

# *The Secrees of Old Philisoffres* and John Lydgate's Posthumous Reputation

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*The Secrees of Old Philisoffres* is a Middle English verse translation of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Secretum Secretorum*, a mirror for princes that imagines the aged philosopher sending letters of advice to Alexander the Great on topics ranging from the arts of kingship to alchemy, physiognomy, and diet. Traditionally dated to the year of the author's death in 1449, it is normally presented as the last work written by the Benedictine monk and highly prolific poet, John Lydgate.<sup>1</sup> This is a distinction that the *Secrees* cannot be said to deserve in any unambiguous way, however, for its identity as a posthumously published, dual-authored production is routinely advertised in paratextual material surviving in the extant medieval witnesses and within the text of the poem itself. Thus after line 1491 of the copy of the work in London, British Library MS Sloane 2464, there comes a rubric announcing a change in authorship: "here deyed this *translator* and nobil poete and the yonge folowere gan his *prologe* on this wyse" (fol. 36r). There then follows a corresponding change of voice as, in a prologue introducing his work, the young follower laments his inexperience. He contrasts this with the expertise of the author of the first part of the poem, whom he is quick to identify as John Lydgate:

Off Iohn lydgate / how shulde I the sotyl trace  
Folwe in secrees / celestial and dyvyne,  
Sith I am nat aqueynted / with the musys nyne?  
(1503–1505)<sup>2</sup>

This article elaborates upon two observations pertaining to the transference of the authorial function in the *Secrees*. First, while Lydgate was clearly not shy when it came to asserting his authorship—indeed, he names himself in more texts than any other Middle English writer<sup>3</sup>—I am keen to register that it is the continuator of the *Secrees*, not Lydgate himself, who identifies Lydgate as the author of the text's opening section. To begin, I look at the agency of the continuator in the production of the *Secrees* and at the extent to which his attribution of the first portion of the poem to Lydgate can be understood as a self-interested bid for respect and, perhaps, reward. Then I go on to consider the significance of the author's death rubric, which is written not in the voice of the continuator but in that of an unidentified third person. I want to think about who speaks these lines and about how they structure our understanding of the relationship between the continuator and the author of the first part of the poem; within the context of a survey of the extant manuscript and early print situations in which the *Secrees* survives, I pay particular attention to the ways in which the author's death rubric implicates the poem's medieval reproducers in the process of developing Lydgate's posthumous reputation.

The success of the *Secrees* was considerable. According to the *Digital Index of Middle English Verse*, where it is listed as item 1544, the poem is extant in twenty-four medieval copies; an annotated list of these witnesses is appended to this article for convenience.<sup>4</sup> While the appeal of the work must have derived in part from the popularity of its source and from its handling of such current themes as good governance and medicine, I argue that a significant portion of the extant medieval witnesses to the text demonstrate an interest among both bookmakers and readers in developing and promoting Lydgate's authorial profile. Like the continuator of the *Secrees*, I suggest, the medieval reproducers of the poem could manipulate the idea of Lydgate's posthumous reputation with a view to exciting the curiosity of their audiences and accruing benefit to themselves. This approach to the *Secrees of Old Philisoffres* and its earliest witnesses thus offers a fresh opportunity to review a range of topics that are crucial to any understanding of English literature in the second half of the fifteenth century: the promotion of Chaucer and his first disciples by their followers; the currency of Middle English authorship as an idea that might give structure to a text or a book; and the motivations, commercial and otherwise, that could drive Middle English book production in the decades immediately before and after the advent of print in England.

### **The Authors and Their Poem**

First, then, the question of attribution: Who wrote the *Secrees*? Where the continuator assigns the first portion of the poem to Lydgate, he also clarifies his position vis-à-vis his work. Lydgate's death provides the rationale

for the continuator's composition, which the reader is invited to view both as a careful tribute to the memory of the dead poet and as a response to the command of an unnamed but impatient patron. In the opening lines of the text of the prologue preserved in Sloane 2464, the continuator mentions that he is late finishing his text:

Tendirnesse of age / and lak of Elloquence,  
 this feerful matere / savyng supportacioun,  
 me hath constreyned / to put in suspence  
 From yow, my lord / to whoom Recommendacioun  
 I mekly do sende / with al Subieccioun  
 The dulnesse of my penne. (1492–1497)

The abject pose in which the continuator depicts himself both here, before the commissioner of the work, and throughout his prologue will be familiar to readers of fifteenth-century poetry. Most often it is before Chaucer that the later Middle English poets prostrate themselves. In his retelling of the story of Troy, for example, Lydgate repeatedly looks back to the example set by his predecessor in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Indeed, we would do well to read the *Troilus*, Lydgate asserts, since it was Chaucer who first gilded “owre englishe” through his poetry and who first began to magnify our tongue and to adorn it with his eloquence:

Be hoole story Chaucer kan ȝow telle  
 Ȝif þat ȝe liste—no man bet alyue—  
 Nor þe processe halfe so wel discryue:  
 For he owre englishe gilte with his sawes,  
 Rude and boistous firste be olde dawes,  
 þat was ful fer from al perfeccioun,  
 And but of litel reputacioun,  
 Til þat he cam, & þoruȝ his poetrie,  
 Gan oure tonge firste to magnifie,  
 And adourne it with his elloquence. (III. 4234–  
 4243)<sup>5</sup>

Once viewed straightforwardly as evidence of Lydgate's awareness of his supposed inferiority to Chaucer, readers from Seth Lerer onward have reinterpreted such gestures towards the pre-eminence of the earlier poet as aspects of a strategy designed by Lydgate and his peers to justify their own literary projects in a climate that had only recently seen English-language poetry return to cultural prominence.<sup>6</sup> Thus in his reading of the continuation of this passage, Robert J. Meyer-Lee highlights Lydgate's retrospective

construction of Chaucer as England's first poet laureate.<sup>7</sup> Chaucer should be praised, Lydgate declares,

So þat þe laurer of oure englishe tonge  
 Be to hym 3oue for his excellence,  
 Riȝt as whilom by ful hiȝe sentence,  
 Perpetuelly for a memorial,  
 Of Columpna by þe cardynal  
 To Petrak Fraunceis was 3ouen in Ytaille (III.  
 4246–4251)

While Lydgate confines his own ambitions to an attempt “So as I can, hym to magnifie / In my writynge, plainly, til I dye” (III. 4261–4262), where he announces his intention to “magnifie” Chaucer just as Chaucer magnified English, Lydgate pictures himself in a role that is comparable to that performed by his predecessor, and he implicitly identifies himself as the earlier poet's heir. If he could establish Chaucer as a viable literary model, an early fifteenth-century poet like Lydgate would have a tradition of Middle English writing into which he might insert himself; by presenting himself as Chaucer's follower he might also hope to bask in the reflection of the glory with which he invested the departed poet and thus to increase his chances of attracting patronage and other forms of support, for himself and for his order. It is a testimony to Lydgate's success in establishing the currency of this authorial strategy that at least one of Lydgate's successors installed Lydgate in the position that Lydgate had reserved for Chaucer. The opportunistic mourning of Chaucer by the poets of Lydgate's generation had provided the foundations on which they could build their own poetic monuments. By the same logic, Lydgate's own death might be manipulated by a mid-fifteenth-century writer engaged in constructing his own literary reputation. I think that this is what is going on in the *Secrees of Old Philisoffres*.

The approach that I am advocating invites readers to view precisely those aspects of the *Secrees* that have rendered it unpopular in modern criticism as part of a deliberate attempt by the text's continuator to present an emotive portrait of Lydgate's demise. The brief critical history of the *Secrees* is not flattering. Walter F. Schirmer comments upon the negative impression left by the work of a “jumble,” both in terms of its content and its formal disposition,<sup>8</sup> and Derek Pearsall amplifies this criticism, pronouncing the poem to be “as nearly worthless as any that Lydgate penned.”<sup>9</sup> These assessments respond first and foremost to the complex opening section of the *Secrees* (ll. 1–637), which compiles a series of formal prologues taken over from the most likely multiple Latin and/or French versions of the *Secretum Secretorum* from which it was translated.<sup>10</sup> These prologues contain much duplicated material. The

process whereby the *Secretum* was translated into Latin is narrated twice and attributed to two different men without further elaboration, for instance (ll. 211–301; 603–637). In a uniquely sensitive reading of the *Secrees*, Margaret Bridges notes the likelihood that the author of the first section of the poem inherited a part of this confusion from his sources, a common feature among parallel French and English versions of the *Secretum* being the misattribution of the initial work of translating the text into Latin to Philip of Paris rather than to John of Spain, the writer now credited with producing the earliest Latin version of the *Secretum*; Bridges also points out that duplication of the kind met in the poem's opening lines is "consonant with [Lydgate's] penchant observable elsewhere for multiplying textual genealogies."<sup>11</sup>

Hospitable readings such as that pursued by Bridges are to be welcomed. It is difficult to imagine that Pearsall's and Schirmer's low estimation of the *Secrees* can have been current in the Middle Ages, given the frequency with which it was reproduced. At the same time, it is difficult to deny the justice of Pearsall's and Schirmer's objections outright. As well as containing several instances of repetition akin to that already described,<sup>12</sup> the portion of the text attributed to Lydgate seems unusually disconnected. There are unexplained shifts between third- and first-person narration, for instance, which frustrate the reading process considerably (ll. 225–231; 617–623).<sup>13</sup> While criticism has evolved beyond the need to make value judgments of the kind that characterize Schirmer's and Pearsall's mid-twentieth-century studies, it thus makes sense to try to work with as well as against their responses to the poem. Indeed, if I am right about the *Secrees*, their reactions might ultimately be imputed not to any deficiency in the work but to its potential cleverness.

The moment at which the death of Lydgate is announced in the *Secrees* appears to have been chosen for maximum impact. The stanzas leading up to this point contain a moralized reflection on the four seasons (ll. 1296–1491); according to the fiction developed in the *Secretum* tradition, this was one of the forms in which Aristotle delivered his advice to King Alexander. Thus we read that remembrance of spring should alert Alexander to the choice that he had to act either wisely or foolishly in his youth; summer should evoke for him the necessary relationship between desert and divine reward; autumn should be interpreted as a sign of the coming of old age; and winter should prompt recollection of the inevitability of death. This point is reinforced in the section's last stanza:

Off this forseyd / take the morallite,  
 Settith a syde / alle materys spooke in veyn:  
 The foure sesouns / shewe in ther degre,  
 First veer and Estas / next Autumpne with his greyn,  
 Constreynt of wyntir / with frostys ovir leyn,

To our foure Ages / the sesouns wel applyed;  
 deth al consumyth / which may nat be denyed  
 (1485–1491)

With this, the portion of the poem attributed to Lydgate ends, and the poet dies, as it were, before our eyes. Where the extant manuscripts have not suffered damage and do not present an extracted text, the next thing we read is the previously mentioned death rubric.<sup>14</sup> Thus we are led to believe, in Pearsall's words, that "the pen slipped limply from [Lydgate's] fingers, and the aged monk slumped to the floor."<sup>15</sup> In such a reading context, the previously mentioned infelicities in the poem's structure might be reprocessed as evidence of the author's senility and the ebbing of his literary powers. Indeed, the poem contains multiple allusions to the great age of Aristotle, the putative original author of the *Secretum Secretorum* that might also be thought to refer to Lydgate. According to the logic established by the posthumous attribution of the first portion of the *Secrees* to the English writer, the translating labors of the old poet can be read in parallel to the work of the old philosopher, who in the text's opening prologues is repeatedly said to have sent Alexander the letters compiled in the *Secretum* when he had fallen into great age (ll. 50–56; 477–483; 596–602; 645–651). Thus at the same time as the *Secrees* confirms Lydgate's fame, it renders him obsolete, clearing the ground for new writing.

As the text's nineteenth-century editor, Robert Steele, wryly noted, the apparent conjunction of literature and life, whereby Lydgate is said to have died having just penned his reflections on the inevitability of death, is "one of those coincidences which look like design."<sup>16</sup> Pearsall concurs, suggesting that before the continuator of the *Secrees* began the portion of the poem that he overtly claims as his own, he deliberately rearranged the lines that he attributes to Lydgate from a series of attempts at the translation of the *Secretum* left in a disordered state by his predecessor at his death.<sup>17</sup> Some justification for Pearsall's and Steele's hypotheses may be drawn from the observation that the passage on the four seasons would seem most often to have been included in the section of the *Secretum Secretorum* devoted to the king's health (the continuator begins his portion of the work with this section, at l. 1590 in the Sloane 2464 text).<sup>18</sup> Further historical corroboration for Pearsall's and Steele's suggestion is provided by the traditional attribution of the continuation of the *Secrees* to the poet Benedict Burgh (d. 1483), who is identified as the author of the second portion of the poem in an extension added to the author's death rubric ("per Benedictum Burgh") that occurs in three of the extant copies of the text written by the so-called Hammond scribe (more on whom below; compare notes for witnesses 12, 15, and 16 in the appendix).<sup>19</sup> In a manuscript largely written



in the hand of the early modern antiquarian John Stow, Burgh is also identified as the author of a verse epistle directed to Lydgate in which he praises the older poet's achievements and begs to be received as his disciple;<sup>20</sup> the reconstructed itineraries of Burgh and Lydgate indicate a possible meeting between the two poets, perhaps in the early 1430s;<sup>21</sup> and the two men were connected by a complex and ramifying network of patronal relationships to the Bouchier family in Essex.<sup>22</sup> In short, we might argue in favor of the likelihood that the continuator of the *Secrees* knew Lydgate personally and that he accordingly enjoyed the intimate access to the dead poet's papers that Steele's and Pearsall's models for the completion of the poem presuppose. A parallel case has recently been put forward regarding the polishing of the Ellesmere text of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, which Simon Horobin attributes to Thomas Hoccleve, a self-confessed devotee of Chaucer.<sup>23</sup>

Lydgate might have attempted to translate the *Secretum Secretorum* at some point in his career—not necessarily at its end—and the continuator, who never names himself, might have been Benedict Burgh, who might have known Lydgate personally. In reality, however, the poet who presents himself as the continuator of the work required no direct access to Lydgate or his papers in order to produce the final version of the *Secrees*. Indeed, Lydgate need not have penned a word of the text attributed to him by the continuator in order for the poem to work as a calculated tribute to Lydgate's achievements: this, I am suggesting, is how we might best approach it. It is the act of attribution that matters. What is at issue here is a phenomenon that shares some features of the "author-function" that Michel Foucault sees as the principle by which the modern reader "limits, excludes, and chooses" among the multiplicity of meanings available in any given cultural text and by which he or she thus "impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction."<sup>24</sup> But whereas for Foucault the author-function is something that we bring to the text, something that, "at least in appearance, is outside it and antecedes it,"<sup>25</sup> in the Middle Ages, as Alexandra Gillespie points out, the idea of the author could both function as a limit to the endless play of textual meaning and be a part of a literary game.<sup>26</sup> Thus while Lydgate is identified as the maker of the first portion of the poem in thirteen of the sixteen extant versions of the author's death rubric listed in the appendix, as we have seen, Lydgate's name is not mentioned in that paratext in Sloane 2464. In Sloane 2464, and in two other copies of the work listed as containing the anonymous rubric, the attribution of the poem to Lydgate comes solely from within the continuator's portion of the work: it is a part of his text, not external to it (compare notes for witnesses 1 and 4 in the appendix).

The appendix also compiles data demonstrating some of the variations to which the continuator's prologue was subject that have a notable effect on the reader's apprehension of the work's authorship and the process of its continuation. The passage cited above from lines 1492–1497 of the Sloane 2464 text (Steele's stanza 214), in which the completed text of the *Secrees* is presented as a tardy production, is to be found only in a minority of the extant witnesses, for instance (compare notes for witnesses 1, 4, and 19 in the appendix); the other copies of the work give less information regarding the continuator's motivation, and in at least two apparently undamaged witnesses the entire continuator's prologue is absent: in one of these, Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College MS 366/725, the author's death rubric is also missing; in the other, Oxford, Balliol College MS 329, the rubric has apparently been rewritten in order to elide the agency of the continuator in the completion of the work, reading simply "Her endyth John lydgate translator of þis be for seyde her arystotyll wrytyth a pystyll to alyzaundre how he scholde conserve naturall helth of þe body" (fol. 107r).<sup>27</sup> While Lydgate's conceptualized responsibility for the portion of the text attributed to him is clearly intended to be appreciated and to add value to the *Secrees*, the nature of his involvement in the work and the continuator's own motivations are presented with varying degrees of clarity and insistence from witness to witness.

The difference between Gillespie's understanding of the author function and that of Foucault as she outlines it is between "a reductive category—one that manages, controls, and answers—and a category that is *also* productive, that proliferates, energizes, and changes."<sup>28</sup> In the case of the *Secrees*, the energizing effects of the attribution of the first portion of the text to Lydgate are significant because it encourages readers to interpret the poem's various infelicities as a meaningful reflection of its author's failing powers. As will soon become clear, some part of the popularity of the *Secrees* clearly derived from the work's thematic engagements; interest in the *Secretum* itself was also already high in later medieval England: the *Secrees* is just one of several Middle English translations of the work that have survived from the period.<sup>29</sup> Alongside the appeal that these factors generated, the continuator's reconstruction of Lydgate's final moments might also be viewed as one of the causes of its undeniable popularity among late-medieval readers.

At the outset of this paper I noted that the rubric announcing Lydgate's death is written in the third person. Bridges and others have sensibly argued that the regular reproduction of this rubric across the total corpus of the extant manuscripts suggests that the continuator himself supplied these words along with the other paratextual comments that punctuate the poem.<sup>30</sup> Be this as it may, it remains notable that the continuator does not assume responsibility for his rubric, either because of generic constraints (manuscript apparatuses are normally written in the third person) or as a matter of



personal choice. “[H]ere deyed this *translator* and *nobil poete*” we are told in Sloane 2464, “and the yonge folowere gan his *prologe* on this wyse.” It is as if the book’s scribe, or perhaps even the book itself, were speaking to us, explaining the process whereby the fraught text that it contains came to be completed and reproduced in manuscript for our perusal. With a view to obtaining a better impression of the variety of compiling voices implicated in this rubric, I want now to survey the medieval contexts in which the poem survives and, through them, to think about the various motivations that produced the surviving medieval copies of the poem.

### The Medieval Witnesses and Their Makers

*The Secrees of Old Philisoffres* held a range of attractions for its medieval reproducers and the readers whose interests guided them. Consideration of the texts alongside which the poem was frequently compiled suggests that it was particularly appreciated among an audience of gentry readers for its development of the themes of governance and self-rule. The poem’s capacity to speak to these concerns is highlighted in the title of the work preferred among the extant witnesses, of which the appendix lists seven entitling the poem *The Book of the Governance of Kings and Princes* and four calling it a *Regimen Principum* in an explicit. The poem frequently appeared in books containing texts treating governance, conduct, and feats of arms that can be associated with particular households. Identified as the “grete boke” commissioned by Sir John Paston (d. 1479), London, British Library MS Lansdowne 285 compiles texts describing chivalric spectacles alongside the *Secrees* (fols. 152r–197v) and the Middle English translation often attributed to John Trevisa of Vegetius’s *De rei militari* (fols. 84r–138r), a late antique treatise on the arts of war that enjoyed huge popularity in the late Middle Ages.<sup>31</sup> Portions of Lansdowne 285, including its copy of the *Secrees*, appear to have been copied directly from New York, Pierpont Morgan Library MS M775, whose execution is more sumptuous but whose origins lie in a context in which a lively interest in the arts of combat might likewise be assumed: heraldic arms added to the book early in its history link it to the household of Sir John Astley (d. 1486), a famous dueler and early recipient of the Order of the Garter from Edward IV in about 1461.<sup>32</sup>

Books comparable to the Lansdowne and Morgan codices include London, British Library MS Additional 14408 and Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud misc. 416. Written throughout by the same scribe, the Additional book compiles the *Secrees* (1r–48v) alongside the first book of the Middle English *De rei militari* (fols. 49r–66r) and a Middle English translation of the *Consilia Isidori* (fols. 66v–73r), a treatise on the vices and the virtues that is traditionally associated with Richard Rolle. It concludes with a colophon announcing that “Cest liure appertient Nycolas de Saint lo Chevalier” (fol.

73r), Nicholas St. Lo being a knight of Sutton in Somerset (d. 1486).<sup>33</sup> In Laud misc. 416, the *Secrees* (fols. 255r–287r) appears alongside part of Peter Idley’s *Instructions to His Son* (fols. 1r–64v), an imperfect copy of the *Cursor mundi* (fols. 65r–181v), the Middle English *De rei militari* (fols. 182r–226v), an abbreviated *Siege of Thebes* (fols. 227r–254r), and an imperfect copy of *The Parliament of Fowels* (fol. 288r–289v). The presence of a colophon in this book—“scriptus Rhodo per Johannem Neuton die 25 Octobris 1459” (fol. 226v)—has allowed M. C. Seymour to locate part of the copying of Laud misc. 416 in the household of John Tiptoff, earl of Worcester (d. 1471), who had a manor at La Rode in Selling, Kent (while Seymour identifies three scribes at work in the codex, the medieval foliation of the book identifies it as a late fifteenth-century compilation).<sup>34</sup> Two further books transmitting the *Secrees* manifest similar tastes, but their provenance is less clear: Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum MS McClean 182, which transmits the *Secrees* (fols. 12r–49r) with an imperfect copy of Lydgate’s *Serpent of Division* (fols. 1r–9v), miscellaneous Lydgatean ballads, some of which are extracts from the *Fall of Princes* (fols. 9v–11v; 49v–52v), and an imperfect copy of Hoccleve’s *Regiment of Princes* (fols. 54r–138r); and London, British Library MS Sloane 2027, which sees the *Secrees* (fols. 53r–92v) rubbing shoulders with an imperfect copy of the Middle English *De rei militari* (fols. 1r–36r), John Russell’s *Boke of Nurture* (fols. 37r–52r), Robert of Gloucester’s *Chronicle* (fols. 97v–169v), and an imperfect *Brut* (fols. 96v–188v).

A smaller group of manuscripts transmitting the *Secrees* witnesses to an interest in the advice on diet and medical matters offered in the poem. Oxford, Balliol College MS 329 situates the *Secrees* (fols. 80r–126r) alongside works on the virtues of herbs (fols. 1r–35v) and a book of remedies (fols. 36r–79r) as well as extracts from the *Fall of Princes* (127r–71v); and Cambridge, Gonville and Caius MS 336/725 accompanies the *Secrees* (fols. 108r–128r) with a series of other medical, alchemical, and astrological texts and diagrams. Both the Balliol and the Gonville and Caius’s texts of the *Secrees* are presented as integral works but they lack several of the sections reproduced in the longer versions of the poems, and those portions of the poem that they do reproduce appear in an order unlike that of the text reproduced in Steele’s edition of Sloane 2464.<sup>35</sup> Their texts, which are not identical, may represent attempts to whittle down the *Secrees* to what were perceived to be its essential points; in Gonville and Caius MS 336/725 it has the title “Of the crafte of phisonomye which doth trete of the qualitees and Condictions of ich membre of man” (fol. 108r).<sup>36</sup> Alternatively, they may be the result of a different arrangement of the fragments of the Middle English translation of the *Secretum Secretorum* with which the compiler of the *Secrees* would have us believe that he was working. It seems more definite that some self-conscious extraction took place during the copying of what is now the

fifth booklet of Cambridge, Trinity College MS R.3.19, which reproduces only the poem's moralized rendition of the four seasons, calling its extract "A trates of the iiij seasons of the yere" (fol. 49r).

Further reading contexts are represented by the remaining extant manuscripts. An imperfect copy of the *Secrees* survives in the Winchester Anthology, London, British Library MS Additional 60577 (fols. 24v–37v), a personal collection that has been attributed to a monk of the Benedictine priory at St. Swithuns.<sup>37</sup> On at least one occasion, moreover, the poem circulated alone: Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud misc. 673 is a small paper volume; its only contents are the *Secrees*, and the book is preserved in its fifteenth-century binding.<sup>38</sup> Finally, one sizable group of manuscripts remains to be discussed in which an interest in Lydgate's authorship mirroring that of the continuator of the *Secrees* might be detected. This interest is perhaps most immediately clear in Oxford, Bodleian Library Ashmole 59, the latest surviving anthology written by John Shirley, which presents toward its close the first five lines of the poem as an independent text (fol. 134r).<sup>39</sup> The unattributed extract from the *Secrees* appears among various verses and pen trials at the end of Shirley's book and is not in Shirley's hand; it might be interpreted as a response to the respectful attitude toward Lydgate's writing cultivated in the rubrics scattered through the book in which Shirley announces the authorship of the texts that he copies, among which works by Lydgate predominate. Thus Lydgate is referred to not only as a monk, a religious, and a clerk but also as a "poete" (fol. 16v, 20r, 21r, etc.) and, on one occasion, as a "philosofre" (fol. 41r). The positive response to Shirley's presentation of Lydgate that might be discerned in the copying of the brief extract from the opening of the *Secrees* into the back of Ashmole 59 can be viewed as a precursor to the subsequent expansion of the book in the sixteenth century, when a copy of Lydgate's *Life of Our Lady* was bound with the manuscript (now fols. 135r–182r).

The interest in developing and perhaps profiting from Lydgate's reputation that determined Shirley's presentation of the poet's writing in Ashmole 59 and throughout his poetic anthologies also seems to have been at work in the production of two scribes whose output has constituted a focus of attention for manuscript scholars interested in the commercialization of book production in the second half of the fifteenth century.<sup>40</sup> First, operating in the rough period from 1465 to 1485 and with some sort of access to Shirley's books, the Hammond scribe is responsible for three manuscripts containing the *Secrees*: London, British Library MSS Additional 34360 (fols. 78r–116r), Arundel 59 (fols. 90r–130v), and Harley 2251 (fols. 188v–224r).<sup>41</sup> In the cases of the Additional and Harley manuscripts, the Hammond scribe's aim appears to have been to collect specimens of Middle English literature from the turn of the fifteenth century; where he carries over Shirley's

authenticating rubrics, he participates in the mythologization of Lydgate and Chaucer that both copyists apparently thought would appeal to their readers.<sup>42</sup> Like Shirley, albeit much more tentatively, the Hammond scribe can be connected with a particular household that might have provided him with an occupation and thus with the initial impetus and audience for his work; but, as is also the case with Shirley, the notion that the Hammond scribe was involved in more speculative work with a commercial goal is difficult to discount definitively.<sup>43</sup> In the case of Arundel 59, in which the *Secrees* follows Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes* (fols. 1r–89v), there are two unfoliated leaves separating the texts and the mise-en-page, and decoration of the *Secrees* differs from that of the preceding work. This bibliographical evidence could reflect a gap in the copying of the works and/or the combination postproduction of two separately produced books for sale to a buyer. The Hammond scribe's stint in Cambridge, Trinity College MS R.3.21, a manuscript compiled of independently produced booklets, provides a stronger link between this copyist and the practice of manuscript compilation via the booklet method, which lent itself well to speculative production campaigns whose aims might have been commercial.<sup>44</sup>

Closer to Lydgate's motherhouse in Bury St. Edmunds, another copyist producing manuscripts of Lydgate's work appears to have been making books both speculatively and on a bespoke basis. The copyist of four manuscripts containing the *Secrees*—Sloane 2464 (fols. 1r–65v); Oxford, Bodleian Library MSS Ashmole 46 (fols. 97r–160v) and Laud misc. 673 (fols. 1r–73v); and London, British Library MS Harley 4826 (fols. 52r–80v)—has been identified as the Edmund-Fremund scribe, so called for his frequent copying of Lydgate's dual hagiography of that name. In a groundbreaking study on the work of this scribe, Kathleen L. Scott establishes that he led a group of illustrators and illuminators who produced a series of books in the vicinity of Lydgate's monastery in the 1460s, shortly after the poet's death.<sup>45</sup> Although he copied texts by various authors, the Edmund-Fremund scribe seems to have specialized in the production of books of Lydgate's works, exemplars of which might have been made available to him by Bury's monks. Where they reproduced copies of Lydgate's texts, he and his associates appear to have been responding to and promoting an interest in the recently deceased poet's writing that was current among the neighbors of and visitors to his former base at Bury.

Some of the manuscripts made by the Edmund-Fremund scribe are so sumptuous that they were almost certainly bespoke productions. Thus the copies of Lydgate's *Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund* in London, British Library MS Yates Thompson 47 and in the Arundel Castle Manuscript described by Scott are accompanied by lavish cycles of illumination whose manufacture must have taxed not only the skill but also the time and

the finances of the Edmund-Fremund scribe and his team. Others of their books are cheaper productions that might have been sold on the coattails of these more extravagant manuscripts to buyers who were sought out once the bookmaking process was complete. Thus Scott comments that “pleasantly but not extensively decorated” manuscripts such as Sloane 2464 and Ashmole 46, and the unadorned paper copy of the *Secrees* that is now Laud misc. 673, might be examples of speculative work.<sup>46</sup> Where the Edmund-Fremund scribe and his colleagues produced copies of Lydgate’s work on spec, they most likely did so in the knowledge that the more lavish codices of the poet’s work that they had produced had helped to fuel demand for books of his poetry. Like the Hammond scribe, moreover, the Edmund-Fremund scribe appears to have exploited the potentialities of booklet production: the first and the last leaves of Sloane 2464 are soiled, suggesting that they remained unbound for some time after writing, and while all the texts compiled in Harley 4826 are written in his hand, the *mise-en-page* of the book differs across its three main sections, which comprise the *Secrees*; *The Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund* and *The Legend of Saint Austin at Compton* (fols. 4r–50v); and Hoccleve’s *Regiment of Princes* (fols. 84r–144v). They were assembled (or reassembled) at the very latest in the seventeenth century, when a series of paper leaves was added to the book, including a pen-and-ink drawing of a kneeling pilgrim accompanied by a monk (fol. 1\*) and pages giving introductory information regarding the Lydgatean and Hocclevean works compiled and on the biographies of their authors (fols. 1–3, 51–52, 82–83). The inclusion of these biographies, which are drawn from the *De claris angliae scriptoribus* of the Catholic scholar, John Pitts (1560–1616), provides a fascinating glimpse into the value attached to the writings of Lydgate and Hoccleve long after their deaths. Not only medieval artisans such as the Edmund-Fremund scribe and the Hammond scribe engaged in the shaping and promoting of their posthumous reputations; this was a process that occupied readers less directly associated with the mechanics of book production, and it continued well into the early modern period.

In the final reckoning, consideration of the extant manuscripts of the *Secrees* bears out Gillespie’s argument that the idea of the medieval author was one means among several by which the makers of books could “limit, mediate, and profit from the movement in vernacular books before Caxton arrived on the publishing scene.”<sup>47</sup> If manuscripts such as Ashmole 59 and Harley 4826 encourage consideration of the ways in which this tendency developed in the early modern period, the unique extant medieval print of the *Secrees* provides a salutary reminder that the tendency toward attribution typically associated with the development of that technology was not an immediate or necessary effect of its introduction. The edition of the *Secrees* that came off the presses of Richard Pynson in 1511 appears to have been designed



primarily to advertise the identities of its commissioner, Charles Somerset, Lord Herbert, later first earl of Worcester (d. 1526), and its printer, Pynson himself, and to shape and to publicize the relationships between these men and Henry VIII, to whom the work is addressed on its opening page. Here the work is announced as, “This present boke called the Gouvernaunce of Kynges and prynces: Imprynted at the commaundement of the good and honourable syre Charles Somerset Lorde Herbert: and Chaumberleyne vnto oure Soueraygne lorde kynge Henry the .viii.” (sig. [A1]r).<sup>48</sup>

There follow images of the royal arms and crown supported by angels, of the Tudor rose, and of three castles. In combination, the title lines and the three images look to have been designed to frame a relationship between Somerset and his king; according to the entry for Somerset in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, the castles were a part of the commissioner’s insignia from 1509, when he became Constable of the Three Castles.<sup>49</sup> By having these textual and visual markers added to a reproduction of the *Secrees*, Somerset encouraged readers of the book to draw comparisons between the advisory relationships between himself and the young king Henry VIII, between Alexander and his old philosopher, Aristotle, and, perhaps, between Lydgate and his king, Henry VI. At the close of the book, the manipulation of Lydgate’s posthumous work and reputation takes a different turn. Here Pynson names himself as “Rycharde Prynson [sic], Prynter vnto the Kynges noble grace,” adding his own visual stamp in the form of his recently acquired heraldic device (sig. [H4]v). As Gillespie points out, while Pynson’s self-identification as the king’s printer was a novel move, it should be viewed in the context of a broader campaign whereby Pynson attempted to elevate his trade and to secure his position at its forefront.<sup>50</sup>

On the one hand, the variety of uses to which Lydgate’s inheritance is put by both the continuator of the *Secrees* and the makers of the medieval witnesses via which it is transmitted might seem to be at odds with the poet’s own plans for his writing. As Mary C. Flannery shows, throughout his work, Lydgate expresses a profound belief in his capacity as a poet to shape and promulgate his own reputation as well as that of his patrons.<sup>51</sup> This appears to be the principle driving the composition of another poem typically grouped among Lydgate’s later works, his *Testament*, which Sebastian Sobecki rereads as the poet’s attempt to prepare his heterogeneous corpus for its reception by posterity.<sup>52</sup> The extant medieval witnesses to the *Secrees* demonstrate only a partial uptake of these concerns. On the other hand, consideration of what the poem can reveal about Lydgate’s reception uncovers a set of creative and self-interested responses that the poet might have anticipated. As Gillespie points out, Lydgate deliberately fictionalized his historical identity when, in his *Siege of Thebes*, he depicted himself joining Chaucer’s pilgrims on their return from Canterbury,<sup>53</sup> and alternative book-historical approaches to



Lydgate's work reveal the writer's probable awareness of some of the main material conditions of his works' transmission. Joel Fredell observes, for instance, that, as well as producing a clutch of monumentally long texts, such as his *Troy Book*, Lydgate also seems to have specialized in producing shorter works that fitted neatly within the bounds of the increasingly cheap pamphlets via which so much medieval writing once circulated.<sup>54</sup> If Lydgate did begin a translation of the *Secretum Secretorum* at some point in his career, he might reasonably have intended it to be transmitted in this form and thence perhaps to be compiled in the kinds of household books and medical manuals in which it currently survives.

At the very least, the foregoing analysis adds further weight to the argument that the author function was not a product of print culture, as is sometimes proposed.<sup>55</sup> Medieval authorship does appear to be a more local affair than in later periods, however; Lydgate's predilection for self-naming notwithstanding, authorial signatures and paratextual attributions are comparatively rare in Middle English books, perhaps reflecting a culture of manuscript transmission that still ran along the lines of personal acquaintance, which rendered self-naming redundant. Despite the efforts that he expended staging his continuation of the *Secrees*, the poet of the second half of the work does not appear to have signed his writing, and while the Edmund-Fremund scribe and his associates clearly specialized in the production of Lydgate manuscripts, many of their books contain no attributions to the author, either internally, within their texts, or externally, via paratext.<sup>56</sup> Under these conditions, authorship remained a fluid concept whose contours might be shaped not only by writers themselves but also by their literary followers and by the manufacturers and readers of the books that transmitted their works. In a literary and book culture that "depended on adaptability rather than adherence to prescribed ideas,"<sup>57</sup> it appears to have been the particular adaptability of the idea of Lydgate's authorship that shaped the final forms assumed by the *Secrees of Old Philisoffres* and ensured its subsequent success.

University of Bern

APPENDIX

The purpose of this appendix is not to provide detailed descriptions of the extant medieval witnesses to the *Secrees of Old Philisoffres*, for which readers are directed to the relevant library catalogues and to the bibliographical sources listed in the foregoing article. Instead it sets out to record variance among the titles given to the poem, the texts of the author’s death rubric, and the composition of the continuator’s prologue (ll. 1492–1589 and stanzas numbered 214–227 in Steele’s edition of the Sloane 2464 text). Brief contextualizing notes are also provided for each witness that summarize points made or alluded to above. In the absence of a critical edition of the *Secrees*, some sense of the considerable variation to which its text was subject in other aspects can be gleaned from the collation of eleven of the extant manuscripts in Theodor Prosiegel’s doctoral dissertation.<sup>58</sup> The appendix follows the list of the extant witnesses given in *The Digital Index of Middle English Verse*, where the *Secrees* is treated as item 1544. Where the DIMEV lists twenty-three manuscript witnesses to the *Secrees*, the total reckoning of the extant manuscript copies should be set at twenty-two: the leaf transmitting forty-one lines of the poem that is now DIMEV witness 13, London, British Library MS Additional 39922, fol. 16r–v, was once part of Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum MS McClean 183, DIMEV witness 8.

Manuscript Witnesses

1. Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 46, fols. 97r–160v

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Title:                  | n/a  |
| Author’s death rubric:  | Here deyed this translatour and nobyl poete and the yonge folwere gan his prologe on this wyse (fol. 131r) |
| Continuator’s prologue: | Has all the stanzas in Steele’s edition  |
| Context:                | MS written by Edmund-Fremund scribe  |

## 2. Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 59, fol. 134r

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Title:                  | n/a  |
| Author's death rubric:  | n/a  |
| Continuator's prologue: | n/a  |
| Context:                | First five lines of <i>Secrees</i> copied into Shirley anthology |

## 3. Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud misc. 416, fols. 255r–287v

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Title:                  | This is the book of the gouernaunce of kyngge and pryncis (fol. 255r)  |
| Author's death rubric:  | Here died this translator and notable poiet John lydgate monk of bury and fowler by gan his prolog in this wyse (274r) |
| Continuator's prologue: | Lacks stanzas 214, 223–224, and 226 of Steele's edition  |
| Context:                | Household book written in part at La Rode, Selling (Kent)  |

## 4. Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud misc. 673, fols. 1r–73v

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Title:                  | This is the book of the gouernaunce of kynges and of prynces (fol. 1r)  |
| Author's death rubric:  | Here deyde this translatur <i>and</i> nobyl Poete <i>and</i> the yong folwere gan his prologe on this maner wyse (fol. 41v) |
| Continuator's prologue: | Has all the stanzas in Steele's edition   |

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| Context: | Written by Edmund-Fremund scribe;<br><i>Secrees</i> transmitted alone and book still<br>has fifteenth-century binding |
|----------|---|

5. Oxford, Balliol College MS 329, fols. 80r–126r

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Title:                  | Hic incipit tractus De regimine principum<br>(fol. 80r); Her endyth þe notable tretyse<br>callyd of Arystotyles regimen principum<br>(fol. 126r)  |
| Author’s death rubric:  | Her endyth John lydgate <i>translator</i> of þis<br>be for seyde her arystotyll wrytyth a py-<br>styll to alyzaundre how he scholde <i>con-</i><br><i>serve</i> naturall helth of þe body (fol. 107r) |
| Continuator’s prologue: | n/a   |
| Context:                | Collection of medical texts including a<br>short text of the <i>Secrees</i>   |

6. Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College MS 336/725, fols. 108r–128r

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Title:                  | Of the crafte of phisonomye which doth<br>trete of the <i>qualitees</i> and <i>Condicions</i> of<br>ich membre of man and of the Image of<br>ypocras which Arestotele wrote to kynge<br>Allisaunder (fol. 108r) |
| Author’s death rubric:  | n/a   |
| Continuator’s prologue: | n/a   |
| Context:                | Collection of medical texts containing a<br>short text of the <i>Secrees</i>  |

## 7. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum MS McClean 182, fols. 12r–49r

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Title:                  | n/a  |
| Author's death rubric:  | Here died þis translatoure and noble Poete John lidgate and þe folower gan his prologue on þis wise (fol. 32v) |
| Continuator's prologue: | Lacks stanzas 214, 218, 223–224, and 226 of Steele's edition   |
| Context:                | Household book   |

## 8. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum MS McClean 183, fols. 1r–47v

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Title:                  | n/a  |
| Author's death rubric:  | n/a  |
| Continuator's prologue: | Begins imperfectly in stanza 215 (at l. 1501), has stanzas 216, 217, 219–222, 225, and 227 of Steele's edition   |
| Context:                | <i>Secrees</i> transmitted alone, but MS is damaged and imperfect at beginning and end; once included witness 13 |

## 9. Cambridge UK, Trinity College MS R.3.19, fols. 49r–52r

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Title:                  | A trates of the iiij seasons of the yere that is t[o] say ver Estas Authumnus & yemps (fol. 49r) |
| Author's death rubric:  | n/a  |
| Continuator's prologue: | n/a  |

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| Context: | Extracted text, identified as such by later hand (Stowe?), which completes the incipit: <i>compilyd by John Lydgate as ap-eryth in his boke of þe secretis to alysaunder from arystotyll</i> (fol. 49r) |
|----------|---|

## 10. Cambridge UK, Trinity College MS O.3.40, fols. 1r–44v

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Title:                  | n/a   |
| Author's death rubric:  | Here died this translatoure and noble Poete John lidgate and the folower gan his prologe oon this wyse (fol. 31v) |
| Continuator's prologue: | Lacks stanzas 214, 218, 223–224 and 226 of Steele's edition   |
| Context:                | <i>Secrees</i> transmitted alone, but MS is damaged and imperfect at beginning and end                            |

## 11. London, British Library MS Additional 14408, fols. 1r–48v

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Title:                  | n/a   |
| Author's death rubric:  | Here dyed this translatoure and noble poete john lidgate and þe folower gan his prologe in this wyse (fol. 27r) |
| Continuator's prologue: | Lacks stanzas 214, 218, 221, 223–224, and 226 of Steele's edition   |
| Context:                | Household book of Nicholas St. Lo   |

## 12. London, British Library MS Additional 34360, fols. 78r–116r

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| Title: | Explicit Regimen Principum (fol. 116r) |
|--------|--|



|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Author's death rubric:  | Here deyde the translator and noble Poete Dane John lidgagate And his folower gan his <i>prolog</i> in this wise <i>Per</i> Benedictu[m] Burgh (fol. 101r) |
| Continuator's prologue: | Lacks stanzas 214, 223–224 and 226 of Steele's edition   |
| Context:                | MS written by Hammond scribe   |

## 13. London, British Library MS Additional 39922, fol. 16r–16v

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Title:                  | n/a  |
| Author's death rubric:  | n/a  |
| Continuator's prologue: | n/a  |
| Context:                | Leaf giving ll. 1268–1309 of <i>Secrees</i> , once part of witness 8 |

## 14. London, British Library MS Additional 60577 [Winchester Anthology], fols. 24v–37v

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Title:                  | [T]his is the boke of the gouernaunce of kynges and princes (fol. 24v) |
| Author's death rubric:  | n/a  |
| Continuator's prologue: | n/a  |
| Context:                | Monastic anthology   |

## 15. London, British Library MS Arundel 59, fols. 90r–130v

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| Title: | Explicit Regimen Principum (fol. 130v) |
|--------|--|

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Author's death rubric:  | Here deyde the translator and noble Poete Dane John Lidgate And his folower gan his prolog in this wise <i>per Benedictum</i> Burgh (fol. 115r) |
| Continuator's prologue: | Lacks stanzas 214, 223–224, and 226 of Steele's edition   |
| Context:                | MS written by Hammond scribe  |

## 16. London, British Library MS Harley 2251, fols. 188v–224r

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Title:                  | Explicit Regimen Principum (fol. 224r)  |
| Author's death rubric:  | Here deyde the translator A noble Poete dane John lydgate And his folower gan his prolog in this wise <i>per Benedictum</i> Burgh (fol. 210r) |
| Continuator's prologue: | Lacks stanzas 214, 223–224, and 226 of Steele's edition   |
| Context:                | MS written by Hammond scribe  |

## 17. London, British Library MS Harley 4826, fols. 52r–80v

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Title:                  | This is the book of the gouernaunce of kynges and Princes (fol. 52r)      |
| Author's death rubric:  | n/a   |
| Continuator's prologue: | Begins imperfectly, has all stanzas in Steele's edition from stanza 219   |
| Context:                | MS written by Edmund-Fremund scribe; (re-)compiled in seventeenth century |

## 18. London, British Library MS Lansdowne 285, fols. 152r–197v

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Title:                  | This is the book of governaunce of kynges and Prynces (fol. 152r)  |
| Author's death rubric:  | Here died this translator <i>and</i> noble poete John lidgate And the folower began his prolog on þis wise (fol. 176v) |
| Continuator's prologue: | Lacks stanzas 214, 217–218, 223–234, and 226 of Steele's edition   |
| Context:                | Sir John Paston's "grete boke"   |

## 19. London, British Library MS Sloane 2027, fol. 53r–92v

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Title:                  | this is the booke off the gouernaunce off Kynges and Pryncis (fol. 53r); Explicit librum Aristotiles Ad Alexandrum magnum (fol. 92v)                               |
| Author's death rubric:  | here deyed this translatur And noble poete and the yong Follower gan his prolog on this wise (fol. 74v); the same hand adds "lidgate" above the text of the rubric |
| Continuator's prologue: | Has all the stanzas in Steele's edition  |
| Context:                | Household book   |

## 20. London, British Library MS Sloane 2464, fols. 1–65v

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| Title:                 | n/a  |
| Author's death rubric: | here deyed this <i>translator</i> and nobil poete and the yonge folowere gan his prologe on this wyse (fol. 36r) |

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Continuator's prologue: | Base text for Steele's edition   |
| Context:                | MS written by Edmund-Fremund scribe; <i>Secrees</i> transmitted alone, but soiling at the opening and close of the book suggests it remained unbound after writing |

21. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library MS M775, fols. 139r–195r

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Title:                  | n/a   |
| Author's death rubric:  | Here died this translatoure and nobill poete Ion lydgate and the folower began his prologe on this wise (fol. 169v) |
| Continuator's prologue: | Lacks stanzas 214, 218, 223–224, and 226 of Steele's edition  |
| Context:                | Household book belonging to John Astley; consulted by copyist of witness 18   |

22. Philadelphia, Philadelphia Free Library MS 15/488 [also Lewis T488], fols. 1r–2v

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Title:                  | n/a  |
| Author's death rubric:  | Here died this translatoure and noble Poete Jon lidgate and the folower began his prologe on this wise (fol. 1r)   |
| Continuator's prologue: | Imperfect, has stanzas 215–217 and 219 of Steele's edition   |
| Context:                | Fragments containing part of continuator's prologue and stanzas from last line of stanza 234 to stanza 240 in Steele's edition; written by copyist of <i>Secrees</i> in witness 21 |

23. New Haven, Yale University, Beinecke Library, Takamiya Deposit MS 33, fols. 1–19v

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Title:                  | Of the crafte of Phisonomye whiche doth trete of the qualitees and conditions of the membre of man and of the Image of ypocras whiche Arestotele wrote to kynge Alisaunder (fol. 1r) [cited from DIMEV] |
| Author's death rubric:  | n/a (?)   |
| Continuator's prologue: | n/a (?)   |
| Context:                | "Twin" of MS containing witness 6   |

### Print Witness

1. STC 17017. *The Gouvernance of Kynges and prynces*, Pynson, London, 1511

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Title:                  | This present boke called the Gouvernaunce of Kynges and prynces; Imprynted at the commaundement of the good and honourable syre Charles Somerset Lorde Herbert: and Chaumberleyne vnto oure Soueraygne lorde kynge Henry the .viii. (sig. [A1]r) |
| Author's death rubric:  | Here dyed this tanslatour & noble poete John lydgate & the folower gan this prologe on this wyse (sig. [D3]v)  |
| Continuator's prologue: | Lacks stanzas 214, 218, 223–224 and 226 of Steele's edition  |
| Context:                | Also transmits the printer's self-designation as "Rycharde Prynson Prynter vnto the Kynges noble grace" (sig. [H4]v)   |

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### NOTES

1. See, e.g., Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate (1371–1449): A Bio-Bibliography*, ELS Monograph Series 71 (Victoria, Canada: University of Victoria English Department, 1997), 39.
2. Cited by line number from *Lydgate and Burgh's Secrees of Old Philisoffres*, ed. Robert Steele, EETS e.s. 66 (London, 1894). Steele took Sloane 2464 as his base text, and his transcription has been checked against the manuscript. Variations among the medieval denominations of the work and among the surviving texts of the author's death rubric and of the continuator's prologue are listed in the appendix and discussed below.
3. See Alexandra Gillespie, *Print Culture and the Medieval Author: Chaucer, Lydgate, and Their Books 1473–1557* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 21.
4. Compare the DIMEV: An Open-Access, Digital Edition of the Index of Middle English Verse, Based on the *Index of Middle English Verse* (1943) and its *Supplement* (1965), compiled, edited, and supplemented by Linne R. Mooney, Daniel W. Mosser, and Elizabeth Solopova with Deborah Thorpe and David Hill Radcliffe, <http://www.dimev.net>.
5. Cited by book and line number from *Lydgate's Troy Book*, ed. Henry Bergen, EETS e.s. 97, 103, 106, 106, in 3 vols. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trübner, 1906–1935).
6. See Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993). The following analysis of the attribution of the *Secrees* draws on Lerer's skeptical discussion (*ibid.*, 117–146) of John Shirley's ascription to Chaucer of the "Wordes to Adam" in the book that is now Cambridge, Trinity College Library MS R.3.20. I am also inspired by Alexandra



- Gillespie's discussion of Lerer's work and by her careful reading of Shirley's presentation of the same text in Alexandra Gillespie, "Reading Chaucer's Words to Adam," *Chaucer Review* 42 (2008): 269–283.
7. See Robert J. Meyer-Lee, *Poets and Power from Chaucer to Wyatt* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 73.
  8. Walter F. Schirmer, *John Lydgate: Ein Kulturbild aus dem 15. Jahrhundert*, Buchreihe der Anglia 1 (Tübingen, Germany: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1952), 217 ("der beherrschende Eindruck ist der eines inhaltlichen und formalen Wirrwarrs").
  9. Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 296.
  10. On the sources of the *Secrees*, the brief comments in *Lydgate and Burgh's Secrees*, ed. Steele, xv, and M. A. Manzalaoui, "The *Secretum Secretorum*: The Mediaeval European Version of Kitāb Sirr-ul-Asrār," *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University* 15 (1961): 83–105, at 96.
  11. Margaret Bridges, "Lydgate's Last Poem," in *Trajectoires européennes du Secretum secretorum du Pseudo-Aristote (XIIIe–XVIe siècle)*, ed. Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas, Margaret Bridges, and Jean-Yves Tilliette, *Alexander redivivus* 6 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2015), 317–336, at 327–328.
  12. Compare the list of repetitious passages in *ibid.*, 327–328 n. 43.
  13. At the close of their paraphrase of the poem, Alain Renoir and C. David Benson complain that the reading of the poem "is often made somewhat irritating by frequent, inconsistent, and unannounced shifts in point of view as well as by the lack of a clear principle of organization." See J. Burke Severs and Albert E. Hartung, eds., *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050–1500*, 9 vols. (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967–1993), 6:1899.
  14. Of the extant manuscripts, three have lost leaves that probably transmitted the author's death rubric: Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum MS 183/ London, British Library MS Additional 39922 and London, British Library MSS Additional 60577 and Harley 4826. Two manuscripts transmit brief extracts from the *Secrees* and thus do not transmit the rubric: Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 59 and Cambridge, Trinity College MS R.3.19. Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College MS 336/725 presents a series of longer portions from the *Secrees* as an integral work; the author's death rubric is absent from its text. New Haven, Beinecke Library Takamiya Deposit MS 33, which I have not seen, also looks likely to have missed the author's death rubric: Linda Ehram Voigts describes Takamiya MS 33 as the "twin" of the Gonville and Caius codex in Linda Ehram Voigts, "The 'Sloane Group': Related

- Scientific and Medical Manuscripts From the Fifteenth Century in the Sloane Collection," *British Library Journal* 16 (1990): 26–57, at 27. All these manuscripts are discussed below. The remaining medieval witnesses to the *Secrees* listed in the DIMEV each contain some form of the author's death rubric: variant forms are collected in the appendix.
15. Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, 297. In a similar vein, Schirmer, *John Lydgate*, 217, imagines the poet dying over the drafts of his unfinished work.
  16. *Lydgate and Burgh's Secrees*, ed. Steele, 109.
  17. Compare Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, 297.
  18. Compare the account of the standard contents of the *Secretum Secretorum* in Steven J. Williams, *The Secret of Secrets: The Scholarly Career of A Pseudo-Aristotelian Text in the Latin Middle Ages* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 10–11.
  19. On Benedict Burgh, see further Max Förster, "Über Benedict Burghs Leben und Werke," *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 101 (1898): 29–64. Förster argues against the attribution of the second portion of the *Secrees* to Burgh on metrical grounds; *ibid.*, 58–59.
  20. This poem is edited from Stow's book, now London, British Library MS Additional 29729, in *English Verse between Chaucer and Surrey*, ed. Eleanor Prescott Hammond (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1927), 188–190.
  21. See *ibid.*, 188; and compare Pearsall, *Bio-Bibliography*, 39–40.
  22. On these patronal connections, see Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, 168.
  23. See Simon Horobin, "Thomas Hoccleve: Chaucer's First Editor?" *Chaucer Review* 50 (2015): 228–250.
  24. Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?," in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 141–160, at 159.
  25. *Ibid.*, 141.
  26. Gillespie, *Print Culture*, 16 n. 53.
  27. Given the purportedly close relationship adduced above between the Gonville and Caius manuscript and New Haven, Beinecke Library, Takamiya Deposit MS 33, it seems likely that the Takamiya manuscript transmitted neither the continuator's prologue nor the author's death rubric. The continuator's prologue is also entirely absent from the two manuscripts transmitting extracts of the *Secrees* listed above (witnesses 2 and 9 in the appendix) and from London, British Library MS Additional 60577, from which leaves have been lost (witnesses 14).
  28. Gillespie, *Print Culture*, 16 (emphasis in original).
  29. Compare the texts edited in *Secretum Secretorum: Nine English Versions*, ed. M. A. Manzalaoui, EETS o.s. 276 (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

- 1977); and *Three Prose Versions of the Secreta Secretorum*, ed. Robert Steele, EETS e.s. 74 (London, 1898).
30. Bridges, "John Lydgate's Last Poem," 335.
  31. See further G. A. Lester, *Sir John Paston's 'Grete Boke': A Descriptive Catalogue, with an Introduction, of British Library MS Lansdowne 285* (Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 1984), 9–12 (for a checklist of the manuscript's contents) and 159–163 (for commentary on Vegetius).
  32. See *ibid.*, 31–33 and 93–95. A. I. Doyle's identification of the hand of Philadelphia, Free Library of Philadelphia MS Lewis T488 as that of the scribe who copied the *Secrees* into MS M775 provides valuable contextualizing information that situates that fragmentary bifolium in the orbit of MS M775 and Lansdowne 285; reported in Lester, *Sir John Paston's 'Grete Boke'*, 29.
  33. The presence of fragments of a copy of *Guy of Warwick* in the binding of Additional 14408 attracted the interest of Maldwyn Mills and Daniel Huws, who provide a useful account of the provenance of this manuscript and another book owned by Nicholas St. Lo in Maldwyn Mills and Daniel Huws, *Fragments of an Early Fourteenth-Century Guy of Warwick*, Medium Ævum Monographs n.s. 4 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), 1–4. Nicholas's other book, Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales MS 572, contains a series of medical recipes followed by an herbal. The interests that can thus be attributed to this man—in governance, on the one hand, and medicine, on the other—provide a useful indication of the breath of the thematic appeal of the *Secrees*.
  34. See M. C. Seymour, *A Catalogue of Chaucer Manuscripts*, 2 vols. (Aldershot, UK: Scolar Press, 1995), 1:25–26. Seymour also points out that the signatures of two sisters of the Bridgettine house at Syon were written on the book's end pastedowns, "Ane Colvyll" and "Clement Trysburghe." The encounters of these female readers with Laud misc. 416 are considered in Nancy Bradley Warren, "Chaucer, the Chaucer Tradition, and Female Monastic Readers," *Chaucer Review* 51 (2016): 88–106.
  35. For details, see the DIMEV (witness 6 to item 1554) and the entry for Balliol MS 329 in Roger Mynors, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of Balliol College, Oxford* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).
  36. According to the DIMEV (witness no. 23 to item 1544), the poem receives an identical title in New Haven, Beinecke Library, Takamiya Deposit MS 33 (fol. 1r). By contrast, the "craft of physiognomy" section of the poem (stanzas 353–390 in Steele's edition) is absent in several of the longer copies of the poem. Steele notes its absence from the copies of the *Secrees* preserved in London, British Library MSS Arundel 59 and Harley 2251.

37. See *The Winchester Anthology: A Facsimile of British Library Additional Manuscript 60577*, ed. Edward Wilson (Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 1981), 1–16.
38. Other manuscripts in which the *Secrees* is now preserved in isolation may once have been part of bigger books: the beginnings and ends of Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Library MS McClean 183 and Trinity College MS O.3.40 have sustained damage and it is impossible to say how much material has been lost from these books. London, British Library MS Sloane 2464 is now bound alone, but its first and last pages are dirty and worn, suggesting that it was left unbound for some time before it was committed to its current binding. The potential for the transmission of the poem in booklet and in pamphlet formats is discussed below.
39. For a transcription and discussion of the extract, see Rossell Hope Robbins, “Popular Prayers in Middle English Verse,” *Modern Philology* 36 (1939): 337–350, at 341.
40. For a discussion of this topic within the context of Middle English literary book production more broadly, and for further bibliography, see Linne R. Mooney, “Vernacular Literary Manuscripts and Their Scribes,” in *The Production of Books in England 1350–1500*, ed. Alexandra Gillespie and Daniel Wakelin (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 192–211.
41. On the Hammond scribe’s access to Shirley’s books, see Linne R. Mooney, “John Shirley’s Heirs,” *Yearbook of English Studies* 33 (2003): 182–198, at 186–190; for the dates of his activity, and for further bibliography, see Daniel W. Mosser, “Dating the Manuscripts of the ‘Hammond Scribe’: What the Paper Evidence Tells Us,” *Journal of the Early Book Society* 10 (2007): 31–70.
42. On Shirley’s practices of attribution, with particular reference to Lydgate, see Margaret Connolly, *John Shirley: Book Production and the Noble Household in Fifteenth-Century England* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1998), 69–101.
43. Compare the connections drawn between the Hammond scribe and London mercantile society in Mooney, “John Shirley’s Heirs,” 189–190. Connolly, *John Shirley*, 190–195, presents a strong case against Shirley’s involvement in commercial book production, but an alternative argument is offered in A. S. G. Edwards, “John Shirley and the Emulation of Courtly Culture,” in *The Court and Cultural Diversity*, ed. Evelyn Mullally and John Thompson (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 1997), 309–318.
44. See Linne R. Mooney, “Scribes and Booklets of Trinity College, Cambridge, Manuscripts R.3.19 and R.3.21,” in *Middle English Poetry, Texts and Traditions: Essays in Honour of Derek Pearsall*, ed. A. J. Minnis (Woodbridge, UK: York Medieval Press, 2001), 241–266.

45. See Kathleen L. Scott, "Lydgate's Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund: A Newly-Located Manuscript in Arundel Castle," *Viator* 13 (1982): 335–366. For an updated list of manuscripts attributed to this scribe, a more recent description of his script (which might reflect the work of two cooperating scribes employing similar styles), and for further bibliography, see Simon Horobin, "The Edmund-Fremund Scribe Copying Chaucer," *Journal of the Early Book Society* 12 (2009): 195–203.
46. Scott, "Lydgate's Lives," 361.
47. Gillespie, *Print Culture*, 29.
48. The print is cited by signature number from the facsimile uploaded at *Early English Books Online* (<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>) of the unique extant copy of the book in the Huntington Library, California; STC 17017.
49. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com>.
50. See Gillespie, *Print Culture*, 160–176.
51. See Mary C. Flannery, *John Lydgate and the Poetics of Fame* (Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2012).
52. See Sebastian Sobiecki, "Lydgate's Kneeling Retraction: The Testament as a Literary Palinode," *Chaucer Review* 49 (2015): 265–293. Sobiecki also discusses the role played by Lydgate's scribes in the production of the author's reputation at Bury; *ibid.*, 278–289.
53. See Gillespie, *Print Culture*, 19–21.
54. See Joel Fredell, "'Go litel quaier': Lydgate's Pamphlet Poetry," *Journal of the Early Book Society* 9 (2006): 51–73.
55. See, e.g., A. S. G. Edwards, "Fifteenth-Century Middle English Verse Author Collections," in *The English Medieval Book: Studies in Memory of Jeremy Griffiths*, ed. A. S. G. Edwards, Vincent Gillespie, and Ralph Hanna (London: British Library, 2000), 101–112.
56. For this observation, see Gillespie, *Print Culture*, 43.
57. *Ibid.*, 51.
58. Theodor Prosiegel, *The Book of the Gouvernaunce of Kynges and of Prynces: Die von Lydgate und einem Anonymus hinterlassene me. Bearbeitung des Secretum Secretorum* (Munich, Germany: Wolf & Sohn, 1903).
59. For this identification, see A. S. G. Edwards, "A British Museum Leaf from McClean 183," *Book Collector* 21 (1972): 127.



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