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**Scribes as Authors:
 Substantive Variation
 in some Late Middle English Manuscripts**

In the course of their work on medieval texts, modern editors and textual critics make a number of assumptions about the nature of textual transmission in an age before the introduction of printing. Without such assumptions, editorial work could hardly proceed, and it is therefore of capital importance that the implications they carry be fully appreciated. Prominent among such assumptions are the following: first, that a text written out by its author, and thus preserved, is considered to be free from error or corruption; second, and conversely, that a text which is the product of scribal activity, a text, that is, which has been copied, will depart from what the author originally wrote to some greater or lesser degree.¹ It is axiomatic among editors to say that the more a text is copied, the more corrupt it will become.²

¹ This is not a modern perception. Chaucer, for example, was keenly aware of the irremedial damage that sloppy scribal copying could inflict on an author's intentions; the short poem entitled "Chaucers Wordes unto Adam, his owne Scriveyn", illustrates the point well. See Larry Benson et al., ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed (Boston: Houghton & Mifflin, 1987), p. 650.

² The situation I have in mind is not that in which multiple copies of a text are made from the same exemplar; rather, it is that in which successively-produced copies themselves serve as exemplars. In such a situation, the errors already present in the exemplar will, in the main, be preserved by the scribe who, at the same time, will invariably add further errors of his own making. The best recent one-volume introduction to this difficult subject, with copious bibliographies, is David C. Greetham, *Textual Scholarship: An Introduction* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992). Among the other books I have found helpful are the following: H. J. Chaytor, *From Script to Print* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1945); P. Collomp, *La critique des textes*, Publications de la Faculté des Lettres de l'université de Strasbourg (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1931). Chapter 4 of George Kane, ed., *Piers Plowman: the A Version* (London: Athlone, 1960) is fundamental.

Both of these broad propositions require qualification. To say, first, that an author's text is deemed to be free from error is a theoretical necessity, since if there is no possibility of assuming its marked superiority to a scribal copy, there will be no theoretical 'original' or 'archetype' to which the editor (availing himself of the logic of recension) may work back.¹ As to the second proposition, it is vital to distinguish between what may be termed unintentional, unthinking error, on the one hand, and deliberate interference, on the other. This paper will attempt to isolate and analyse typical examples of the latter phenomenon, deliberate interference, as it appears in four late-fifteenth century manuscripts which witness to the last-known stage of development in the growth of an orthodox sermon cycle.

The four manuscripts in question are: Oxford, Bodleian Library e Musaeo 180 [MS O]; Lincoln, Cathedral Chapter Library 50 and 51 [MS L];² Gloucester, Cathedral Chapter Library 22 [MS G] and Durham, University Library, Cosin V.iv.3 [MS D]. All date from the latter half of the fifteenth century and, unusually, all are the work of the same scribe who writes a somewhat idiosyncratic Anglicana script.³ No manuscript contains any texts other than those which form a complete *De Tempore* sermon cycle conforming to Sarum use. No manuscript is a direct copy of any other. These manuscripts form a distinct group which shall be referred to as the OLGD group.⁴

¹ The classic account of this method is that of Paul Maas, *Textkritik*, 3. verbesserte u. vermehrte Aufl., (Leipzig, 1957), trans. Barbara Flower as *Textual Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958). Those seeking a brief but sound overview of the logic of recension, and of its limitations, will find much of value in L. D. Reynolds & N. G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*, 3rd ed (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), ch. 6. It may seem paradoxical that while the logic of recension is generally perceived to be flawed, it continues to enjoy considerable popularity among editors.

² This single manuscript is today bound in two volumes.

³ The term is explained by Malcolm B. Parkes, *English Cursive Book Hands, 1250-1500* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

⁴ The sermons remain unpublished. An authoritative account of their make-up and relationship to other sermon collections is now available in Helen L. Spencer, *English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), via the Index. The existence today of four copies suggests that the collection was being produced in multiple copies for retail. See the remarks of Alan J. Fletcher, "Unnoticed Sermons from John Mirk's Festial", *Speculum*, 55 (1980), 514-22 at 516.

From the point of view of content, these four manuscripts are associated closely with three others of earlier date: Cambridge, University Library Gg.6.16 [MS C] and London, British Library manuscripts Harley 2247 [MS H] and Royal 18.B.xxv [MS R].¹ The Harley and Royal manuscripts descend from a common archetype, thus forming a small sub-group. All date from the mid-fifteenth century; on palæographical grounds, C is thought to be the earliest of the three. The association is to be explained by the fact that earlier versions of no fewer than nine sermons of the OLGD group are attested in CHR, those for Nativity, Circumcision, Epiphany, Sexagesima, Quinquagesima, Ash Wednesday and the sermons for the second and third Sundays in Lent. Of the nine, only that for Lent 2 is preserved complete in all the manuscripts.²

In order to provide some solid ground on which to situate the discussion which follows, it is necessary to identify the textual affiliations of these manuscripts as precisely as is possible. Since, on palæographical grounds, the manuscripts OLGD form a distinct group (they are all the work of one man), two questions need to be answered. First, what is the textual relationship of the OLGD manuscripts, seen

¹ For the Cambridge manuscript see now Ariane Lainé, "Cambridge University Library MS Gg.6.16: édition critique et étude du contenu d'un outil de prédication moyen anglais, accompagnées de notes et d'un glossaire", 2 tomes, thèse de doctorat nouveau régime, Université de Poitiers, 2000. The De Tempore sermons of the Harley-Royal collection (and much else besides) have been edited by Susan Powell, "A Critical Edition of the Temporale Sermons of MSS Harley 2247 and Royal 18 B XXV" (unpublished Ph. D dissertation, University of London, 1980). A briefer yet more accessible account of the manuscripts is the same editor's *The Advent and Nativity Sermons from a Fifteenth-Century Revision of John Mirk's Festial*, Middle English Texts 13 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1981). The Sanctorale sermons of this collection have recently been edited by Elodie Petrequin (née Monteau), "Edition critique d'une révision du XV^{ème} siècle du recueil hagiographique moyen-anglais du Festial de John Mirk, conservé dans les manuscrits London, British Library Harley 2247, Royal 18 B xxv & Trinity College Dublin 428, avec notes et glossaire", thèse de doctorat nouveau régime Université de Poitiers, 1998.

² The arithmetical discrepancy is explained by the fact that the Ash Wednesday sermon in C provides the material upon which two pieces for the same feast in OLGD are based. H and R lack the Epiphany sermon.

as a group, to the others; and, second, what textual relations do the OLGD manuscripts show to the others when examined individually? In order to broach this subject, I have chosen a short extract from the sermon for Lent 2 for purposes of comparison. It is based on the Sarum gospel reading for that day, Matthew 15: 21-28, the story of the Canaanite woman whose daughter was possessed by a devil.¹ The sermon writer characteristically interprets the woman as an allegory of the sinful soul, and then develops three reasons why sin should be shunned.

The text is presented here in three blocks, each block corresponding to one of the reasons why sin should be avoided, and in each block the relevant matter from C, from HR and from OLGD has been grouped together. In order to highlight the nature of textual discrepancy within the OLGD group, a select number of significant substantive variants to O – the reasons why this manuscript has been chosen as base manuscript will emerge soon – have been included in parentheses.² The abbreviation *om.*, which refers to the word immediately preceding it, stands for ‘omitted’ and is followed by the relevant manuscript sigil. Elsewhere, words and phrases in parentheses, followed by their sigils, indicate what had been substituted in the manuscript(s) in question for the immediately preceding words and phrases. Thus, in lines 18-19, D reads *every sowle* while G has *every synfull creature*. The reading of L at this point is identical to that of O.

1.

[C] Then this woman off Canonee, synffull manys sawle, must goone owte frome the cuntres off synne for iiij cawses. First, for the grete bondage and thraldam off syn, /57r/ *Quia qui facit peccatum, servus est peccati*; ‘For he þat doethe syn, he is bonde servawnt to syn,’ *Iohannis 8 et Luce 4*.

[HR] Bi þis woman of Chanane [is] vndirstonde euery synfull soule. For as long as þe soule ys infecte with dedely synne, so long is the

¹ The Sarum (Salisbury) missal was the most widely used in England in the fifteenth century. It was edited by J. Wickham Legg, *The Sarum Missal* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916).

² I should stress that these substantive variants represent only a fraction of the whole.

soule sogett to the devell. For he ledith it from syn to syn where þat he wolde, as seynt Austeyn vpon þe gospell declareth: 'Like as a man ledith a best whan he hathe hym tyed with a lyne or a cheyne, right so hathe þe devell power over a synner.

Then this woman of Chanane, synfull mans soule, must goo oute from þe cuntreis of syn and forsake syn for iij causes. First for the grete thraldam and bondship of syn, *quia qui facit peccatum, seruus est peccati*; 'For he þat dothe synne, he is bounde and a seruaunte to syn, Luce 4° and Iohannis 8°. And as ofte as man synneth, so oft he dothe omage to þe devell.

[OLGD] Be this woman of Canane is vnderstonde every synfull (*om. D*) sowle (creature *G*) that is infecte wythe dedely synne. So long is the sowle soget to the devyll, and he ledythe it frome synne to synne (one synne to another *LGD*), then this woman of Canane, þat is synfull mans sowle, muste go owte from the cuntres of Tyry and Sydony, þat is to sey, frome synne that he or sche hathe ben in, and forsake it [for certeyne grete cawsys *LGD, om. O*].

The firste (fyrst cawse whi þat a man muste forsake synne *LGD*) is for the thraldome and bondage of synne /271v/ *quia qui facit peccatum, seruus est peccati*; 'For he that doþe synne is seruaunt and bonde to synne,' *Luce iij° et Iohannis octauo*; and as often as a man dothe synne, so often he dothe homage (omage and servyce *LGD*) to þe devyll.

2.

[C] The secunde cawse is for the povert off syn, for lyche as a theffe spoylethe and robbythe a man off hys goodys, so syn spoylethe the sawle and makethe hym pore off the blys off heven and privethe hym off hys goodis naturall, as it is figured in the gospell off Sent Luce, *De filio prodigo*.

[HR] The second cause whi man must forsake his synnes ys for þe grete povert of syn. For like as þe thefe spoyles a man and robbith hym of his goodes, so synne spoyleth the soule and makith hym pore of [þe] blisse of heven and pryveth hym of all his goodis naturall, as of byrth, /64v/ kynred, bewte, strenght, witt and wisdam. All þese it maketh pore, nedy and febyll as it is well figured *de filio prodigo*, that viciously wastid all his goodis by lecherous lyving, Luce XV.

[OLGD] The secunde cawse whi þat a man muste forsake synne is for þe grete povert of synne. For lyke as a thefe spoilythe and robbythe a

man of his goodis, ry3t so synne spoylythe and robberyth [mans sowle] and makethe [it] pore (bare and pore GD) of the blys of heven, and depryvithe it of all his good dedys. Be these menys þe devyll temptiþe moche pepyll. And tho that scholde (*om.* LGD) be prowde of burthe, of bewtye, of strengthe, of wyt or of wysdome, to be prowde of eny [of] þese 3iftis, it cawsithe þe synful sowlys to be pore, nedy and febyll of all grace tyll he cum to better state of good lyvyng, as it is fygurde, *De filio prodigo*, þat viciously wastid all his gooddys be lecherus lyvyng.

3.

[C] Thirdlye, synfull mans sawle must goone from the cunctres off syn for the grete infirmite off syn, as it is figoured, *Regem 5*, howe Naaman þat fowle lepyr went owte off the cuncture unto the kyng off Israel to bee cured off hys innfirmite. By this lepyr Naaman is understonde every synner þat horribele stynkethe in the sygh3t off God, he must goone owte from the lothelye londe off dedly syn and cum to the kyng off Israel, þat is to owre soffereyn Lorde God off blys þat he mey cure hym off hys sekene off dedly syn.

[HR] The third, synfull mans soule must goo oute from þe cuntreis of syn and forsake synne for þe grete infirmite and sikene [of synne], as it is writte, *Regum 5°*, howe Naaman, [þat foule lepire, went owt of hys owen cuncture vnto þe kyngdome of Israel for to be cured of hys infirmite. By þis lepire Naaman] is vnderstonde euery synne[re þat] horryble stinkeþ in the syght of God. So then þe synfull man must go from the lothely londe of dedely synne by confessions and contricion and then cum to the kyng of Israel, þat is to sey, oure souereyn Lord God, king of Blisse, that he may cure hym of his sikene of lepre of dedely synne. For þese iij causes must synfull man is soule goo owte from þe countrey of syn, as þe woman of Chanane did.

[OLGD] The therde cawse whi þat a man schall forsake synne is for þe grete hurt and dyvers diseses of the sekene of synne, as it is wreton, *quinto Regum*, how /272r/ Naaman that fowle leper went owte of his cuncture vnto þe kyng of Israell to be made hole of his grete sekene. Be this leper (fowle leper GD) is vnderstonde every synner þe whiche infirmite of the sekene of synne cawsithe þe sowle to stynke in þe sy3te of God, þe whiche is fowle disfygurde when it is chargyd wythe synne. And if he wyll be hole he muste go owte of þe cuncture of dedely synne be confescion and contriscion, and so cum to þe kyng of Israell, þat is to sey, þe kyng of blys þe whiche is [the]

connyngeste leche (leche of all þe worlde LGD), for he helythe every synfull sowle of all (all maner LGD) infirmyte and diseses (sekenes of synne G). For man is never so redy to schewe to þis blyssed Lorde þe sekenes of synne by þe mene (menys GD) of confescion and contriscion as he is (but he is as LGD) redy to 3ife þe salue of his swete mercy and eternal saluacion. And therefore for [LGD, *om.* O] these thre cawses ow3te every synfull creature þat hathe a seke sowle be synne to go owte of þe cuntre of synne as þe woman of Canane dyd.

In observing the differences between the various versions it is immediately apparent that both HR and OLGD offer expanded, more elaborate versions of the text preserved in C. In the first block, for example, although all three versions illustrate the first reason with a quotation from the gospel of St. John (8: 34), C lacks the lengthy preamble which, it must be supposed, was supplied by the compiler of the archetype and thus transmitted to the preacher responsible for the OLGD version.¹ The same is true of blocks two and three, to which one may add the observation that as HR expanded on C, so OLGD expanded on HR. In the course of development, vernacular sermons have a tendency to increase in size rather than shrink.²

As to the second question, it is also apparent that the text in O is closer to the intermediate version represented by HR (from which it must, in some way, derive) than L or G or D. For example, in line 21, O reads *from synne to synne* (as HR, line 8) while LGD provide a different expression, one which two scribes are unlikely to have

¹ The reference to Luke 4 is hard to account for, since there is no similar statement anywhere in that chapter. However, verses 31 ff. do record the casting out of a devil, and some confusion may have arisen in the mind of the compiler as a result.

² Even though it can be shown that such texts were the frequent object of 'editing' by medieval preachers – length was often a criterion in determining the shape of a sermon – sermon writers were generally prone to loquacity. Indeed, our sermon compiler seems to have been keenly aware of the adverse effects of long-windedness, as his remark in the sermon for Trinity 18 (on the Decalogue) would suggest: MS O, fol. 140v: *Now þen, if we scholde declare vnto 3ow þe commawndementis of God as þei were 3even to the pepyll in the Old Testament, it scholde be tediys vnto 3ow and to long tariyng. Therefore I purpose to do after þe philosophirs cowncell, as I seyde: þe schorttist wey is beeste.*

arrived at independently.¹ Again, the LGD archetype has expanded the text at line 25 while HR (line 13) and O are silent. In line 45 O, like HR (line 37) is content with *makethe it pore* while GD form a doublet *pore and bare*. More extensive quotation of text and variants would reveal a marked tendency for L and G to agree with each other against O. L and G must therefore be seen as representing a second line of descent in the transmission of the text, O. The position of D in the stemma is unclear, but there is enough evidence here to show that its text deviates, too, from that in O.

Finally, within the OLGD group, in places not capable of allowing comparison with either C or HR (because only OLGD preserve the text thus), it is clear that LGD (or a combination of these) have a tendency to continue the process of expansion – lines 75, 80-81, 81-82, 85 – indicating that their archetype was at a further remove from the putative original than was that of O. It is for this reason that the Bodleian manuscript has been selected as base manuscript.

The subject of scribal contributions to medieval texts in the course of their transmission has given rise to some debate in recent years, and large claims have been made for their importance. Thus, Barry Windeatt, editor of *Troilus and Criseyde*, asserts that ‘the behaviour of the scribes in manuscripts of Chaucer’s work offers line-by-line a contemporary response to his poetry... Their reactions to the poetry they are transcribing are their equivalent of literary analysis in that they can reveal to us exactly what the scribes found difficult and unusual in Chaucer’s work.’² In similar vein, Derek Pearsall has said of scribes, whom he characterises as ‘the first literary critics’, that they ‘provide a wealth of insight into a contemporary or near contemporary reading of a text (and therefore into the text itself), into the tastes of the age and the expectations of readers.’³ For both of

¹ It is important to distinguish between significant error, on the one hand (that is to say, error that two scribes are unlikely to commit independently), and routine corruptions which a succession of scribes might well arrive at independently.

² Barry Windeatt, “The Scribes as Chaucer’s Early Critics”, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 1 (1979), 119-41, at 121.

³ Derek Pearsall, “Editing Medieval Texts: Some Developments and Some Problems”, in Jerome J. McGann, ed., *Textual Criticism and Literary Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 103.

these critics, who are also editors, the value of scribal variation is to be assessed in broad literary-historical terms; it is the province of the literary historian. For the *editor* of Chaucer (or of any other writer), its value must, however, seem dubious, as Windeatt readily acknowledges.¹

These arguments have, predictably perhaps, been vigorously countered by yet another prominent editor of difficult, sophisticated texts, in these terms: 'To think of a manuscript as 'good' in that it provides evidence of 'how the poem was first read' is not a primarily editorial consideration; it might be of interest to literary historians if the evidence at least for Middle English were not almost invariably jejune.'² Whatever the merits of the case made by Windeatt and Pearsall, and how readily one would wish to dismiss the scribal involvement with Chaucer and Langland as 'jejune', it is noticeable that many of the scribal procedures enumerated by Windeatt in his discussion of Chaucer, an evidently 'difficult' writer, are mirrored by the sermon evidence I wish to present. Such similarity of approach to texts of very different complexity, making widely disparate demands on scribes, suggests that these latter may not always be the creative artists they are said to be.

In what follows I have attempted to organise the evidence for scribal reactions to copy text in the sermons in those categories which have been postulated by Windeatt.³ I make the tacit assumption that

¹ 'For both poet and editor any scribal influence on the text is by definition unwanted [...], *art.cit.* p. 120.

² George Kane, "'Good' and 'Bad' Manuscripts: Texts and Critics", in his collected essays, *Chaucer and Langland: Historical and Textual Approaches* (London: Athlone Press, 1989), pp. 206-13, at p. 208. Kane is quoting Barry Windeatt, ed., *Geoffrey Chaucer: Troilus and Criseyde* (London and New York: Longman, 1984), p. 33.

³ His argument ranges widely, as the following quotations from his article indicate: 'scribal re-writing reflects a sense of what is out of the ordinary and needs to made "more normal"' (p. 121); 'the mss provide very widespread evidence for verbal substitution by the scribes, substitutions which reflect their sense of the difficulty and unusualness of the diction in their exemplar' (p. 125): a common feature of scribal response is to 'bring out more explicitly the sense of the passages' being transcribed (p. 132).

manuscript O in the OLGD group preserves a text closer to the now lost archetype than do any of the others, although I am aware that the charge of deliberate interference levelled at LG and/or D can also, if less often, be laid at the door of O. At bottom, this difference is of less importance than might at first appear: all four manuscripts are more or less corrupt, and since scribal variation, unconscious or deliberate, is, on occasions, by its very nature random and unpredictable, no neat pattern of error or substitution can be established.

The examples that follow are intended to illustrate the different ways in which scribes sought to make their texts more accessible to the reader, more immediately comprehensible. They have been arranged in a number of specific categories, highlighting the importance of three main areas of ‘compositional’ involvement: lexis, syntax and what I will call hypercorrection, a properly lexical concern, but one which deserves special treatment, as I hope to show. Each category has been given ample illustration in order to suggest that the phenomena they exemplify are characteristic and representative of scribal responses to textual copying, and not random and unsystematic idiosyncracies. In almost all cases – I grant that some doubt may persist in a small number of instances – the discrepancy between what the scribe read, and then subsequently wrote, can only be explained by postulating a conscious, deliberate departure from copy; it is, in the main, inconceivable that these ‘corruptions’, if they may so be termed, should have arisen through the regular processes of faithfully reproducing what was found in the exemplar.¹

I will begin with what I call ‘lexical substitution’, a practice which suggests that scribes were anxious to suppress certain terms in favour of others which, presumably, were felt to be more readily and immediately understandable:

¹ Windeatt, *art cit.* p. 119, objects to the use of ‘technical vocabulary of editing’ which is made up of ‘metaphors of moral degeneration.’ Compare Pearsall, *art. cit.* p. 103: ‘it is interesting to observe how the language of moral approbation and disapprobation hangs around textual criticism and to speculate on the influence it may have on editorial attitude.’

A. Lexical substitution¹

1. O, 202^Y. Nativity : the seke (sick man) þen is more comforted and *alleyved* of his sekenes and peyne [ly3ttened LG]
2. O, 215^Y. Octave of the Epiphany: For the commyng of this blissed Lord confermyd all þere actis, þe whiche þei *exsecutyd* in þe cawse of God [had done LG]
3. O, 222^U. Octave Two of the Epiphany: And thus be þis *evydens* [exsampyls G]
4. O, 59^Y. Third Sunday after Trinity: First I sey, and (if) a man scholde grownde hym *fectually* in good lyvyng [perfytely L, stedfastly G]
5. O, 61^Y. Third Sunday after Trinity: a man schall fynde full few þat wil *peyse* that vertues lyvyng in there mynde [remembyr LG].²
6. O, 67^Y. Fourth Sunday after Trinity: Who schall *stye* vp into the hyll [ascende LG]
7. O, 71^U. Fifth Sunday after Trinity: And for *encheson* þat þe fende wold maryr hyr [becawse LG]
8. O, 72^Y. Fifth Sunday after Trinity: soche pepyll fallythe *presisely* into bacbityng and slawnderyng [comenly LG]
9. O, 74^U. Fifth Sunday after Trinity: Who is þat that schall dismay 3ow or disese 3ow if 3e be *sewars* or lovers of goodnes? [followers LG].
10. O, 93^U. Ninth Sunday after Trinity: For then it schall be seyde to vs, and we schall not *astert* it: *Redde rationem, et cetera*; ‘3elde rekenyng of thi balischepe’³ [askape L].

¹ For the sake of coherence, the examples are enumerated continuously, not according to category. Unless otherwise stated, the text is quoted from O, the relevant item appearing in italics; the corresponding form, to which it is to be compared, is given in square brackets, together with the sigil(s) of the manuscript(s) concerned. Scribal corrections and additions to O are not indicated in these extracts. Words which may prove to be difficult to the reader are given their modern English counterparts in brackets.

² According to MED, *Middle English Dictionary*, ed., Hans Kurath, Sherman Kuhn, et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952-2002), *peyse* is overwhelmingly poetic in usage.

³ Luke 16: 2.

In this first category, the substitution of formal by less formal terminology is evident: in ex. 1 (*alleyved* by *ly3ttened*); ex. 2 (*exsecutyd* by *had done*) and ex. 4 (*fectually* by *perfytely*). Elsewhere, a desire to remove terms considered somewhat old-fashioned may plausibly be suggested: ex. 6 (*ascende* for *stye*) and ex. 7 (*becawse* for *encheson*). An extension of this last observation may be illustrated in ex. 5 where *peyse*, (< OF *peser*), which means ‘to weigh, to measure’ as applied to ‘non-material things’, may be rendered in Mod. English as ‘consider’, perhaps, but not (directly) ‘remember’ which remains a possible consequence of the original action. Since the *Oxford English Dictionary* records only one occurrence of this verb carrying this sense before the sixteenth century,¹ it may be that the scribe encountered difficulty with the word and, in his uncertainty, hazarded an approximation.

B. Lexical expansion

If lexical substitution of this type may be said to reflect a desire on the part of scribes to make texts more accessible and transparent, the related phenomenon of what I wish to call ‘lexical expansion’, or ‘addition’, may point equally to a conviction among scribes that some elements, at least, of the religious discourse were worthy of special emphasis. As remarked earlier, successive sermon compilers tended to expand their copy texts, and an evident resolve to introduce emphasis is one illustration of the process. Examples abound: where, in the sermon *Pro Die Cinerum*, on the subject of the benefits of confession, we read that the soul shall be *clene purged frome all maner of synne* (O, 255v), the corresponding section in G reads *purged and clenysyd from all maner fowle fylþi spottis of synne*. Similarly, in the sermon for the fifth Sunday after Easter, we are told that the true servant of Christ is one who shall *kepe hymselfe vndefowled frome this worlde* (O, 20r), a formulation which is expanded in L to *vndefowlyd from all fowle fylthy spottis of synne in this worlde*. Since this very same

¹ OED, s.v. *peise*, 1b.

formulation appears elsewhere in the recension represented by ms O,¹ it is reasonable to suppose that the association of *synne* with the notion of *spottis* is a feature of one sermon writer's rhetorical *wordhord*, and that, in his mind, the concept of sin routinely suggests the concept of disease. Thus it may be that certain terms encountered in the copy text were capable of triggering in the mind of the scribes an association of ideas which found expression in a formulaic-like sequence, such as the one discussed here.²

Deliberate expansion of the base text may equally result from the scribal propensity to 'gloss' terms which were considered difficult. Such is the interpretation I would give to the following passage:

11. O, 165^v-66^f. Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Trinity: Seynt Mathew the euuangelist tellythe in the gospell of þis day how that owre sovereyne sauowre Ihesu, when he was among a grete multitude of pepyll, there came to hym a prince and worschepid hym and seyde: *Domine, filia mea modo defuncta est, sed veni, impone manum tuam super eam, et uiuet*; 'Lorde, my dow3ter is now dede, but com thu and put thyne honde on hyr and sche schal lyffe.' And Ihesus rosse and sued hym. And loo, a woman that *sufferd the flix or rynnyng of blood (mulier quae sanguinis fluxum patiebatur* Vulg.; *had suffyrde a grete disese* G) twelue 3ere ny3hed behynde owre Lorde and towchid þe hem of his clothis. For sche seyde witheyn hyrselfe, 'If I my3te towche only þe clothis of hym, I schall be saffe.' And Ihesus turned hym, and saw hyr, and seyde: *Confide filia, fides tua te saluam fecit*; 'Dow3ter, haue þu trest, thi feythe hathe made þe saffe.' And the woman was made [hol]e [saffe O] fro þat owre.

The passage is a translation of Matt. 9: 18-22, the gospel reading for Trinity 24, and it is with this that the sermon begins. In the constitution of his text, the compiler made the unusual move of drawing on a pre-existing English translation of the biblical text – that

¹ fol. 181r: *It is grete wisdom for þe to cast away the derke and mystye spottis of synne* (Advent 1); fol. 291r: *the blode of Criste hathe clenysd owre consciens from þe fowle spottis of synne* (Passion Sunday); one could add this additional example from ms G, the only ms in the group to conserve the Easter sermon in which it is found (G, p. 258): *remember vs well rownde abowte whedyr þere be eny maner of fowle fylþi spotis of synne reynnyng in þi sowle*.

² Windeatt observes 'a marked tendency in the scribes to think in pairs of related ideas', *art. cit.* p. 131.

known as the Later Version of the so-called Wycliffite Bible [WLV] – as comparison with that latter text makes abundantly clear:

Whiles that Jhesus spak thes thingis to hem, lo! a prince cam, and worschipide hym, and seide, Lord, my douzter is now deed; but come thou, and putte thin hond on hir, and she schal lyue. And Jhesus roos, and hise disciplis, and sueden hym. And lo! a womman, that hadde the blodi flux twelue zere, neizede bihynde, and touchide the hem of his cloth. For sche seide with ynne hir self, 3if Y touche oonli the cloth of hym, Y schal be saaf. And Jhesus turnede, and say hir, and seide, Douztir, haue thou trist; thi feith hath maad thee saaf. And the womman was hool fro that our.¹

The one detail in the passage which calls for comment is the description of the woman suffering from the *flix*. In the Vulgate one reads *mulier quae sanguinis fluxum patiebatur* (Matt. 9: 20), to which the WLV *woman that hadde the blodi flux* corresponds exactly. In copying the Wycliffite text, the scribe of O (or one of his predecessors) saw fit to explicate the term *flix* by adding *or rynnynge*, an addition which has no justification either in the biblical text or in the OLGD original. What is more, the formulation offered by the recension represented by MS G at this point – *suffyrde a grete disese* – strongly suggests that the term was far from common, inducing one normally alert and creative (but here confused) scribe to abandon his copy altogether in favour of the merest of generalisations.

Imagination of a different sort lies behind the following addition, made in the G recension, to the gospel text which recounts the coming of the Magi (Matt. 2: 1-11):

12. 0, 212^f: ...He [Herod] calde vnto hym þese thre kyngis [kyngis of Colen G].

¹ Josiah Forshall and Frederick Madden, edd., *The Holy Bible . . . made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and his Followers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1850), rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1981. The WLV text of the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles was issued separately by Oxford University Press in 1879 (one volume) under the title *The New Testament in English according to the version by John Wycliffe . . . and revised by John Purvey, with an introduction by W. W. Skeat*. The punctuation of the 1850 edition has been retained here.

There is, of course, no textual justification for the inclusion of the reference to the town of Cologne, since the story of the Magi's journey to that part of the world (after their presentation of gifts at Bethlehem) is thoroughly medieval: the English versions all derive from the *Historia Trium Regum*, composed by John of Hildesheim in the second half of the fourteenth century.¹ To judge from the number of surviving English versions, the *Historia* was a popular text, and our scribe has allowed his literary predilections to take precedence over the exigencies of his professional calling.

The final set of examples under the general rubric of lexical expansion illustrate the tendency among scribes to form word pairs through the addition of an appropriate element absent from copy. The following are entirely representative:

C. Formation of doublets

13. O, 209^v. Nativity: [Adam] was chasyd and drevyn owte of þat *precius* place of paradise [precious and pleasaunt LG]
14. O, 202^f. Nativity: For lyke as the presens of almyȝti God be influent grace makythe vs all to do well in so moche as we may *profyt* in good werkis [inreze and profytt L, inreze G]
15. O, 206^f. Circumcision: [...] we be bownde be the ordynaunce of holy chirche to haue in *worschipe* þe viij day of other seyntis [...] [reverence and worchyppe L, worchype and reverence G]
16. O, 208^f. Circumcision: That is to sey, he scholde haue cause to cut away frome hym the *luste* of his flessche [lust and lykyng of his fowle flessche G]
17. O, 256^f. Ash Wednesday: Confession is a lawfull declaracion of synne before a preste that hathe *cure* of hys sowle [cure and charge L, charge and cure G].

Although it is theoretically possible to explain these discrepancies between O and the other manuscript witnesses as due to omission on the part of O, it is inherently much more probable that the later

¹ For recent discussion see Frank Schaer, ed., *The Three Kings of Cologne*, Middle English Texts 31 (Heidelberg: Winter, 2000).

recension, represented by LG, reflects the familiar scribal habit of expanding the text in order to make its message more transparent. On a number of occasions such additions result in alliterating word pairs: *precius and plesaunt; lust and lykyng; cure and charge*, the last two of which occur so frequently that they may be seen as stereotyped commonplaces.

D. Syntactical considerations

The second major manifestation of scribal involvement in the process of composition arises with word-order patterns. Some scribes, it would seem, made deliberate attempts to 'normalise' certain sequences so as to make them conform to the standard SVO order (subject-verb-object). It is only in accepting this premiss that the following modifications can be accounted for:

18. O, 50^f. First Sunday after Trinity: *Dyvers geftis there ben* that þe Holy Goste 3evithe [There be dyverse 3yftis [...] LG]
19. O, 218^f. Second Octave of Epiphany: Many frendys there be [...] [There be many men L]
20. O, 68^v. Fourth Sunday after Trinity: [...] and owte of þe syde of þis ymage þere lassched owte *bloode grete plente* [grete plente of bloode LG].
21. O, 42^f. Trinity Sunday: And *then, thiselfe doyng* all þe goodnesse and myrakyls to þine owne sowle, þen may I sey [when þu haste done L].

Example 21 reveals the reaction of a scribe who, in seeking to impose standard word order, is also prepared to modify grammatical categories: the subordinate clause formed by the use of the present participle is suppressed in favour of a simpler indicative within a temporal construction. As such, it illustrates a capacity for re-writing copy which goes beyond mere lexical substitution or word-order re-arrangement. Among further instances of this phenomenon are the following:

22. O, 261^v. Ash Wednesday: But when he *wepythe for his synnes and is sorowful* for them, anon þat mercifull Lord cummethe to hym as a tender nors (nurse) [wakiþe and weþithe for his synnys and makethe grete sorow3e in his herte G]

23. O, 212^r. Epiphany: Anon Herode *gaderd* [Then anone kyng Herode commawndyd to gader G].
24. O, 213^v. Epiphany: be þe plentefull schedyng of his pure blood [...] wherby we were *wasschyd and made clene* [clene wasschyn and made saffe G].

In ex. 22, a scribe of the G recension has decided to increase the emotional appeal of the benefits of contrition by expanding *wepythe* into *wakibe and wepithē*, then by transforming a somewhat neutral *is sorowful* into a considerably more forceful *makethe grete sorowze in his herte*. In ex. 24 the scribe, confronted with *wasschyd and made clene*, rearranges skilfully by treating *clene* in the exemplar, not as an adjective but as an adverb (*clene wasschen*), and then by finding a suitable near synonym (*saffe*) for adjectival *clene* in order to complete the required sense.

Concern for the syntactical arrangement of copy text reveals itself equally in the pleonastic use of pronouns, motivated, it would seem, by the same general desire to render the text immediately and unambiguously comprehensible. Again, instances of this abound. Among those I have noted are the following:

25. O, 55^r. Second Sunday after Trinity: he that lovithe not his brother *dwellythe* in dethe [he dwellythe LG]
26. O, 78^v. Sixth Sunday after Trinity: Qui autem dixerit fratri suo Racha, reus erit consilio (Matth. 5: 22). For certen, 'He that seythe to his brother Racha, that is a worde of skorne, *schall* be gilty of cowncell' [he schall G].
27. O, 178^v. First Sunday in Advent. Another tyme he came to by (redeem) man, what tyme he cam and toke flessche and bloode of þe glorius virgyn our Lady, and after that *bow3te* man with his precius pascion [...] [he bow3te D].
28. O, 192^{rv}. Third Sunday in Advent. So he that hathe not truw feythe to his good Lord *is* a3enste his God, as it is wreton in the goppell of Luke where Criste seythe thus: Qui non est mecum, aduersum me est; 'He that is not withe me,' þat is to sey, he that is not in very stedfaste beleve '*is* a3enste me.' [he is LD].

29. O, 284^f. Fourth Sunday in Lent [...] a glorijs feste [...] in þe whiche feste were fede wythe v lovys (loaves) and ij fyssches v thowsande pepyll wibeowte (not counting) women and childerne; and the levying that was lefte *was xii skeppys replete and fulfilled* [there was D, fillyd G].

It may be argued that in cases such as these, the subject was perceived to be sufficiently distant from its main verb to require repetition at an appropriate place; in ex. 26 and 28, it is the inclusion of a parenthetical phrase which contributes to this perception.

I conclude this rapid survey of deliberate scribal modification of copy text by drawing attention to a somewhat unexpected phenomenon, one that resists easy classification, in contradistinction to the other categories examined above. It may, rather loosely, be termed ‘hypercorrection’ because it consists in introducing changes – which constitute errors – into copy text on the basis of a faulty analysis of Latin quotations. In this sermon cycle, Latin quotations, biblical or otherwise, are invariably translated, and it is in these translations that the corruptions occasionally occur. The following examples may serve as illustrations:

E. Hypercorrection

30. L, 127^v. Passion Sunday: Nonne *bene dicimus* nos quia Samaritanus es tu; ‘Whedyr *we schall not blis* becawse þu arte a Samaritane (and haste a devyll witheyn the.) [John. 8: 48].
31. O, 68^v. Fourth Sunday after Trinity: O Tene quod habes, id est, misericordiam et iusticiam, ne alius accipiat coronam tuam [*coronam vite*, tuam *canc.* L]; ‘Hold,’ he seythe, ‘that þu hast, þat is to sey, þi mercy and thi ry3twysnes þat non other take from the þe *crowne of lyfe*. [Apoc. 3 :11 [...] *coronam tuam*]
32. O, 106^{rv}, G. Eleventh Sunday after Trinity: *Venite ad me omnes qui laboratis, et honorati* (Vulg.: *onerati*) *estis* (*et ego reficiam vos*). ‘Come to me all 3e that hathe labored’ in þis comberus worlde ‘and now 3e *schall be sanctified* and I

schall refressche 3ow' [and [...] sanctified *om.* L; satisfied G]. [Matt. 11: 28.]

Example 30 shows a barely comprehensible sequence in English, resulting from a misinterpretation of the Latin which precedes it. Ex. 31 is a modification of copy text based on an apparently correct analysis of the discrepancy between English and Latin. Finally, ex. 32 preserves two distinct, though related errors, one probably involuntary, the other not, where the translation is brought into line with a faulty Latin quotation. All three may be interpreted as instances of hypercorrection, and each invites further scrutiny.

In ex. 30, the sequence *whedyr we schall not blis* may be rendered in Mod. English by 'shall we not give praise [...]' (because you are a Samaritan?) which, detached from its context, may be said to convey sense of some sort: being a Samaritan is a praiseworthy condition. But the Jews who address these words to Christ in the gospel of John look upon Samaritans as reprehensible; they finish their question with the words *et daemonium habes!* What the phrase actually means is 'Do not we say well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?'¹ It seems only reasonable to assume that, at an earlier, uncorrupted or less corrupted stage in the transmission of the text, the proposed translation rendered the Latin accurately. That it now reads *shall not blis* is likely to be the result of a scribal correction on the erroneous assumption that the sequence *bene dicimus* (written as one word in the manuscript) expresses the notion of praise or benediction rather than that of correctness.²

The two final examples appear to be more straightforward. Ex. 32 shows the replacement, in MS L, of the phrase *coronam tuam*, present in the exemplar, by *coronam vite*. This replacement evidently results from the scribe's perception that *coronam tuam* does not correspond

¹ This is the so-called Douay-Rheims translation. The edition I have used is that published by Tan Books at Rockford, Illinois, in 1989, an unaltered reprint of the 1899 edition (Baltimore: John Murphy Co.). The Revised Standard Version has 'Are we not right in saying [...]?' The French translation prepared by Emile Osty, et al (Paris: éd. du Seuil, 1973) reads 'N'avons nous pas raison de dire [...]?'

² It is true that the Latin forms *bene dicere* and *benedicere* (both are current) are ambiguous.

with the posited translation, *crowne of lyfe*. Thus, the offending item, *tuam*, is crossed through and replaced by *vite*, despite the fact that the biblical text reads *coronam tuam*, and that the original (if so it is) translation is inaccurate. Had the scribe acted with full knowledge of the textual situation, he would have modified the English, not the Latin.

The last example presents a situation in which two separate stages in the corruption may be said to have occurred. In the first instance it is necessary to posit scribal error over *onerati*, presumed to have been present in the copy text, and its replacement by the form *honorati*, close to the other term both phonetically and orthographically, and evidently more common: of the two, it is the ‘easier’ term.¹ At some undetermined subsequent point, a diligent scribe intervened so as to make the translation conform to what was mistakenly taken to be an accurate biblical quotation. Only in this way, it seems, can the presence of the erroneous *sanctified* be satisfactorily explained.

To sum up: on the basis of the evidence collected here, one would have to conclude that notions of textual stability associated with print culture simply have no place in assessing the work of medieval scribes. Fallible though they were, falling into routine, unintentional error for a variety of reasons and in a variety of textual situations, they were also, by fits and starts, actively involved in the process of textual transmission. If asked, they would probably defend their authorial tendencies on the grounds of clarity, what we today might term ‘reader friendliness.’ However, to those whose business it is to produce reliable modern editions of what medieval authors actually wrote, their efforts constitute a significant obstacle in the realisation of an already delicate task.

¹ Textual criticism would invoke the principle of *difficilior lectio* here: the more difficult the term, the more likely it is to have formed part of the original reading. For interesting discussion of this principle, together with some misgivings about its application, see Nicholas Jacobs, “Some Creative Misreadings in Le Bone Florence of Rome: An Experiment in Textual Criticism” in Edward D. Kennedy, Ronald Waldron & Joseph S. Wittig, ed., *Medieval English Studies Presented to George Kane* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1988), pp. 279-84.