Not Diane: The Risk of Error in Chaucerian Classicism

Daniel Wakelin

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Abstract.
When Chaucer, Lydgate and their contemporaries made classical characters and classical allusions an important part of English poetry, they risked confusing scribes and readers. In the vein of recent studies of scribes as readers, this article explores the mistakes of scribes in copying and comprehending those details. In addition, this article explores the ways that poets' phrasing implies awareness of those risks and seeks to mitigate them. The article thus presents the creation of the text as a coproduction between agents, which might be understood in the framework of pragmatics, the analysis of speech acts in social context. These problems in transmission, and the forestalling of them, first reveal how classicism, which later became a monumental tradition, was a risky interaction in some of its earliest phases in English poetry. Second, more briefly and tentatively, these problems suggest the risks of writing for scribal transmission in general.

In the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, poets in English increased the variety and frequency of classical allusions. From the work of Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower onwards, writers showed off their classical pretensions to support their ambitions for poetry in English. The stylistic shift, from Bevis of Hampton to Hecuba of Troy, is often told as part of a larger one from 'medieval to Renaissance in English poetry'; so A. C. Spearing once put it, noting Chaucer's innovation in invocation of the Muses (1985: e.g. 24-28). We are learning how a renewed classical taste shaped ethics, theology and genre, especially for Chaucer and Lydgate (e.g. recently Minnis 2016; Edwards 2016), but there is more to learn about the stylistic changes in this poetry. These allusions might seem like hackneyed clichés after centuries of gods and fauns, but the style is not trivial: a stylistic tic can carry connotations and have implications for a poem's theory of history, its rhetorical effect and its political prestige. Even if we resist the

monumental cultural authority of classical allusions, we need to dismantle the monument of classicism, back to its foundations, and ask how it was built. How was this powerful tradition introduced? How propagated? Spearing provokingly suggested that the course of classicism never did run smooth, and the Chaucer's innovations were not well developed in the fifteenth century (1985: 89-90). In recent years, others have found in English in that century more classical influences than Spearing's trenchant book had room for (e.g. Nolan 2004; Wakelin 2007; Galloway 2008). But Spearing is right that new styles and modes of thought are challenged at their point of transmission to other people. Scribes did not always understand these allusions: even the Muses were baffling to a scribe who mistook one, amusingly, for 'a mowse' (Manly and Rickert 1940: apparatus for B.92). These classical allusions with hindsight seem grandiose, but in their composition by poets and their first reception by scribes they were a kind of aesthetic risk.

One small incident, involving the nymph Daphne, shows the difficulties of introducing this new laureate style. The poet Geoffrey Chaucer had been the first to mention Daphne in English poetry, in passing in *Troilus and Criseyde* (III.726), so would another allusion to her in the Knight's tale be understood? There is an ekphrasis of some myths painted in the temple of Diana. So when the poet comes to Daphne's picture he takes care to distinguish her, spelled without <ph> as <Dane>, from Diana, spelled <Diane>:

> Now to the temple of Diane the chaste
> [...] Ther saw I Dane, yturned to a tree
> I mene nat the goddesse Diane
> But Penneus doghter which that highte Dane
> Ther saugh I Attheon an hert ymaked
> For vengeaunce that he saw Diane al naked
> […] Ther saugh I many another wonder storie
> (*Tales* A.2051-73)[1]

[1] For brevity and clarity, the references use short titles for the following works: *Thebes* = Lydgate, *The Siege of Thebes* = Erdmann and Ekwall ed. 1911-30; *Troy* = Lydgate, *Troy Book* = Bergen 1906-35. *Troilus* = Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde* = Windeatt ed. 1984; *Tales* = Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* = Manly and Rickert ed. 1940. As citation of *Tales* is normally to the apparatus of Manly and Rickert ed. (1940), the few quotations not from MSS or Manly and Rickert's apparatus also come from their text, despite its flaws, and line-numbering is theirs.

Despite Chaucer's protest, the scribes of this poem often muddled Daphne and Diana. The manuscript variants for *The Canterbury Tales* (Manly and Rickert 1940: apparatus for A.2062) show that in the first mention of 'Dane' seventeen scribes wrote 'dyane' instead. The scribes who made the slip, or copied it willingly from exemplars, were more familiar with Diana than with Daphne by this point in the poem; Diana had also appeared in other English poems for centuries, as early as Laȝamon's and Robert Mannyng's work. Tellingly, in the next line, no scribe gets 'Diane' wrong. This assumption that the name must be Diana's is what textual editors call banalization, where scribes revert to more familiar wording than the poet had used (Kane 1960: 132-133). Disasters like this befall 'Dane' in copies of *Troilus and Criseyde* too (Windeatt 1984: apparatus on III.726). The scribes cannot comprehend this allusion, new and confusingly looking like another.

Chaucer foresees the problem, so he tries to forestall it. He explains 'I mene nat the goddesse Diane' and puts the contrastive names in rhyming position which might draw attention to them. It's often noted that rhyme can awaken linguistic awareness to the distinctions between words (Stewart 2009: 42). The trick didn't work. Eight scribes repeat the wrong name 'dyane' anyway at the second, rhyming mention of 'Dane'; one even gives the odd unrhyming 'Dade' here (Manly and Rickert 1940: apparatus for A.2064). For another scribe, the rhyme not only failed to distinguish the names; the lookalikes 'Diane' and 'Dane' made him skip a line, and the result makes no sense:

> There saugh I dyane turned to a tre
> But penneus doughter which that hight dane
> (BL, MS Egerton 2726, fol. 26v)[2]

It is ironic that in these lines many scribes make the error which Chaucer tells them to avoid, and that the rhyme which might prevent the error makes them err more. But Chaucer can have the last laugh at this irony. For this scribe's collaborator was able to spot the missing line and add it in the margin: 'I mene nat þe goddesse Dyane' (BL, MS Egerton 2726, fol. 26v). Another copy made directly from this manuscript passes on the correct version (New Haven, Beinecke Library, MS Takamiya 24, fol. 25v). Likewise,

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[2] References to MSS use the following abbreviations: BL = London, British Library; BodL = Oxford, Bodleian Library; HEHL = San Marino, Huntington Library; PML = New York, Pierpont Morgan Library. All quotations from MSS expand abbreviations silently.

another scribe who had once repeated 'Diane' in both rhymes was able to delete it and distinguish the names again:

> Ther saugh I Dane yturned vnto a tre
> I mene not the goddesse Diane
> But Penneus doughtir which þat hight ~~Diane~~ Dane
> (BodL, MS Bodley 414, p. 50; Figure 1)

The problems with copying the reference to Daphne reveal how risky it was to introduce these allusions into English poetry; but Chaucer's nervous asseveration ('I mene') and the scribes' careful checks together suggest that people recognized those risks.

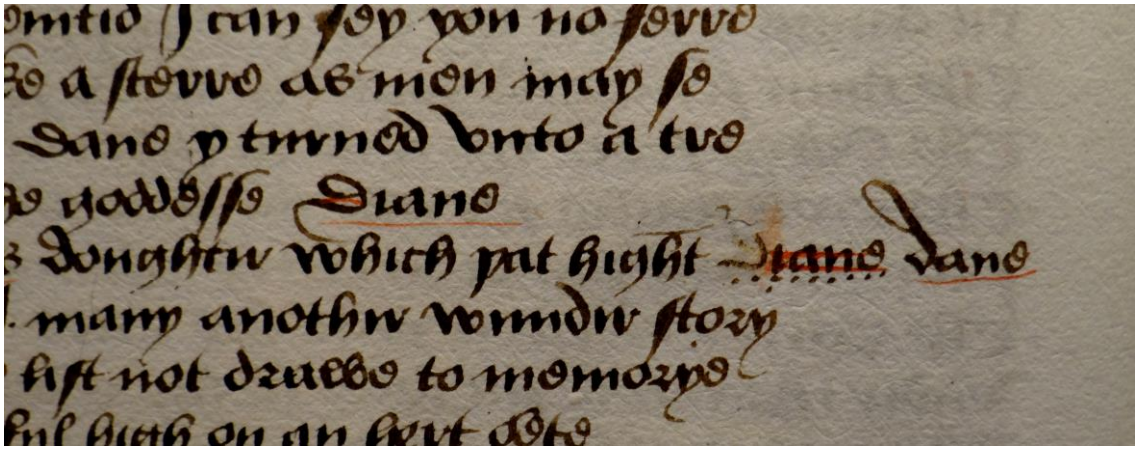

Figure 1. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 414, p. 50 (detail). Photograph by Daniel Wakelin, courtesy of the Bodleian Library.

An example like this helps to pin down a change as diffuse as a new style – and to humanize what can seem a tectonic shift in 'period'. It can be hard to understand how new elements develop in literary traditions. How can a poet 'make it new' *and* make it be understood or approved of? There's a difference between 'ahead of the curve' and 'off at a tangent'. Any writer who seeks to innovate takes such risks. Patricia Claire Ingham notes that something becomes describable as new, the start of a tradition, only when it is repeated and shared; otherwise it is a one-off oddity (2015: 2). The inventiveness of *Pearl* has no known followers; but Chaucer's classicism starts a tradition that lasts for nearly four centuries. So how did this work? An historical shift – a new character named, a novel style of allusion – is easier to comprehend if we see it

as a set of interactions or transactions between the people who compose those words and the scribes who receive and copy them. As Rita Felski has noted, we might understand the power of a text – or a style or other feature of an artwork – by 'patient piecing together' of the 'lines of translation, negotiation, and influence', as a text is forged as 'a coproduction between actors' (Felski 2015: 12).

These transactions are fraught with the danger of misunderstanding which inhere in all social interactions and speech acts. The concept of risk might help here. *Risk* is not a word used in Middle English or much in Middle French (*OED*, *risk*), but fifteenth-century English culture had lots to say, in homely proverbs, about the danger of trusting others (e.g. Orme 2013: § 4, nos 37, 44, 48, 57). And authors were notably alter to the political risks of addressing patrons on touchy topics and found ways of mitigating those risks in their writing (Lawton 1987). Risk also captures the process of composing words which one then entrusts to others to copy. Sociologists have seen risk as increasing with the division of roles in modern labour (Stompka 1999: 17, 39), and we might draw loose analogies with the division of labour between the author's role and the scribe's in manuscript culture. One person's agency always exists in balance, conflict or negotiation with the agency of others – as in conversation, of two interlocutors, or in composing and copying, the poet's with the copyist's. An heuristic for understanding these interactions would be, as Felski has suggested (2015: 166-172), actor-network theory. That would be fruitful, but as the interactions (in this article) are all utterances and their comprehension, also germane is pragmatics, the philosophy of language in use. In speech acts, successful communication depends in part on the listener or reader – the co-operative principle – and so every utterance risks 'misfire' – a failure of take-up or comprehension (Levinson 1983: 101, 229-230). Speakers and listeners draw on presuppositions, pace out new information along with the 'given', risk ambiguity, make conversational 'repair', all as they negotiate prestige through communication. (For models, see e.g. Mercer 2000: 16-59; Jaszczolt 2003: 160-90, 294-311.) In the circulation of literature in manuscripts, scribes are interlocutors who'll respond to the author's words – and then speak on behalf of the author in turn. As such, a shift in literary style – even one which supposedly heralds a momentous shift in 'period' – is at base a speech act that can have force or can risk misfire.

There are clear models for scribes' roles in this exchange – roles of comprehension, misprision or repair – in recent research into scribal copying, variance and correction. Scribes have been praised as 'professional readers' or 'authors' who package and rewrite (Kerby-Fulton and others 2012: 209; Fisher 2012: 6), and their copies have been seen as readers' responses (Reiter 1996). B. A. Windeatt's thorough study of the scribes' stylistic difficulties in copies of *Troilus and Criseyde* (1979) has seldom been imitated, but it could be extended to other works and focused on particular sorts of problems. The first half of this essay does this: it shows how the scribes of some Chaucerian poetry were misled by allusions to classical figures.

But this is not all. While it is healthy to decentre the author, the scribes' work in fostering this classical trend was shared with the poets who first wrote the words they rewrote. The second half of this essay shows how poets instigate and envisage these risks in textual transmission. One can predict risks or safeguard against them. Sociologists often note that people deal with 'uncertainty and risk' not in a naive way but with 'agency', 'actively anticipating and facing an unknown future' (Stompka 1999: 25). And while philosophers of language show how listeners and readers have an active role in parsing the words they encounter, they also show how 'The responsibility for avoiding misunderstandings also lies with the speaker', as she works out which contextual knowledge and communicative conventions the hearer will bring to bear (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 43). And just as pragmatics reminds us of the role of the composers of texts, like speakers, in these interactions, so studies of literary texts as 'actors remind us how they influence their own reception, in negotiation with other influences (Felski 2015: 162-164). Poets (I shall argue) were alert to their risky transactions with scribes and prepared for them when they experimented with classical allusions – and when they wrote for scribal transmission in general. After all, there are very few manuscripts surviving in authors' own handwriting (Beadle 1993), and it has recently been suggested that people composed orally by dictation rather than pen-in-hand (Cannon 2016b). In that case, many were – and would have known themselves to be – reliant on others to transmit their words. Can we espy implicit or indirect responses to copying in the poets' work? Did they ever design their works to suit the scribal medium to which they entrusted them? It is axiomatic that all artists

'work with' the media they employ, the possibilities and limits in material and economic respects. We talk casually of 'writing for television' or, more controversially, of 'oral formulaic composition' as something different from composing for other media. But this is not a question often asked of 'writing for manuscript'. Do Middle English authors show awareness of the challenges of their medium? This is a large question (which this essay can only gesture to). But classical allusions are one useful test-case in which to raise it.

Copying

First, more securely, and the main argument here: the work of scribal coping, error and correction teaches us about the innovativeness and dangers of classical allusions in Chaucerian poetry. These dangers emerge from a close look at passages of text where we can see scribes at work with classicizing materials, miscopying what proves hard to handle. Every textual crux is an act of communication that would repay detailed explanation – if there were time to retrace each penstroke with the thoroughness of Pierre Menard. But the scribes' miscopying is also significant in aggregate. Beyond *Troilus and Criseyde*, an overview is best obtained for *The Canterbury Tales*, for which John Manly, Edith Rickert and colleagues recorded the vast majority of variants across all the manuscripts (1940: vols V-VIII). The over eighty manuscripts of the complete work or excerpted tales all postdate Chaucer's death in 1400 and were mostly produced in the fifteenth century; as such, they reveal how his work was passed on in the first generations of its life. A tally is revealing.[3] Of 844 classical people, places or texts named in *The Tales*, for 439 or barely over half, Manly and Rickert record no textual variants; but for almost half the classical allusions, one or more scribes alters it substantively. For half of those, there are at least two variant forms of the name recorded. And for about one in ten, Manly and Rickert record five or more variants,

[3] I thank Niall Summers for compiling a database of classical proper nouns from the text and variants of Manly and Rickert (1940: vols V-VIII) and of Erdmann and Ekwall (1911-30). Tallies in this paragraph exclude the frequently repeated main characters and places *Arcite*, *Athens*, *Aurelius*, *Arviragus*, *Dorigen*, *Emelye*, *Palamon* from *Tales*, and *Adrastus*, *Argos*, *Eteocles*, *Jocasta*, *Lycurgus*, *Oedipus*, *Polynices*, and *Thebes* from *Siege* and *Greece/Greek* and *Troy/Trojan*.

widespread confusion. Daphne is in good company. To trace similar troubles in the work of other authors is less easy. The most relevant comparison would be with John Lydgate's voluminous classical content and allusions in *The Siege of Thebes*. It is presented as another tale told, by Lydgate, to Chaucer's pilgrims; and its story overlaps with that of the Knight's tale; it survives in twenty-nine manuscripts or fragments, five of them copied after *The Canterbury Tales*. Beyond the main characters, it contains 196 mentions of classical people, places or texts, of which only 58 have variants recorded by the editor who gives the largest critical apparatus. This survey might suggest that the copying of *The Siege of Thebes* were more accurate than that of *The Tales*, but the apparatus to *The Siege* does not record all manuscripts and their differences. (E.g. the edition does not record, for Menalippus the variant 'Mentalyp', from PML, MS M. 4, fol. 22v; *Siege*, 1278.) For Lydgate's *Troy Book*, there is an even less thorough editorial apparatus: the edition only prints variants from five of nineteen extant manuscripts and omits variants of spelling (Bergen ed. 1906-35: I, ix-x). So to appreciate how scribes of Lydgate's work handle classical allusions, it is necessary to examine the manuscripts themselves. I have done so not exhaustively nor quantitatively, but by comparing passages with many allusions across various manuscripts of *The Siege of Thebes* and *Troy Book*. A few textual cruces can exemplify some patterns in the cognitive processes of copying, and they in turn might illustrate larger historical shifts in poetic style, as it is transmitted and received.

For difficulties in copying, the foremost question is whether errors stem from almost physiological elements of scribal work in general, or from intellectual responses to classicism in particular. The classical allusions (here discussed) are often long names. Polysyllabic words bring visual slips of repetition or omission, say, dittography or haplology. Unsurprisingly, the longest names cause the most confusion: in *The Canterbury Tales*, Epicurus, Andromache and Abradatas are the most mangled, each over fifteen ways (Manly and Rickert 1940: apparatus for A.336, B.4331, F.1416). And many mistakes seem caused by the slips consequent to any copying. Scribes working fast likely glanced at the exemplar a few words at a time, and then wrote out those words without looking back, reciting them in their head; this brought both visual and auditory errors (Wakelin 2014a: 53-57). The process could readily alter the spelling of

classical names too. For instance, in the Knight's tale just after Daphne and Diana, one of Diana's victims, Actaeon, has his name torn to shreds by the scribes in ways explicable by mechanical means – even if the effect is bizarre. One scribe writes that not Actaeon but 'a lyon' was turned into a deer, perhaps misreading **t**, which letter grew taller during the fifteenth century, as **l** (BL, MS Harley 1239, fol. 72r; *Tales* A.2065); another scribe muddles the shorter **t** with its lookalike **c** and muddles **o** with the rounded shape of **e** in some fifteenth-century hands, writing 'attheen' (Oxford, Trinity College, MS 49, fol. 32r). These problems seem prompted by the sight and sound of the words and not by their classicism *per se*. Indeed, the scribes do also muddle Biblical names, for instance, and scribes of earlier periods muddled an archaic Germanic mythology in Old English verse. It is merely a poignant coincidence that many of the people whose names are transformed were the victims of Ovidian metamorphosis.

But whether long or not, names and other rare words also cause problems in another way: they disrupt the scribes' *Gestalt* perception of what the exemplar might say. Working fast, a scribe could rely on grammar or experience to read the exemplar and to write; or if he made or found a mechanical slip, he could puzzle out how to emend it. Scribes elsewhere correct oddities in their exemplar or their own copy quite well, guessing from their knowledge of grammar or customary idiom (Wakelin 2014a: 142-145). Errors occurred when texts said something unfamiliar but the scribe rushed into familiar idioms instead – like mistakes in 'predictive text' on smartphones; or when they made such mechanical errors, the correct unfamiliar words could not be readily deduced by guesswork. Classical names, infrequent and alien, are traps like this. So these scribes of Actaeon's name might have misread it, or corrected an exemplar's mistake in it, by assuming that 'a lyon' is more likely to change species than a man; the myth disturbs our categories of beast and man. Another might have thought that Actaeon's name was a poor spelling for the Athenians mentioned elsewhere in the Knight's tale. They seldom spell the words *Athens* and *Athenian* wrongly and so seem to have known them. (There are only four instances of misspelling in the seventeen mentions, each rendered rightly across dozens of manuscripts. More curiously, four times *Athens* is replaced with *Thebes*: Manly and

Rickert 19940: apparatus for A861, A.873, A.968, A.2098.) More knowledge of the classical world beyond Athens might have disciplined the scribe to avoid mechanical errors, say, in lookalike letters, or to correct them when they occurred.

The role of knowledge in these errors is evident if we sift out which allusions the scribes get wrong and right. Not all classical lore is equally arcane, and scribes knew some myths more than others. In the Knight's tale (as we saw), Daphne, a minor nymph, is often replaced with Diana, a major goddess. Danae, mother of Castor, Pollux and Helen, is similarly misunderstood: in his *Troy Book*, Lydgate mentions Danae also as 'Dane', and while many scribes preserve this spelling (e.g. BL, MS Cotton Augustus A.iv., fol. 21v), several make a similar mistake to Chaucer's scribes and make the mother of three into the goddess of virgins, 'Diane' or 'Dyane', with the two medial vowel sounds (*Troy* I.3810; BL, MS Arundel 99, fol. 22v; BodL, MS Digby 232, fol. 24v; BodL, MS Douce 148, fol. 54v); others misread the letters **d** and **a** which could look similar in anglicana script, to give 'Adane' (*Troy* I.3810; PML, MS M. 876, fol. 2v). Deianira also ends up as 'Deyanne', perhaps the goddess of the moon again (Schick ed. 1891: apparatus for l. 788). But Diana herself is safe from this mistreatment. She is named twelve times in *The Canterbury Tales* but only miscopied on one occasion, when her name was accidentally repeated (Manly and Rickert 1940: apparatus for A.1912; Oxford, Trinity College, MS 49, fol. 26v). In copies of Lydgate's work the spelling of her name varies; some scribes omit the final unaccented <e> or use an abbreviation mark that might be otiose (e.g. BL, MS Add. 5140, fol. 365r; BL, MS Cotton Appendix XVII, fol. 8v), and the medial vowels can be <ia> or <ya>. But Diana is always recognizable – and so has been recognized – as Daphne and Danae have not. It must be said: the limits of their knowledge might be surprising. For example, in *The Siege of Thebes* Pluto is often rendered as 'Plato', and sometimes as 'Plito' and 'Plyto' (e.g. BodL, MS Bodley 776, fol. 62v; BL, MS Arundel 119, fol. 67v; *Thebes* 4043-4). Plato was undoubtedly renowned, if little read; but Pluto and his queen Proserpina, with whom Lydgate pairs him, were widely read about in Claudian's *De Raptu Proserpinae*, a common text in schooling (Cannon 2016a: 65, 163, 172-3; Curry Woods and Copeland 1999), and in the Merchant's tale and *Troy Book* (I.142-143). It is not always clear why scribes recognized some classical figures more than others. Each error in these

manuscripts would repay fuller contextualization in intellectual history (fuller than this essay can) to tell exactly what was a novelty when and for whom. But overall the presence of errors suggests the risk which poets took in offering for manuscript transmission some recherché names. That is especially true with allusions of a more fleeting sort, one-off comparisons or ekphrasis or mythological scene-setting. Classical lore is difficult; classical lore in passing is difficulty at speed: and the risk of incomprehension increases.

Further evidence of the risk comes, by contrast, when it diminishes, when a scribe's copying of these names improves as he gets used to them. For instance, one scribe calls Lydgate's Ipsiphyle (classical Hypsipyle) 'Isisilee' on the first mention of her but the more legible 'Isiphile' on the second two pages later (BL, MS Add. 5140, fols 406v, 407v; *Thebes* 3156, 3194). One main character of *The Siege of Thebes*, Tydeus, recurs so often that scribes usually get his name right as 'Tydeus', 'Tideus' or 'Tidyus'. But in his earliest mentions in the poem, some scribes call him 'tedius' or 'tedeous' (BL, MS Cotton Appendix XVII, fol. 21r, *Thebes* 1266; BodL, MS Laud misc. 416, fol. 236r, *Thebes* 1648; Figure 2). It is wicked to suspect that *tedious* is a Freudian slip by copyists of Lydgate's poem, and it is probably wrong to suggest that they were more familiar with the adjective, for *tedious* was itself a novelty, newly borrowed from Latin – borrowed, ironically, by Lydgate or by a close contemporary (cf. *OED*, *tedious*, and *MED*, *tedious*). But the scribes do not seem sure at first that this word with an ending like many Latinate adjectives is in fact a name. Other scribes recognize Tydeus as a person but might mistake him for someone more familiar from Chaucer's work: in a copy of *The Siege of Thebes* added to *The Canterbury Tales*, one scribe repeatedly spells the name of Tydeus as 'Thedeus', perhaps in recall of Theseus from the Knight's tale, earlier in the book he was completing (BL, MS Add. 5140, fols 378v-379v, *Thebes* 1266-1339, and so on). This scribe's copying is shaped by the limits of the knowledge – of Chaucer's classicism, rather than classical literature itself – that he brings to parsing what he finds in his exemplar.

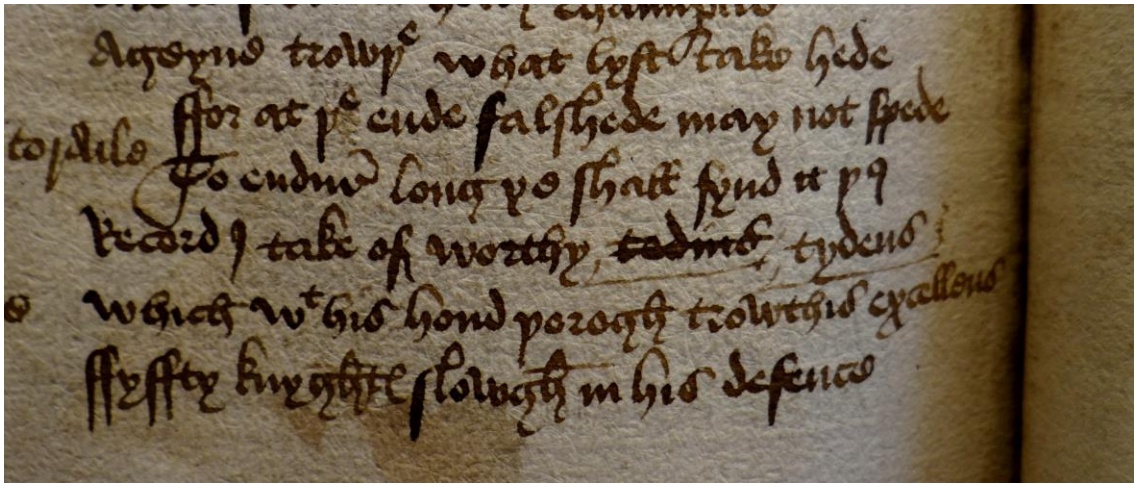

Figure 2: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud misc. 416, fol. 239v (detail). Photograph by Daniel Wakelin, courtesy of the Bodleian Library.

Now, it is important not to be judgmental about what has so far been described as error. In the history of the language, descriptive relativism is necessary. How one transfers classical names into English is still not settled ('Virgil' or 'Vergil'), nor was it in the fifteenth century. And scribes were happily free to 'translate' works into their local spelling systems: those from Scotland render names in ways unconventional now but not there then: Ovid is 'Owyd' and the Pythonesses are 'Fethonisses' (MS Douce 148, fol. 125r-v; *Troy* II.5417, II.5464). Many of these forms were not found wrong.

But sometimes scribes did correct the spelling of these names, and that decision to change things suggests that there was some concern to get things right; they were prescriptive sometimes when we might not be. The spelling 'tedius' might seem acceptable for capturing the three syllables of Tydeus, but when a scribe crosses it out and adds 'tydeus' awkwardly after the line, then he treats it as a problem (BodL, MS Laud misc. 416, fol. 239v; *Thebes* 2249; Figure 2). Scribes sometimes correct the spelling to make it more classical, for instance in its inflexional endings: they correct 'Argus' to 'Argos', 'Crasse' to 'Crassus' (BL, MS Add. 39569, fol. 114r, Bergen ed. 1924-1927: V.1201; BodL, MS Rawl poet. 163, fol. 59v, *Troilus* III.1391). Various kinds of correction signal an awareness of problems in these names. First, scribes sometimes leave gaps for things they cannot copy with confidence, when their exemplar or their *Gestalt* recognition fails. Among such gaps, classical and foreign names are common (Wakelin 2014b: 266-7). For instance, one scribe of Lydgate's *The Fall of Princes* writes just 'Igu'

for Jugurtha and leaves the second half of the word blank until somebody later added 'rta' (HEHL, MS HM 268, fol. 118v; Bergen ed. 1924-7: V.2959). Scribes also sometimes leave prompts to come back later to words they left blank or thought they had got wrong. In the same book, for instance, a prompt in the margin corrects 'Egge' to 'egee' for the Aegean – though the correction itself was never implemented in the line (HEHL, MS HM 268, fol. 75r; Bergen ed. 1924-7: III.4553). Finally, corrections could be made, either during the initial copying or in a stage of revision by the scribe or a colleague: for instance, in two copies of *The Siege of Thebes* somebody corrected the first reference to 'Ethiocles' to ensure that the name had <i> as its second syllable, once by writing **i** over some other erased letter, before going onto **o**, and once by interlineating it, after writing **o** at least (BL, MS Add. 5140, fol. 373r; BL, MS Add. 18632, fol. 10r; *Thebes* 879). Such interventions show that the scribes did stop and reflect on the puzzle of these words.

But it is not clear whether the proportion of classicizing words which scribes got wrong or put right is higher than the proportion of other kinds of words. (This has not been quantified.) The scribes err and emend in words of all sorts. For instance, in a copy of *The Siege of Thebes* heavily corrected by a second hand, most corrections are of large omissions or small variants which disrupt the rhyme; some of these lines include classical words, as many lines in the poem do, but this seems solely happenstance (e.g. BL, MS Cotton Appendix XVIII, fol. 12r; *Thebes* 624). The scribes do not always err nor catch all their errors. For instance, in the copy of *The Siege* with the emendation to 'tedius', only twenty of hundreds of classical names get oddly spelled, and of them only six then get corrected (BodL, MS Laud misc. 416). This is not a simple triumphal story of improving classical knowledge, nor an iconoclastic one of the fragility of such. It is a story of varied degrees of risk in poetic style, and of varied responses to that.

But the errors and corrections in classical names, whether or not quantitatively common, are qualitatively distinctive – and the fact that they are susceptible to correction bears this out. On the one hand (as we have seen), this material is especially risky for scribes, who might not be as easily able to transmit it correctly or, if they err, correct the mistransmission by their own lights. It requires specific knowledge to work out that Danae and Diane, spelled similarly, are different figures. On the other hand,

these errors demand correction because they have a referential relationship to external fact. Not everything in fiction is fictional. As John Searle noted (1979: 72), even within fictional texts – if that is how these tales were understood – authors commit themselves to refer to history or myth in ways corroborated by knowledge from outside the text. The same could be said of the proper nouns in other genres such as romance (Broyles 2016), but it is especially important in Chaucer's and Lydgate's *romans antiques*, a genre with a pretension to learning and a promise to feed readers' pretensions to it. Such erudition has concomitant claims to referentiality and verifiability.

There were all manner of scholarly traditions which attest to people's love for these classical facts, and for collecting and correcting them: checking schoolbooks for accuracy; historical glossing in grammar schools; debate on whether the poets were licensed to commit errors; the encyclopaedic collections of monastic writers such as Thomas Walsingham (Federico 2016); the new fetish for arcane classical learning in the *studia humanitatis*. People influenced by such schooling and reading might have been fixated on separating fact from faulty copying. Moreover, the page design of many copies of these English poems highlights the referentiality of allusions as things open to verification. Many have notes in the margin or headings in the text, which highlight the proper nouns or direct us to sources for the facts. Such referencing is not, interestingly, common in copies of *Troy Book* but it is frequent and possibly authorial with other poems by Chaucer, such as some parts of *The Canterbury Tales* and *The House of Fame*, by Lydgate and by their imitators in *Reson and Sensuallyte* and *Knyghthode and Bataile* (Griffiths 2014: 7, 9, 23, 28, 29; Wakelin 2010). Such apparatus might have lessened scribal error sometimes. For instance, in one copy of *Troilus and Criseyde*, the name 'ymenus' is corrected by interlining to give 'ymen^^{e}us', and besides this correction the Latin name appears spelled right in the margin, in a note identifying 'ymeneus deus nupciarum' ('Hymen god of marriages'; HEHL, MS HM 114, fol. 254r; *Troilus* III.1258). Yet a direct effect on the scribe by the apparatus is unlikely to be common. The notes or headings were often added later, as gaps or cues for adding them show. So in *The Siege of Thebes* one scribe writes Cadmus as 'Cadicius' on his first mention; but the scribe's heading before that line rightly calls him 'Cadmus'. 'Cadicius' in the poem was the first time he wrote this name; he added the heading 'Cadmus'

later in red, by which time he knew what he was doing (BodL, MS Bodley 776, fol. 5v; *Thebes* 293-314). Such notes or headings were also transmitted erratically, for fiddly page designs were often abandoned by undiligent scribes. And such apparatus is not itself immune to error. For instance, *The Assembly of the Gods* starts with a list of the classical gods; but when the list mentions Morpheus, god of sleep, a major character in the poem, the scribe renders him as 'Morpleus' (Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R.3.19, fol. 67v; on which see Chance ed. 1999: 20). Rather than actually make the poems accurate, what these paratexts do is give the *impression* these poems were accurate, were subject to scholarly verification. The verifying function can seem explicit. For instance, in *The Siege of Thebes*, where Lydgate tells the legend of Hypsipyle, a Latin annotation sends readers to take notes from book XII, about trees, of Boccaccio's *De Genealogia deorum* ('Nota de xij. arboribus in libro bochacij de Geneologia deorum', BodL, MS Laud misc. 557, fol. 50v). They present the poem as though it could be got factually right, as though that mattered in a poem.

Composing

That commitment to verifiable classical allusions is also written into the poems themselves. While scribes often abandoned or altered the paratexts – wearied by the effort of writing them and freed by their seeming detachability (Partridge 2011: 89–97) – these other comments on the poems' facticity were woven into the verse and so less likely to be omitted. Whether or not they have the red note citing Boccaccio, all copies of *The Siege* have Lydgate's direction to 'Rede' Boccaccio's work 'of Goddes þe Geonologie', if 'ye lust to veryfye' this or other myths (BodL, MS Laud misc. 557, fol. 50v; *Thebes* 3536). Lydgate in particular often explains classical names, etymologies, origins and histories by reference to sources, in vague filler phrases such as 'as I fynde' and 'as I rede' or by specific claims that 'Ovide reherseth in his boke' or by citing other bits of his own work (*Troy* e.g. II.5623, I.6217, II.5612, III.5676, IV.6920). The classical details are strongly referential, verifiable.

This spirit of facticity is what underpins a slightly different rhetorical trick: the insistence on getting one's words right – as when Chaucer insists, of Daphne and

Diana, what 'I mene'. These comments on what 'I mene' are paralleled elsewhere. Chaucer does use 'I mene' a lot for clarifying other things, especially explaining what florid circumlocutions refer to (e.g. *Troilus* II.171, IV.331; *Tales* A.1673, B.641, B.958, B.1860, B.2141), but on nine occasions he uses it to clarify which classical figures he is referring to (e.g. *Troilus* III.186; *Tales* I.11). A page or so after mentioning Daphne, for instance, he glosses the title and epithet 'Citherea benigne' by saying 'I mene Venus, honorable and digne' (*Tales* A.2216). The rhyming couplet of 'benigne' and 'digne' makes the line on what he means less easy to lose than a marginal note might be. The trope of 'I mene' took off among Chaucer's followers. Lydgate uses it to clarify circumlocutions for Cupid in *The Temple of Glass* (Schick ed. 1891: ll. 444, 837), and in *Troy Book* it is a stylistic tic – and might imitate the Knight's Tale directly. (It is rarer in *The Siege of Thebes* though: e.g. 181, 223, 2897.) Lydgate often shortcuts his roundabout epithets or puffs up his brief names by stating which person 'I mene'. He too glosses 'þe quene of Cytheroun' as 'I mene Venus' (*Troy* II.5708-5709; also I.3099, II.6266-6271, III.2856-2857, III.3333-3334, V.1688-1689). His fascination with this device is evident when he uses it needlessly: once he uses 'I mene' for Venus when she is already named a few lines earlier (*Troy* II.5596-5603). Rather than useful, 'I mene' is rhetorical: it is part of the figure of *definitio*, where a poet concludes a circumlocution with a shorter version, or *amplificatio*, where he paraphrases a single word with something longer. Such florid description is often used in writing about classical figures, by alluding to some well-known element of their story. For instance, Chaucer refers to the man whom Venus loved as 'I meene Adoun, that with the boor was slawe', assuming we'll know Adonis by his goring (*Troilus* III.721). Lydgate uses 'I mene' or 'mene I' some eighteen times in *Troy Book* (of thirty-two uses in total) to introduce the classical person to whom some amplified epithet refers. So 'I mene' contributes to the high style and the poet's pretensions to learning.

But 'I mene' not only adorns; it clarifies too; it is not just grandiose but is nervous. As a metalinguistic phrase it alerts the reader or scribe to the presence of a proper noun. Another alert is in the page design sometimes, when scribes highlight proper nouns of all sorts – so largely classical figures – with underlining (e.g. MS Laud misc. 416) or a dash of red on the initial letter (e.g. BodL, MS Bodley 776). Might this

highlighting be purposeful? After all, these names were often unfamiliar and so open to mistranscription or misrecognition. Like other hedging idioms – *what I call*; *I don't like to say this but* – 'I mene' warns that the speaker fears misprision. The name *Adonis* did get mistaken by scribes for other words such as the preposition *down* (Manly and Rickert 1940: apparatus for A.2224; Schick ed. 1891: apparatus for ll. 64, 341/3d.7), but when the phrase 'I mene' is used, this does not happen (Windeatt ed. 1984: apparatus for III.721). As with Daphne and Diana, often 'I mene' accompanies names which would be easy to muddle because they look or sound alike. It occurs where Lydgate mentions one by one 'Phebus', 'Phicius', 'Pheton' and the 'Phetonysses' and adds of the last, 'I mene women þat ben devyneresses' (*Troy* II.5453-5465). (These lines seem based on *Tales* H.125-129.) It occurs when he mentions both 'Thelamoun, | I mene Aiax' and his father who 'hiȝt also Thelamoun'. With 'also' also he reassures the reader or scribe that the repetition is intended, not in error; and he verifies it by noting that 'þe stori telleth þus'. He had already mentioned the elder 'Thelamoun' earlier in the poem (*Troy* III.2038-2048; cf. I.3831). The names of Achilles and somebody 'whos name was Calchas', with lots of the same letters, get the reassurance 'I mene Calchas' (*Troy* II.5978-5982). So, in another work, the sciences 'Founde by Phylomon | I mene Physonomye' has two words, 'Phylomon' and 'Physonomye', with very similar sets of letters; and even the different letters **l** and the tall **s** looked similar in some styles of handwriting (Steele 1894: 2467). It is tempting to speculate that adding 'I mene' to this phrase is meant to stop the scribe or reader confusing two lookalike words.

Yet Lydgate, in particular, not only seems wary of arcane names; he revels in them. As Langland reflects on grammar and Chaucer on semantics, Lydgate is a poet of onomastics. Throughout his classical poems he digs up the roots of names: Helen is called 'Tyndarys' because she is from the island of 'Tyndaris'; Pallas Athene gives her name to Athens, Apollo to Delos; Ortigia comes from the Greek word for the curlew; and Beelzebub means 'god of flyes' (*Troy* I.3812-3816, II.5427-5431, II.5443-5448, II.5548-5556, II.5699). Lydgate also loves variant names, such as linking Beelzebub with 'Belus' of Assyria and 'Bel', 'Balym' and 'Belphegor', or noting that 'Phebus' and 'Phicius' are synonyms, as are Apollo and Titan (*Troy* II.5447-5454, II.5548-5551). He lists variant epithets. For instance, he repeats in quick succession the points that Pallas 'callid is

Mynerue' and Diana 'callid is' the moon or Lucina (*Troy* II.5426, II.5435-36, II.5609, II.5678, II.5697). These phrases *X þat callid is Y* and *called was X* are other common tics to introduce classical names, like *I mene X*; likewise they make us take note. In most cases in *The Siege of Thebes* and *Troy Book*, the word order puts *called was* or *is called* before the classical name (fifty-one times), rather than after it (seven times), and then *called* warns the scribe or reader, metalinguistically, that some new name is coming. In a few cases we are told what some person or place 'called was' or 'is' twice (*Troy* I.852, I.3358, IV.5735, IV.5825, V.1581, V.1735). As well as these direct sentences about what people are called, Lydgate also often uses the word 'called' when a new character's name is given in passing. (In grammar, this is the difference between *called* working as a predicative adjective with the verb *to be* or as an attributive adjective in a sentence with a different verb.) So when we first hear of Tydeus, we hear that 'he slough his broder / called Menalippe' and not that (say) 'he slough his broder / Menalippe'; we meet 'the kyng / called Tortolanus' and not 'the kyng Tortolanus' (*Thebes* 1278, 2614; see also *Thebes* 227, 561, 841, 1041, 1266, 3034, 3303). All these attributive uses of 'called' could be deleted, and the sense and grammar would survive. Metre needs these filler phrases to slow down the line. But they also slow the scribe's or reader's apprehension of obscure words. It is like taking a breath before introducing somebody to several new friends. The poem compiles classical names but, as this risks bafflement, it does so in ways that explain and pace the recognition of new information.

Even without explicit comment on what people are called, the process of compiling names has a similar double effect – both risking misprision and guarding against it. This double effect comes to some extent with any encyclopaedic list. For instance, at the end of book IV of *Troy Book*, Lydgate dismisses the pagan gods while nonetheless listing them all in the figure of *occupatio*: he rejects 'Cirra, 'Cirrea', 'Cibeles' and 'Ceres', and dozens more in chains of soundalike names (*Troy* IV.6914-7034). Such lists are risky for miscopying with eyeskip; but at the same time, by laying them in adjacent lines, these lists disambiguate those words or heighten the scribe's or reader's attention to them. That balance of risk and prevention is sharpest when these names are introduced as the rhymes. He often puts these names in rhyming position, and this has many uses. It gives prominence to the poet's learned matter. And notably, as there

is scarcity of rhyming in English, the common inflectional endings of Latin and Greek names are helpful. Lydgate has several habitual rhymes for classical names: 'doun' to rhyme with Amphion, Polibon or Telamon, 'se' (*see*) for Greek names ending with pronounced <e>, long words ending in <ous> for Latin names in <us>. These names are also, intentionally or not, protected in rhyming position from miscopying. Scribal corrections of all manner of words are often prompted by rhyme, which reveals to the scribe's ear or eye where something is awry (Wakelin 2014a: 219-234). For instance, the heroine Alcyone or 'Alkyone' has the end of her name written over erasure once, and as corrected it rhymes with 'euerychone' (BodL, MS Laud misc. 600, fol. 126v; *Tales* B.57); 'Antonye' becomes 'Antony^ne' and then rhymes with 'determyn' (PML, MS M.124, fol. 152r; Bergen ed. 1924-1927: VIII.288, i.e. *Antoninus*). Even when they do not need to correct later, rhyme might help scribes to copy correctly from the outset. First, various psycholinguistic processes make us more self-conscious of rhyming words, as when the rules of rhyme required that 'Dane' and 'Diane' be separate names, not homonyms (above). Likewise Lydgate rhymes 'Chysoun' and 'Chaloun', for example, and the scribes do not muddle the second rhyming syllable. Rhyme is limited in its effect, though. Scribes do, by contrast, muddle the first unrhymed syllable of Chison and Chalon as 'Clyson', once over an erasure, and 'Clalon'. They presumably mistake the tall letters **h** and **l** for each other (e.g. BodL, MS Bodley 776, fol. 19v; BodL, MS Laud misc. 557, f.18v; BL, MS Add. 18632, fol. 12r; BL, MS Add. 5140, fol. 377v; *Thebes* 1195-6). Furthermore, the repetition of letters in rhyming words itself can cause eyeskip when copying or reading: two scribes did not disambiguate 'Dane' and 'Diane' but simply omitted one of the lines (as we saw). Rhyme was a risky thing itself.

After all, like much poetic language, rhyme is an affront to ordinary language – even to the ordinary learned language. Putting classical nouns in rhyming position can require that they be warped to fit the sound or the spelling of fifteenth-century English. In one book, Chaucer's Greek hero Arcite becomes 'Arciȝt' with a throaty yogh to rhyme with 'foure boles whiȝt' (*four white bulls*; BodL, MS Laud misc. 557, fol. 50r; *Thebes* 3525-6). One scribe sometimes uses uncommon spellings to make an eye-rhyme: Virgil's poem is 'Eneydos' in one line but 'Enydoos' in another to rhyme visually with 'so greet alloos' (*so great a reputation*), and Pluto becomes once 'Plutoo' to

match 'no moo' (*no more*; BL, MS Arundel 99, fols 28r, 56v; *Troy* II.329, II.341-2, II.5581-2). Scribes can even use corrections to make the eye-rhyme more glaring, for instance, shortening 'Adoun' for *Adonis* to 'Adon' to rhyme with 'citheron' (Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 110, fol. 25r; *Tales* A.2224). The rhyme distorts the customary spelling or sound of these words. This is not only the scribes' error; this is the poet's misbehaviour. Poetic distortion is striking in some lines from Lydgate's *The Fall of Princes*, where he describes the patronage of Julius Caesar or 'Cesar Iulius', for the writer Marcus Tullius Cicero or 'Tullius'. Lydgate warps the names to rhyme, but two scribes miscopy his mischief:

> For in the tyme of Iulius Cesar
> Whan the triumphe . he wan in Rome toun
> He entre wolde . the scole of Tullius
> And here his lecture . of grete affeccion
> (Chicago, University Library, MS 565, fol. 6v; Bergen ed. 1924-7: I.365-8)

The scribes get the name factually right, placing the hereditary *cognomen* 'Cesar' last, as the Romans would. Scribes (as we saw) recognize some classical figures more than others, and *Julius Caesar* was already common as the version of this name in English, for instance in The Monk's Tale and the annotations on it (e.g. BL, MS Harley 1758, fol. 191v), and scribes seldom got it wrong (in *Tales*, only in one of nine references in one manuscript: Manly and Rickert 1940: apparatus on B.199). But when two scribes of Lydgate give the name with historical accuracy as 'Iulius Cesar', what they get wrong is the rhyme. People correct the error: in one copy, a reader who annotates heavily in Latin adds the letters 'b' and 'a' over 'Iulius Cesar' to reorder the words to 'Cesar Iulius'; and in another copy the scribe adds 'Iulyus' at the end of the line, and someone deletes the first 'Iulyus' in red: 'For in the tyme of ~~Iulyus~~ Cesar Iulyus' (New Haven, Beinecke Library, MS Takamiya 40, fol. 2v). There are similar problems at other points where Lydgate uses odd forms of classical names to find a rhyme, and scribes who hypercorrect them must restore the variant – for instance, correcting the ending of 'neron' over erasure (*Nero*) where it must rhyme with 'persecucioun' (BL, MS Harley 4203, fol. 150r; Bergen ed. 1924-1927: VIII.216-217). Lydgate's rhyme safeguards against inaccurate transmission of the poem. Lydgate's rhyme, though, has its own risks: that the poet himself might be altering classical history and myth to fit into English verse.

Indeed, scribes are not the only people who struggle to understand allusions; poets struggle to make them – to make them accurate echoes of Latin sources. Poets were not themselves perfect classicists: They often drew from secondhand sources, as much research has shown, and from earlier poetry in English – which, of course, they had to read in manuscripts already mediated by scribes. The changing fate of Daphne might exemplify this: the scribes transform her name in the Knight's tale (we saw), but does Lydgate make any improvement? He might have learned of her from Chaucer's tale, for in his early poem *The Temple of Glass* (before 1415) he mentions Daphne or 'Dane' just after a summary of the Knight's tale. He echoes that tale by saying that she 'vnto a laurer tre | Iturned was' (Schick ed., 1891: 102-116). (The editor emends 'Dane' to 'Daphne' but admits in his apparatus to line 115 that all the manuscripts have 'Diane' again or 'Done'.) Yet Lydgate surpasses the Knight's tale in specifying that the tree was a laurel, which he might learn from *Troilus and Criseyde* (III.726), and he goes further in his later poem *Troy Book*. He names her alongside Diana, again distinguishing them, but he uses the more classical spelling 'Daphne' (IV.6956-8). He might have learned this spelling from that good Latinist Gower (Macaulay ed. 1900-1: III.1685-1720) if not from Ovid directly. His knowledge is variable then, and even when it improves might do so by reading more English poetry, not only more Latin. Nor is there always progress. For instance, after describing Daphne and Diana, the Knight's tale mentioned Cytherea (*Tales* A.2215), a Greek title for Venus, but Lydgate seems once to forget that Venus and Cytherea are the same, when he refers to neither 'My3ti Venus, nor Cytherea', as though they are different people (*Troy* IV.6959). He also seems to fit her name to metre by dropping the penultimate syllable <e>, giving the less classical 'Cithera' (*Troy* II.2519). The growth of classical allusion, then, is not a unidirectional story of poets innovating and scribes regressing. Just as scribes struggled with the allusions they copied, so did the poets struggle with those they composed. The risk of classicism inhered not only in textual reception but in devising such a text in the first place.

Contexts

These allusions, with various misfires and misprisions, first illuminate one historically specific context: the growing fashion for classical allusions in the English poetry of late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. The work of poets and scribes in composing and copying these allusions suggests that such material involved risks for readers, scribes and even poets of English with less knowledge of the classical intertexts. Classicism – which with hindsight seems so safe, so monumental – brought a special risk and fragility when it was still novel in English poetry.

To prove and improve this story, we would need to survey the poems and their manuscripts with more chronological and topographical precision (more than this essay has room for). The story is not a simple one of progress, nor though of decay – for the novel fashion for allusions did ultimately take off. For instance, Cytherea in the Knight's tale becomes 'Sithea' in many copies (Manly and Rickert ed. 1940: A.2215), perhaps because some exemplar abbreviated the middle letters **er** with a curl, a common technique, and later copyists missed this little mark. Conversely, Lydgate's less classical 'Cithera' (*Troy* II.2519) comes out once as the gibberish 'I Cithera', randomly adding the first-person pronoun (BL, MS Arundel 99, fol. 39v), but in other copies comes out with spellings even more like Latin's, such as 'Cytherea' with <y> and with all four syllables (Bristol, Public Library, MS 8, fol. 27v; BodL, MS Digby 230, fol. 68r). As that suggests, scribes at different times and places interpret the allusions differently. One of these scribes (BodL, MS Digby 230) seems notably consistent in his spelling of classical names, and his spelling is often more like Latin's than is that of the manuscript thought to be closest to Lydgate's (BL, MS Arundel 119). Conversely, another scribe, who names himself John Newton, is notably odd in his rendering of names: in one short stretch Laius is 'layows', Pallas is 'pallax' and Juno, after a crossed out first attempt at it, is 'Iuvo', for example – and only 'Dian' is OK (BodL, MS Laud misc. 416, fols 229r; *Thebes* 343, 351-352). An historical question would be whether scribes who worked later in the fifteenth century grew more familiar with classical lore, as Latin grammar schools adopted the more classicizing reading matter of the *studia humanitatis*, and as scribes of English encountered increasingly many such allusions in poetry. That question would require more work to answer either way; nor might the answer be clear. The poor speller John Newton dates his work to 1459 and

copies in the same book a prose classical translation of Vegetius's *Epitoma rei militaris* (Lester ed. 1988: 21-22); the more classical spellers of 'Cytherea' (above) use handwriting that seems to date from a generation or so earlier. Uncovering patterns and inexplicable behaviour in transmitting such allusions prevents any triumphalism about the coming of a classicizing style – or indeed about a supposed fifteenth century rejection of its follies. These multiple little acts of communication and miscommunication reveal the risky innovativeness of classical allusions in English poetry – and reveal the human agency in a large literary movement.

But these allusions in particular also exemplify in general how poets risk misprision, and work to mitigate it, when they entrust an utterance to others for scribal copying. This is a second, less historically specific and less provable, explanation of the poets' handling of these allusions: a widespread awareness of scribal error and attempts to counteract it. While they risk error with innovation, do they also try to lessen the risk? In classical allusions, they introduce obscure names with phrases that warn us to expect obscurity; they reiterate what 'I mene'; they place names in rhyming positions or lists which draw attention to them. Might Middle English poets do things like this, which guard against miscopying or incomprehension, more widely? Do they future-proof their work against the risks of the scribal medium?

There are a few explicit comments, from Richard de Bury to Chaucer and Lydgate, on the faultiness of scribes (e.g. Fisher 2012: 21-36; Wakelin 2014a: 20-39); in English poetry several come in passages of classicizing sorts. The poem to 'Adam Scriveyne' worries about the copying of *Boece*, with its mythological metres. At the end of the antique romance *Troilus and Criseyde* Chaucer prays that nobody miswrite or mismetre his poem, just after a stanza where he urges his little tragedy to emulate the classics (*Troilus* V.1785-1798). And this envoy is echoed directly in many fifteenth-century poems, including – though by no means limited to – many classicizing ones such as *Troy Book*, *The Fall of Princes* and *Knyghthode and Bataile* (Wakelin 2014a: 30, 32-36). Wonderfully, Chaucer's line about mismetring gets mismetred, and the word *tragedy*, which Chaucer had himself introduced into English gets mangled here and elsewhere (Windeatt ed. 1984: apparatus on V.1786, V.1796; Manly and Rickert ed. 1940: apparatus on B.3161, B.3163, B.3181). And one of his classical models Statius or

'Stace' from *Troilus and Criseyde* is borrowed by Lydgate but then garbled, by the scribe John Newton, as 'Stage' (BodL, MS Laud misc. 416, fol. 234r; *Thebes* 1272). As he dreams of classical imitation, Chaucer worries that his poetry will be miscopied, and he was right to worry.

As well as commenting on the risk in theory, in these well-known prologues and envoys, might there be things which the poets do in practice to prevent it? Do they do so in other passages beyond their classical allusions? To suggest so might seem to present poets in a banausic light, working with and against their medium, the handmade copy. But to think about poetic composition as a craft like this reminds us of its technical skill, its imagination of other minds, and its interesting mix of audacity and prudence. These classical novelties might exemplify how stylistic innovation in any era brings risk, measured often in the hostile incomprehension of new things such as inkhorn words, *vers libre* or obscenity. And there is risk whenever authors give up their intentions to coproduction by readers, as traced by reception history or by the analysis of speech acts in social context. These risks of authorship, avant-garde or otherwise, were even more powerful in a period when technology and institutions allowed authors even less control than they have had through print, copyright, publicity. To build up the monument of classicism in English poetry, when the tools were not there to build anything secure, was just another part of Chaucer's and Lydgate's risk-taking.

That said, in one way they might be reassured. Though the errors are sometimes egregious, and the corrections are never thorough, within the vast length of these *romans antiques* the errors themselves are only sporadic. We have focused on them, as a real risk for poets and for scribes. But the scribes managed to copy many of the allusions accurately; and these outlandish names are only a tiny percentage of the words in these voluminous works. Scribal error might be less ubiquitous or all-encompassing than our fascination with it would suggest (Wakelin 2014a: 44-53, 306-307). That is so here. While these errors and worries reveal the riskiness of introducing classical material, and of writing for the manuscript medium in general, the risk paid off – mostly, the classical allusions were passed on, and an innovation become a daunting tradition.

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