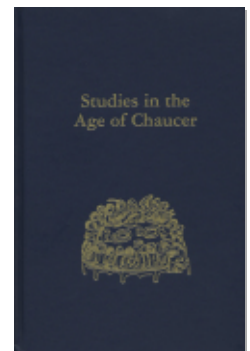*Scribal Correction and Literary Craft: English Manuscripts 1375–1510* by Daniel Wakelin (review)

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Daniel Wakelin, *Scribal Correction and Literary Craft: English Manuscripts 1375–1510*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pp. xviii, 345. $99.00.

Under the influence of scholars such as Jean Rychner, Paul Zumthor, and Bernard Cerquiglini, the closing decades of the twentieth century witnessed an important reevaluation of scribal labor. The inevitable points of difference among manuscript versions of a given work came to be seen not solely as the unfortunate products of human error but also, potentially, as evidence of scribes' critical engagement with the works that they were engaged in copying. The effects of this trend on Middle English Studies are often traced back to Barry Windeatt's seminal article on ''The Scribes as Chaucer's Early Critics'' (*SAC* 1 [1979]: 119–41), in which Windeatt read the slips and aberrations among the extant manuscripts of *Troilus and Criseyde* as evidence of their copyists' responses to Chaucer's poetry. Studies of the critical and editorial work of Middle English scribes have since proliferated, but their focus continues to fall on the elements of a piece of writing that a given scribe has changed. In response to this trend, Daniel Wakelin's new book makes a compelling case for rethinking the question of scribal agency, so that it also include a consideration of those moments in which scribes make clear their determination to reproduce their exemplars accurately. Just like aberrance, Wakelin argues, correctness can make scribal priorities visible; when scribes correct their own or their colleagues' work, they manifest a series of attitudes toward both their craft and the texts whose transmission they ensure. Indeed, their corrections can be viewed as an implicit form of literary criticism that anticipates the more overt theorizing of writing in English that begins to be produced in the early modern period.

   In his introduction (Chapter 1), Wakelin explains that he has pursued his account of correction in English manuscripts from two angles. On the one hand, he has made a broad survey of the corrections in eighty manuscripts containing Middle English that are now in the Huntington Library in California; on the other, he has conducted a series of case studies of individual manuscripts kept in the Huntington collection and elsewhere. In combination with the survey, the case studies allow Wakelin to offer a series of observations that are at once broadly relevant and nuanced, as his individual chapters move from general discussion into the analysis of specific manuscripts. The book is divided into two

halves. In the first, Wakelin outlines the pains that some scribes took in order to produce accurate versions of the works that they copied. Preliminary chapters cover the cultural influences that promoted this pursuit of accuracy (in the case of Chapter 2) and demonstrate the degree of fidelity that scribes frequently attained. If it is unsurprising that divergences are few between known direct copies and their exemplars, for example (how else would we be able to identify them as direct copies?), it is nevertheless noteworthy that the majority of the corrections made by scribes to a sample of such known direct copies further reduce those divergences (Chapter 3). Turning to his Huntington corpus, Wakelin goes on to demonstrate that most of the corrections made in these books are in the hand of their main scribes, further implicating individual copyists in the pursuit of accurate reproduction (Chapter 4).

Chapters 5 to 7 discuss correcting techniques, as well as the frequency and the nature of scribal corrections in the Huntington corpus and in the books selected for closer study. The result is a rich account of the intelligence and the resourcefulness of Middle English scribes, whose engagement in the process of correcting their work often appears to reflect a sense of responsibility toward the texts that they reproduce. One among several intriguing observations made at this stage is that the majority of corrections that Wakelin logs in a sample of the Huntington manuscripts bring the texts thus corrected closer into line with modern critical editions of those works. While the limitations of such comparisons are clear, as Wakelin is well aware, this observation points to an apparently instinctive tendency among some scribes toward standardization. In many of the manuscripts Wakelin considers, scribes seem to have been motivated by a desire to produce texts that would look like already extant copies of the same work, not productions that were refashioned in order to appeal to their own or to their patrons' idiosyncratic interests.

The book's second half considers how scribes' behavior as correctors was shaped by their exposure to the Middle English texts that they copied. When scribes make corrections to their work that are not mandated by the requirements of Middle English grammar, those modifications might be an attempt to rectify a belatedly observed discrepancy between the copy and its exemplar. Modifications of this kind might represent an autonomous alteration, designed to bring the copy closer into line with a theoretical notion of its "correct" form—a notion developed over the course of the scribe's reading and copying of the text. As

Wakelin observes in Chapter 9, corrections to rhyme patterns provide the clearest indication of Middle English scribes' sensitivity to the dictates of genre and form; however, corrections that introduce otherwise superfluous adjectives, adverbs, and intensifiers also display a sensitivity to poetic style. When these scribal corrections are viewed as a kind of literary-critical judgment, it becomes evident that a poet like Lydgate—whose verse has not typically attracted close attention from modern critics—was actually a figure whose works sparked careful critical interest during the Middle Ages (see Chapter 5). Finally, in places where scribes signal gaps in their own copying, they clearly demonstrate an awareness of the gulf that might exist between any material manifestation of a text and its fullest, most correct version. Indeed, as Wakelin points out, by calling attention to such gaps, scribes articulate a belief that the unity of any given work might exist somewhere beyond the manuscript page; in this sense, their theoretical assumptions about the nature of a literary work might be said to anticipate Formalist conceptions of the text and of reading (Chapter 10). Where recent studies on the independent creativity of Middle English copyists have encouraged a blurring of the distinction between authorship and scribal work, Wakelin thus reestablishes the scribe in a position of subservience to the text. This is not the subservience of a dullard, however, but of a skilled and dedicated craftsman. Authors themselves did not disregard this kind of work; consideration of autograph manuscripts suggests that author-scribes behaved similarly when they wrote out their own texts (Chapter 11).

Criticisms of *Scribal Correction* will likely focus on the composition of its manuscript sample, about whose deficiencies Wakelin is unswervingly upfront. One group of texts known to have attracted significant scribal tampering—Middle English romances—happens to be underrepresented in the Huntington Library's collection. Somewhat more problematic is the omission of Anglo-French and Anglo-Latin copying from consideration. Since many medieval scribes were engaged in bi- or trilingual copying, Wakelin's focus on Middle English skews his study more seriously than does the omission of one literary genre: it limits what he can say about the "English" manuscripts announced as the subject of his book in its title. It would be churlish to push such objections too far, however. As it is, the breadth of the corpus studied in *Scribal Correction* far exceeds that covered by most Anglo-Saxon publications on paleographic topics, which still typically take the form of articles addressing

individual scribes and/or codices. At the same time, Wakelin's sensitivity to the uniqueness of each manuscript book demonstrates the attention to detail with which that scholarly tradition continues to be associated. By illuminating the craftsmanship and the careful thinking that often went into accurate copying, Wakelin has made a welcome contribution to our understanding of typical scribal behavior. Its importance will be felt in subsequent studies of Middle English editing and textual history, the standardization of English before print, the early history of literary criticism in England, and several other topics.

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JON WHITMAN, ed. *Romance and History: Imagining Time from the Medieval to the Early Modern Period*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. 331. $99.00.

This ambitious volume considers the relationship between romance and history from Geoffrey of Monmouth to Cervantes. Its sixteen chapters give attention to medieval and early modern Latin, English, French, Italian, and Spanish texts, assembled under the guiding question of "what kinds of history . . . such texts evoke" (8). This organizing principle admits quite a bit of ambiguity. The idea of "history" not only varies within the romances under consideration, but also shifts across different critical approaches. Such methodological differences can make it difficult to track any one idea about history across the entire set of essays. But the variety is also valuable. History and historicism have often been invoked as shibboleths that separate medieval thought from that of the Renaissance or divide one critical approach from another. In using "history" instead as a unifying term, Whitman lends perspective on the relationship among the different "kinds of history" that emerge beneath different critical lenses.

To organize the volume, Whitman must invoke literary historical categories even as he brings preconceived models of history under scrutiny. Accordingly, he uses a self-consciously constructed scheme, borrowing Jehan Bodel's "three matters" of Rome, Britain, and France, while modifying and supplementing them to suit the material (8). After the editor's introduction (Part 1), Part 2 of the collection gathers two essays