

**Playing the *Canterbury Tales***  
**The Continuations and Additions**

**Andrew Higl**

ASHGATE e-BOOK

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PLAYING THE *CANTERBURY TALES*

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*For Teresa*

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# Playing the *Canterbury Tales*

The Continuations and Additions

ANDREW HIGL  
*Winona State University, USA*

ASHGATE

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# List of Abbreviations

BL	British Library
MED	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i>
MS	manuscript
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>

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# Introduction

Henry Jenkins, a new-media cultural critic, coined the term “convergence culture” during the first decade of the twenty-first century, most notably in his 2006 book *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*.<sup>1</sup> Since then the term has been bandied about in various fields including cultural studies, literary studies, media studies, and communication studies and has taken on sundry meanings not all of which are clearly expressed in Jenkins’s own work. Though he never offers a neat and tidy definition of “convergence culture,” a key feature of this “new” culture is the recent rise in participation, marking a convergence between the consumption and production of cultural texts. Increasingly in new media, fans can interact with cultural expressions in significant ways, contributing to the texts’ development and eventual meaning.

In many ways, I had a convergence moment of my own. Studying the multifarious manuscripts and early printed versions of medieval works and reading this new-media theorist, I noticed an historical convergence of sorts. First off, postmodernism has taught us that there is little new under the sun; so much of what we see as new in new media often has some precedent somewhere in the past in some form if we look closely enough at history. Jenkins’s idea of “old media” in the title of his book seems to refer more to television shows such as *Lost* and mass-market books such *Harry Potter*, which have accommodated themselves to convergence culture, rather than the old medieval media I have in mind. Second, and most relevant to the present book, one of the oldest and most canonical of all the works in the English literary canon, the *Canterbury Tales*, has a history of transmission and reception in which acts of consumption and production converged. Though often ignored, these post-Chaucer continuations and additions to the *Tales* remain in the extant manuscripts and early printed editions but unseen in the modern editions of Chaucer’s works because editors have condemned them as spurious and apocryphal.

The *OED* defines “spurious” variously: “begot or born out of wedlock; illegitimate, bastard, adulterous” and “superficially resembling or simulating, but lacking the genuine character or qualities of, something; not true or genuine; false, sham, counterfeit” among others.<sup>2</sup> It is, we must say, a shameful word, and for that reason, the spurious and apocryphal texts have been hidden from the view of most modern readers of the *Canterbury Tales*. At this present historical moment, when we are seeing a rise in socially produced and interactive forms of expression

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> “spurious, *a.*” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, accessed 25 January, 2008, <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50234923>.

in new media, we have the unique opportunity to reconsider and historicize past forms of mobile, interactive textual creations as something more aesthetically and socially valuable than just spurious corruptions of the autonomous author's work. Perhaps, as we come to better understand pre-modern textual models not centered on the autonomous author, we might welcome these bastardized texts back into the fold.

When most scholars and students imagine the *Canterbury Tales*, they likely have in mind a set of very specific tales by Geoffrey Chaucer perhaps in a specific order. Oftentimes, the text of the *Tales* that most imagine is that of a modern critical edition such as the *Riverside*, which presents only one version of the *Tales*, and that version is largely a modern editorial construct. Such editions only include those tales that we assume Chaucer wrote. As far as we know, there is no surviving manuscript in Chaucer's hand, so there have been some tenuous assumptions involved in the selection of what ought to be and what ought not to be in Chaucer's oeuvre since his death in 1400. As far as we can tell based on extant texts, Chaucer left the *Tales* incomplete and fragmented. After years of literary and textual dissecting and probing, critics of the *Tales* have drawn a firm boundary between those texts that are canonical and those that are apocryphal, and many readers of the *Tales* do not realize that there is a whole corpus of continuations and additions not found in any modern, critical edition of the *Tales*.

This is not to say that the edited text ought to be discarded. There are many practical reasons why editions such as the *Riverside* are useful in the classroom and in scholarship. There is no easy way to account for the range of different manifestations of the *Tales* in a single volume, and, as of now, there is no scholarly edition, electronic or paper, that presents the so-called apocrypha in their original context. For now, the single, edited text will have to do in most cases, yet it is important for readers to understand that there is a complex and dynamic textual history of interaction and reader-produced meanings lurking beyond the pages of the monolithic modern critical edition.

It might seem as though I am trying to question Chaucer's authorship or, on the other hand, trying to reconsider the "authority" of the apocryphal additions. I am not. To use St. Paul's image of the chaff and the wheat, an image that Chaucer and the poet and monk John Lydgate both use in their own work, I am not trying to separate the chaff from the wheat. I am not trying to question "what is the chaff" and "what is the wheat." Rather, in the chapters that follow I uncover the meaningfulness and social significance of both that which we generally discard and that which we generally hold as canonical. I hope to show that the continuations and additions, which are traceable in manuscripts and early printed editions, are meaning-making, socially significant narratives and/or narrative-shaping textual additions that fill in the gaps and fissures left in the incomplete and fragmented work. Thus, I argue that these additions and continuations ought to shed the terms "apocryphal" and "spurious" that mark their marginality. For most critics in the field of textual studies who are concerned with getting at Chaucer's text of the work, these non-Chaucer creations are things to be accounted for, contained, and

then suppressed. For many, they are corruptions, but their present marginalization and relegation to footnotes ignore their long history as meaningful interactions, which take the *Tales* in unique narrative directions in ways that affect the aesthetic and socio-political meaning of the entire work. Many medieval and early modern readers of the *Tales* would have only known the version in a single manuscript or printed volume. A seventeenth-century reader, for instance, would have only known the *Canterbury Tales* that included the anti-papal *Plowman's Tale*, a tale Chaucer likely had nothing to do with, but one that would be a fixture in the canon for centuries. On the other hand, if a reader in the fifteenth century were to encounter the *Tales*, he or she may very well have read the *Canterbury Interlude* or the orthodox *Ploughman's Tale* and had a very different idea or perception of what the *Tales* meant.

While some may discount the “apocryphal” additions as merely scribal estimations of what Chaucer might have said had he had the chance, and others may argue that they only make up a minimal percentage of the work as a whole, we must not underestimate the new potential meanings generated by the continuations and additions, even if they are not voluminous. In many ways, then, this is a study of the reception of the *Canterbury Tales*. However, it is not just about how readers received and responded to the *Tales* imaginatively. Also, this is not just about the writing of new works of literature in the tradition of or alluding to the *Tales*. It is, in contrast, about the ways that interactive readers participated in the ongoing creation and production of the work of the *Tales* through meaningful additions, continuations, and rearrangements. It is about the continuation of the storytelling game through textual transmission. Like the pilgrims in the frame narrative, who, through telling tales and responding to previous tellers, add new text, so too did active readers add new text, rearrange existing text, and introduce new social and literary meanings to the dynamic and mobile work.

Tellingly, according to the *OED* a “Canterbury tale,” when not used as a proper noun to refer to the poetic work, beginning in the sixteenth century but falling out of usage in the nineteenth century refers to: “a long tedious story, a ‘friar’s tale,’ a fable, a cock-and-bull story.”<sup>3</sup> The editors of the *OED* cite in particular William Fulke, writing in 1579, who describes a certain Catholic, of whom he was not particularly fond, as “a lewd lying counterfeter of more then Caunterburie tales.”<sup>4</sup> This usage is extremely broad, and thus any harmless fictional story might be lumped into the category of a “Canterbury tale” as a colloquial description of a genre. However, in terms of the work itself, the *Canterbury Tales* too was

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<sup>3</sup> “Canterbury, n.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. 1989; *OED Online*, accessed June 10, 2008, <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50032649>.

<sup>4</sup> See William Fulke, *D. Heskins, D. Sanders, and M. Rastel, accounted (among their faction) three pillers and archpatriarches of the popish synagogue (vtter enemies to the truth of Christes Gospell, and all that syncerely professe the same) ouerthrowne, and detected of their seuerall blasphemous heresies* (London: Printed by Henrie Middleton for George Bishop, 1579), 422.



not limited to a singular creative act by Chaucer alone. Writerly readers added new accretions to the organic corpus of the *Canterbury Tales*, ranging from short several-line-long links to an over 4,000-line-long poem on Theban history linked to the frame narrative with a lengthy prologue by John Lydgate.<sup>5</sup>

I argue that the best way to understand the additions and changes to Chaucer's open and fragmented work in the years after his death in 1400 is to think of them as discernable acts, like the acts of the pilgrims in the storytelling game, making up an ongoing and historically traceable body of writerly interactions with the legacy of the *Tales*, in effect an "interactive fiction." A term with cachet in the field of new-media studies in our own moment in history, Interactive Fiction is a particular form of text-based narrative game usually presented and played on a computer, in which readers respond to elements of a procedural (or rules-based, programmed) story by writing, and thus affecting the direction and outcome of the story itself. I want however to apply the term "interactive fiction" historically, using it as a way to understand a much older yet meaningfully "interactive" narrative work, the *Canterbury Tales*. I understand that it may seem anachronistic to begin with a term used for text-based interactive computer narratives, but my purpose is ultimately an historical understanding by way of this transhistorical comparison. Moreover, this study is ultimately grounded in the field of textual criticism and the fairly recent concern within that field to reconsider the "spurious" and the "apocryphal" additions to literary works as socially significant and meaningful creative acts rather than stumbling blocks standing between readers and the authorial text of a work.

The reception history and textual criticism of Chaucer's works over the last thirty years have gone down several paths. While some studies have focused on specific readers and scribes such as John Shirley, others have focused on specific manuscripts, or have examined the construction of the idea of Chaucer; still others have sought to trace the landmark, canonical instantiations of Chaucer's work. For instance, Paul Ruggiers's 1984 collection of essays, *Editing Chaucer: The Great Tradition*, focuses on each of the major editing projects in the printing history of the *Tales* and explores the evolution and genesis of the Chaucer canon.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, because only the often-spurned 1721 Urry edition included the *Tale of Beryn* and the *Tale of Gamelyn* and no editions included the Orthodox

<sup>5</sup> Roland Barthes states that the writerly text is a perpetual present, upon which no *consequent* language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is *ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages.

In contrast, the reader of the "readerly" text only receives the text and does not actively take part in its meaning-making construction. See Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 5.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Ruggiers, ed., *Editing Chaucer: The Great Tradition* (Norman, OK: Pilgrim, 1984).

*Ploughman's Tale* or any other *Canterbury Tales* apocrypha, the volume does not directly engage the continuations and additions to the *Tales*. Moreover, the focus of *Editing Chaucer* is canonical Chaucer rather than the spurious, apocryphal, and marginalized additions to Chaucer's work.

On the other hand, some scholars have examined the reception and construction of Chaucer the man and author, including Stephanie Trigg in *Congenial Souls: Reading Chaucer from Medieval to Postmodern* and Geoffrey Gust in *Constructing Chaucer: Author and Autofiction in the Critical Tradition*.<sup>7</sup> Trigg thoroughly examines the history of readers seeking an affinity with Chaucer in his work, often constructing Chaucer in order to identify with him. Seth Lerer's *Chaucer and His Readers* explores the subjugated position of Chaucer's fifteenth-century readers, standing at the feet of "Father Chaucer."<sup>8</sup> Thomas Prendergast's *Chaucer's Dead Body: From Corpse to Corpus* compares the body of Chaucer to his body of work and how the connection between the two plays out in transmission and reception.<sup>9</sup> Still, all of these works are concerned with Chaucer's work generally and more specifically place the authorial persona at the center of the study, even if that center ends up being an absent center.

The most relevant studies of works at the margins of the Chaucer canon have been concerned with either individual works in isolation or the apocrypha in print. In *The Renaissance Chaucer*, Alice Miskimin devotes all of eight pages to the Chaucerian apocrypha. Moreover, Miskimin makes no mention of the continuations and additions to the *Tales*, focusing instead on the nature of the growth of the canon in the sixteenth century rather generally. In the only book on Chaucerian apocrypha, Kathleen Forni builds on Miskimin's initial study of the apocrypha and Chaucer in the Renaissance by exploring the transmission and reception history of the apocrypha, beginning with the 1532 printing of Chaucer's *Workes* by William Thynne, which marked the first publication effort to gather the works of Chaucer under the name of Chaucer.<sup>10</sup> Again, though, the interactive moves in the transmission of the *Tales* prior to the advent of the Folio canon of Chaucer's works are outside the purview of Forni's work.

These studies, briefly outlined above, are about the reception and construction of Chaucer. He is, of course, one of the few writers in the English canon who needs only one name, so it is only natural that *he* has taken different forms at different

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<sup>7</sup> Stephanie Trigg, *Congenial Souls: Reading Chaucer from Medieval to Postmodern* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2002); Geoffrey Gust, *Constructing Chaucer: Author and Autofiction in the Critical Tradition* (New York: Palgrave, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late Medieval England* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> Thomas A. Prendergast, *Chaucer's Dead Body: From Corpse to Corpus* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Alice Miskimin, *The Renaissance Chaucer* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1975); Kathleen Forni, *Chaucerian Apocrypha: A Counterfeit Canon* (Gainesville: U of Florida P, 2002).

moments for different readers. However, my focus here is on the *Canterbury Tales* and why this particular work has attracted so many continuations and additions. It is not so much about Chaucer as it is about the textual traces in his wake. Chaucer may very well have had a final intention when it came to the *Canterbury Tales*, and one of the manuscripts surviving might represent that intention. We may never know, and, so it seems based on the variety of textual instantiations of *Tales*, neither did late medieval and early modern readers. Most importantly, the point of this study is for it to stand in relief to the *Riverside* edition. As a teacher, I will continue to use the *Riverside*, but readers of Chaucer ought to know and consider that there is not a single text of the *Tales* but rather multiple texts, all of which are approximations of a work that may or may not have been fully expressed or, at the very least, we may never fully know.

In spite of this dynamic history and no shortage of critical attention, the *Canterbury Tales*' canon has remained stagnant for over the past one hundred years. Walter Skeat's late nineteenth-century edition of Chaucer's works and his 1900 book *The Chaucer Canon* have fixed Chaucer's corpus without many notable changes over the course of the last century. At the 2010 meeting of the New Chaucer Society, A.S.G. Edwards, a key proponent of the social-text approach to Chaucer's works, proposed that we reconsider some elements of the Chaucer canon, mentioning the potential inclusion of the *Tale of Gamelyn*, which I address in Chapter 6. Moreover, other critics have questioned the canonicity of the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* or the lyric "Chaucers wordes unto Adam, His Owne Scriveyn." Even with all these gestures toward reconsideration, the *Riverside* text, now over twenty years old in its current edition, reigns supreme as both a teaching and scholarly edition. In his 1985 article on *Beryn* and the *Siege of Thebes*, Bowers states poignantly that

in a very real sense very few people have read the *Canterbury Tales*. What they have experienced is a modern fabrication by Skeat, Robinson, Baugh, and Fisher, and other editors who offer the poem as a single work, albeit marred by gaps and rough edges, but nonetheless recounting what was said on a one-way trip from Southwark to the outskirts of Canterbury. This is technically a fabrication because no surviving manuscript arranges the fragments in an order which gives perfect geographical support to this design—not without the notorious "Bradshaw shift"—and no single manuscript, not even the Ellesmere, contains all the tales and links to be found in a modern edition with its scholarly confluations.<sup>11</sup>

I quote Bowers at length because he reveals the problems inherent in the monolithic, monumental modern critical edition of something with the history of being as dynamic and mobile as the *Canterbury Tales*. Just as the editors he cites, such as Robinson and Skeat, would consider many of the manuscripts to be corruptions

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<sup>11</sup> John Bowers, "The Tale of Beryn and The Siege of Thebes: Alternative Ideas of The Canterbury Tales," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 7 (1985): 23.

of the *Canterbury Tales*, Bowers considers the modern editors' "fabrication" a corruption (or at the very least an obfuscation) of the *Tales* as they existed in the fifteenth-century imagination. What Bowers gets at, perhaps unintentionally, is the fact that the medieval scribes and the twentieth-century editors are doing the very same thing. Both of them, though with very different criteria, historical contexts, and motivations, participate in the ongoing production of new versions of the *Canterbury Tales* through the selection and arrangement of the tales and frame material, the divisible pieces of the *Tales*, available to these differently historically situated participants in the interactive, gamelike production of the *Tales*.

Yet the monolithic *Riverside* edition, a fairly recent interactive move in the history of the *Tales*, is at tension with a significant current in the criticism. Some scholars have moved away from reconstructing a lost authoritative original closest to the author himself, looking more closely at the dynamic textual tradition of the *Tales*. Stephen Partridge, in "Questions of Evidence: Manuscripts and the Early History of Chaucer's Works," cites the major developments in the study of Chaucer manuscripts, and, though there have been many critics who have pointed out the mobility of Chaucer's works or fruitfulness of the social-text lens for Middle English works, two stand out as most pertinent to this present investigation.<sup>12</sup> In the 1991 volume of *TEXT*, John Thompson observes that Middle English texts are characterized by "openness."<sup>13</sup> In a 1994 article, Daniel Mosser picks up on the idea of openness, arguing that "the issue of 'openness' is [...] an important consideration for readers, editors, and critics of the *Canterbury Tales*, though it is also an issue that is most often not foregrounded in editorial commentary or presentation."<sup>14</sup> Mosser suggests James Dean's and John Bowers's TEAMS editions "have begun the process of fully documenting the openness of Chaucer's text," yet, twenty years removed, there have not been any further advancements. In fact, while Mosser offers a convincing call for new-media editions that account for this openness, no electronic or print edition has revolutionized teaching or scholarship, and the rather closed text of the *Riverside* remains the standard. *The Variorum Chaucer* has been slowly progressing over the past forty years and is quite limited by the print medium. The initial CD-ROMS of the *Canterbury Tales* Project are now obsolete, and the focus on individual, canonical tales would have likely excluded the spurious, apocryphal, and continuative texts that I focus on in the following chapters. The only recent advancement on the editorial front is a project at the University of Sheffield called "The Blake Editions of the *Canterbury Tales*," named for textual critic Norman Blake, which appears to be the left-over

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<sup>12</sup> Stephen Partridge, "Questions of Evidence: Manuscripts and the Early History of Chaucer's Works," in *Writing after Chaucer: Essential Readings in Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Daniel J. Pinti (New York: Garland, 1998), 1–26.

<sup>13</sup> John Thompson, "Textual Instability and the Late Medieval Reputation of Some Middle English Religious Literature," *Text* 5 (1991): 175.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Mosser, "Reading and Editing the *Canterbury Tales*: Past, Present, and Future (?)," *Text* 7 (1994): 201.

materials from the *Canterbury Tales* Project, including a diplomatic transcription of seven manuscripts and all the witnesses to the *Franklin's Tale*. Nevertheless, conspicuously absent from the editions are manuscript images accompanying the diplomatic transcriptions. While many of the manuscripts of the Blake editions are noteworthy for their non-canonical material, they are far from being comprehensive and lack the tools offered by an electronic platform exhibited by such projects as the William Blake Archive.

Two decades after Mosser's essay, at a time when "openness" has emerged as a formal structure of new media in such venues as wikis, open-source software, and other platforms, it is time to revisit "openness" and scrutinize the interactive moves readers made with the *Tales* in its transmission. While we are still waiting for an electronic edition that presents mobility and openness meaningfully, it is time to turn a critical lens to the corpus of *Canterbury Tales*' materials that have been left out of the canon.

In the following chapters I look at several of the historically traceable continuations and additions to the *Tales*. Chapter 1 advocates for the critical value of the "spurious" and "apocryphal" by looking to recent advances in textual criticism and drawing a comparison between the interactive continuation of the *Tales* and interactive forms of play characteristic of newer media. Through this transhistorical comparison, the highly variable texts of the *Tales* reveal themselves to be the traces of a history of playful, involved reading.

Chapter 2 addresses the spurious links and other gateway paratexts that serve to introduce and frame the *Tales*. The chapter begins by questioning the authority of the title of the *Tales*, the cover images of modern editions, and an historiated initial in BL Lansdowne MS 851. The chapter concludes with the spurious links involving the Wife of Bath, exploring how these very small paratexts cause big changes in the voice and meaning of the Wife's lengthy prologue. The first presents the Wife as a submissive storyteller not capable of matching or fully "requiting" the male storytellers. The second example reinforces the Wife's recalcitrant identity, describing her swearing and seizing control of the storytelling game.

Chapter 3 looks at the only addition assignable to a particular author—John Lydgate, monk and court poet. Through the *Siege of Thebes* and its prologue, Lydgate interjects himself into the frame narrative and imaginary world of the *Tales*, forms a carefully calculated monastic identity, and narrates what Chaucer failed to narrate—the arrival of the pilgrims at Canterbury. In addition, the scribes and illuminators of the manuscripts of the *Siege* reinforce Lydgate's effort to enter into the imaginary world of the *Tales* and extend the *Canterbury* story canon through additions of their own. In this chapter, I explore the various ways Lydgate creates for himself a very particular pilgrim avatar, situating himself in the place of Chaucer, imitating Chaucer's syntax, correcting Chaucer's monk, and reinforcing his own poetic identity.

The fourth chapter addresses the unique order of the *Tales* in Alnwick Castle, Northumberland MS 455 and the addition of the *Canterbury Interlude*, in which the pilgrims finally reach their destination. Several decades after Chaucer composed

his *Tales*, the redactor(s) of Northumberland MS 455 recognized the storytelling game as the catalyst through which the individual tales are told and identified the plan of the pilgrimage and storytelling game that needed to be seen through to some semblance of completion in this unique text of the work.

In Chapter 5, I look at the *Tale of Beryn*, which was added as the second *Merchant's Tale* in the Northumberland text. While many of the chapters in this book look at the manuscripts and historical context, this chapter examines the literary significance of a particular additional tale and how the tale itself delves into the themes of game and play. I argue that it is only appropriate that a work predicated on the playing of a storytelling game have a text added to it later that extends the images and concepts of game in the narrative itself. In *Beryn*, there are the overt games played by Beryn such as dice and chess, but there are also the language and identity games Geoffrey plays.

The next chapter, Chapter 6, explores the various manifestations of late medieval and early modern tales assigned to the Plowman pilgrim for whom Chaucer gave no tale. The plowman was a highly charged socio-religious figure, whose religious identity Chaucer fails to fully flesh out by not giving him a tale, leaving him with only a positive yet religiously ambiguous description in the *General Prologue*. However, two diametrically opposed Plowmans (spelled Ploughman in the fifteenth-century text) would be added to the *Tales* in a manuscript dating from the second half of the fifteenth century and then later in several sixteenth-century printed editions. The fifteenth-century manifestation of the Ploughman is clearly and strangely orthodox, and the sixteenth-century manifestation is plainly and vituperatively anti-papal.

Finally, Chapter 7 investigates the various acts throughout the transmission of the *Cook's Tale* that seek to overcome and explain the tale's fragmented state, including the *Tale of Gamelyn*, the interlinear additions in three manuscripts, and the relocation of the tale in one particular manuscript.

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## Chapter 1

# Reclaiming the “Spurious” and “Apocryphal”

Though textual criticism has been used primarily to produce new editions, when coupled with traditional forms of literary criticism, textual criticism, especially a social-text approach, provides a fruitful form of cultural and literary analysis. For most of the twentieth century, the broad field of textual criticism within the discipline of English served as the handmaiden to literary criticism. Before one could do literary criticism, one had to trace the textual history (or usually have someone else do so) in order to arrive at a text to be studied. Most literary critics entrusted this task to editors and took up the work with the words on the page, trusting that the editor had done his/her job well and that the text presented and the textual history summarized were accurate.

We can trace this division of labor to the early to mid-twentieth century and the desire to make the process of textual criticism as objective and scientific as possible. The New Bibliographers and other textual critics practiced analytical bibliography in order to trace the history of a given work with the goal of discovering the fully authorial text. For critics such as Fredson Bowers and W.W. Greg, the goal was an edition that approximated the author’s intentions (whether final, original, or otherwise). The most notable inheritance from Greg’s model of editing for editors of medieval texts is the practice of eclectic editing. That is to say, an editor will systematically choose readings from several manuscripts or printed texts, and also introduce emendations based on judgments regarding the author’s intentions without basis in the extant texts, in order to work towards (or divine) what he/she estimates is the most authorial text (however that editor chooses to define authorial). The other common editorial model is the best-text edition, in which the editor uses what he/she concludes is the “best text” and consults other textual witnesses to reconcile textual cruxes and defects found in the “best text.” Both editorial models tend to privilege and/or create a single text, often with a complicated list of significant variants relegated to the notes.

Tim Machan argues in *Textual Criticism and Middle English Texts* that approaches which place authorial intentions as the paramount goal are guilty of “the ahistorical assumption that one conception of author, work, and text has been constant throughout all literary periods and provenances and that this conception, in turn, must be reflected in editorial procedure.”<sup>1</sup> Machan suggests that the late medieval English model of authority centered on the pre-linguistic truth or the *res* of the work rather

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<sup>1</sup> Tim William Machan, *Textual Criticism and Middle English Texts* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1995), 57.



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