text of the Canterbury Tales*, i, 304–8.

[49] Lerer, *Chaucer and his Readers*, p. 17.

[50] Derek Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), pp. 212–13.

[51] Paul Strohm, 'Chaucer's Fifteenth-Century Audience and the Narrowing of the "Chaucer Tradition" ', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 4 (1982), 3–32 (pp. 18–21) and Glending Olson, 'The Misreadings of the *Beryn* Prologue', *Medaevalia*, 17 (1991), 201–19 (p. 204).

[52] Seth Lerer, 'Rewriting Chaucer: Two Fifteenth-Century Readings of the *Canterbury Tales*', *Viator*, 19 (1988), 311–26 (p. 322). Also Lee Patterson, 'Ambiguity and Interpretation: A Fifteenth-Century Reading of *Troilus and Criseyde*', *Speculum*, 54 (1979), 297–330 (pp. 297–300).

countenance a similar state for society. In V. A. Kolve's reading of what there is of the tale, the Cook swiftly sketches out a conflict between the artisan class and their unruly apprentices.[53] Those from such rising classes who commissioned lavish manuscripts such as Lansdowne (and Bodley 686, Pinti's focus), were liable to have to deal with their own rebellious underlings and were invested in the status quo; therefore, in Pinti's construction, degenerates such as Perkyn and deficient texts such as Chaucer's *Cook's Tale* must be 'mastered'.[54] The insertion of the *Tale of Gamelyn* in many of the manuscripts both reversed the moral trajectory of the story and obscured the tale's unfinished state; in Lansdowne, the scribe once again takes it upon himself to add an additional few lines to smooth the transition:

> Fye, therone, it is so foule! I wil nowe tell no forthere
> For schame of the harlotrie that seweth after.
> A velany it were thareof more to spell,
> Bot of a knighte and his sonnes, my tale I wil forthe tell.[55]

In Chaucer's version of the *Cook's Tale*, whether by design or by chance, the provocations of Perkyn and his friends stand unanswered. By having the Cook denounce his own tale, the Lansdowne scribe serves a swift (if abrupt) corrective, then transitions into the more conciliatory *Gamelyn*. Bodley 686, in contrast, lacks *Gamelyn*, and so resorts to more extreme measures. It heavily edits the *Cook's Tale* to make sure that Perkyn and his friend meet unhappy ends for their misbehaviour. The wife, for her part, is saved from prostitution by the stroke of the scribe's pen — she now 'pleyed' rather than 'swyved' for her sustenance.[56]

Lansdowne conforms quite well to this interpretation of luxury manuscripts and their contents. The quality of its production is high, and its invented links speak to the same impulse to rectify perceived shortcomings in the text. One can see this carried out at an even finer level in Lansdowne than in Pinti's Bodley 686 example, for whereas the Bodley scribe actively altered Chaucer's wording in his revision, the Lansdowne scribe, as we have seen, instead repeated key terms from Chaucer so as to make his transitions even more seamless. Moreover, the Lansdowne scribe's final product speaks to the priority he gave to completeness, both actual and illusory. Lansdowne is the only manuscript from group *c* that contains Chaucer's *Retraction*, for example, giving the work a definitive end.[57] As we have seen, it also completely integrates *Gamelyn* into its structure whereas other manuscripts show hesitation on the part of their scribes as to how to proceed.[58] Lansdowne, in short, is notable for the absolute regularization of its visual form, as well as its uninterrupted flow from one tale into the other.[59] The scribe's goal was physical and narrative completeness, at the expense of

[53] V. A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), pp. 267–75.

[54] Daniel J. Pinti, 'Governing the *Cook's Tale* in Bodley 686', *The Chaucer Review*, 30 (1996), 379–88 (p. 384). See also Partridge, 'Minding the Gaps', pp. 63–64.

[55] 'Spurious Links', p. 43. In Lansdowne, these lines are found on fol. 54r–54v.

[56] 'The Cook's Tale', in *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions*, ed. by John M. Bowers (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), pp. 33–39 (p. 37). For a reading of 'pleyed' vs. 'swyved' and the redeeming of Perkyn's wife, see David Lorenzo Boyd, 'Social Texts: Bodley 686 and the Politics of the Cook's Tale', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 58 (1995), pp. 93–95.

[57] Stephen Partridge, ' "The Makere of this Boke": Chaucer's *Retraction* and the Author as Scribe and Compiler', in *Author, Reader, Book: Medieval Authorship in Theory and Practice*, ed. by Stephen Partridge and Eric Kwakkel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), pp. 106–53 (p. 117).

[58] N. F. Blake, 'Chaucer, Gamelyn and the Cook's Tale', in *The Medieval Book and a Modern Collector: Essays in Honour of Toshiyuki Takamiya*, ed. by Takami Matsuda, Richard A. Linenthal, and John Scahill (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 87–98 (p. 94).

[59] Partridge, 'Minding the Gaps', p. 55.

fidelity to his exemplar and without the hope that supplemental materials might come his way. That he made his changes to create an attractive object for his patron is a plausible explanation for his actions.

It should be noted, however, how conjectural this conclusion is. Nothing is known in fact about the scribe of Lansdowne or his patron; the circumstances of the manuscript's commission may not conform to the expectations of such a lavish work, and whoever commissioned it may not fit the stereotype of the new fifteenth-century reader. With Lansdowne, too, we are dealing with a relatively clear instance of scribal intervention. In other cases, it is far harder to determine just what is scribal invention and what is authorial revision. On issues where there is a difference of opinion — whether the *Canon Yeoman's Tale* is authentic,[60] or if the expansions to the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* are authorial[61] — the interpretation of the text hinges upon one's decision over what is or is not Chaucerian. And, as many have noted, in the hardest cases such decisions can only be subjective.[62] The surviving *Canterbury Tales* corpus is also not ideal for making clear delineations between Chaucer's work and others'. It exists in fragments and in various orders, and there is no extant autograph to guide modern commentators. In addition, as Ralph Hanna III has noted, of what we can perceive of Chaucer's writing process, he rarely made major, systematic revisions to his work such as those which produced the discrete versions of *Piers Plowman*. Instead he practiced 'rolling revision', making small changes here and there in ways that are very similar to scribal activity.[63] In such circumstances it is often difficult to say with any certainty what is authorial in a manuscript and what isn't.

The Squire-Wife of Bath link in Lansdowne 851 represents, therefore, not only the potential for innovative scribal art that plays upon the contents of the text and the desires of a patron, but also how those pressures shaped the manuscripts that ultimately resulted. Hanna describes 'scribal poetics' as 'a much shabbier thing' than the words of the author: 'the series of disruptive and degenerative choices that could be associated inductively with the activity of scribes'.[64] The implication of this definition is that scribes, unlike authors, operated under constraints — primarily the requirement that they copy a text faithfully. These constraints either discouraged or undermined originality, leading, inevitably, to a degeneration of the work. Yet, as Chaucer understood, the scribe's position gave him an enormous amount of power over a text. Scribal effect is diffuse, but obscured, making the scribe fit for a number

[60] Norman Blake, 'Editing the *Canterbury Tales*: An Overview', in *The 'Canterbury Tales' Project Occasional Papers, vol. 1*, ed. by Norman Blake and Peter Robinson (London: Office for Humanities Communication, 1993), pp. 5–18 (p. 8) and Blake, 'Chaucer, Gamelyn and the Cook's Tale', pp. 97–98.

[61] Beverly Kennedy, 'Contradictory Responses to the Wife of Bath as Evidenced by Fifteenth-Century Manuscript Variants', in *The 'Canterbury Tales' Project Occasional Papers, vol. 2*, ed. by Norman Blake and Peter Robinson (London: Office for Humanities Communication, 1997), pp. 23–39 (pp. 27–32).

[62] See Blake, *The Textual Tradition of the Canterbury Tales*, pp. 46–48; Blake, 'Editing *The Canterbury Tales*', p. 7; Helen Cooper, 'The Order of the Tales in the Ellesmere Manuscript', in *Ellesmere Chaucer: Essays in Interpretation*, ed. by Martin Stevens and Daniel Woodward (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1995), pp. 245–61 (p. 246); and Simon Horobin, 'Editorial Assumptions and the Manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales*', in *The 'Canterbury Tales' Project Occasional Papers, vol. 2*, ed. by Norman Blake and Peter Robinson (London: Office for Humanities Communication, 1997), pp. 15–21 (pp. 19–20).

[63] Hanna, 'Authorial Versions, Rolling Revision, Scribal Error?', pp. 160–61.

[64] Hanna, 'Authorial Versions, Rolling Revision, Scribal Error?', p. 159.

of behind-the-scenes roles — critic,[65] editor,[66] censor[67] — or, even, ultimately, author.[68] This is the result of the great variability of their task and to the variety of effects their actions could have on a manuscript. The dynamism in the work of writing in this period makes the study of scribal contribution difficult yet necessary, as the fluidity between the roles scribes might take and the tension that existed between the demands placed on them produced such unique products as the Squire-Wife of Bath link in Lansdowne 851.

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[65] B. A. Windeatt, 'The Scribes as Chaucer's Early Critics', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 1 (1979), 119–41.

[66] Celia Millward, 'The Medieval Scribe as Editor: The Case of *La Estoire del Evangelie*', *Manuscripta*, 41 (1997), pp. 155–70.

[67] Boyd, 'Social Texts', pp. 81–97; Pinti, 'Governing the *Cook's Tale* in Bodley 686', pp. 379–88 and Kennedy, 'Contradictory Responses to the Wife of Bath as evidenced by Fifteenth-Century Manuscript Variants', pp. 23–39.

[68] Patricia Stoop, 'The Writing Sisters of Jericho: Authors or Copyists?', in *Constructing the Medieval Sermon*, ed. by Roger Andersson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 275–308; Aidan Conti, 'Scribes as Authors, Transmission as Composition: Towards a Science of Copying', in *Modes of Authorship in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Slavica Ranković (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2012), pp. 267–88; and Fisher, *Scribal Authorship*.