"In fourme of speche is chaunge": Final - *e* in *Troilus and Criseyde* , Book II, Lines 22–28

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ABSTRACT: This article posits that the fourth stanza of the proem to Book Two of *Troilus and Criseyde*, a passage that reflects on linguistic change, calls attention to such change by deploying the already-antiquated but still-recognized final *-e*. The discussion considers first how Chaucer positions language change in *Troilus*, including the envoy (V, 1793–98), before addressing the careful construction of II, 22–28. Chaucer thus highlights discrepancies between written and oral forms of language as well as geographic and temporal differences. A consideration of the extant manuscripts of the poem demonstrates the attention Chaucer's early copyists paid to his deliberate use of written, but silent, final *-e*.

KEYWORDS: Chaucer, final *-e*, Middle English language, prosody, *Troilus and Criseyde*

In the proem to Book Two of *Troilus and Criseyde*, the Chaucerian narrator considers the mutable nature of language. Drawing on Horace and Dante, he remarks:[1]

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1. Chaucer echoes Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 69–72, and Dante, *Il Convivio*, 2.14.83–89; see Horace, *Satires, Epistles, and Ars Poetica*, ed. and trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, Mass., 1929); Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, ed. Franca Brambilla Ageno (Florence, 1995); and Dante Alighieri, *Il Convivio (The Banquet)*, trans. Richard Lansing (New York, 1990). On Chaucer's engagement with the traditions of these texts, see Kara Gaston, "'Save oure tonges difference': Translation, Literary Histories, and *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Chaucer Review* 48 (2014): 258–83. As she points out, "Dante's comments on linguistic change imagine language as having a kind of visible afterlife" (273). I will here suggest that Chaucer is playing upon a similar notion of visible relics.

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> 3e knowe ek that in fourme of speche is chaunge
> With-inne a thousand 3eer, and wordes tho
> That hadden pris now wonder nyce and straunge
> Us thenketh hem, and 3et thei spake hem so,
> And spedde as wel in loue as men now do;
> Ek forto wynnen loue in sondry ages,
> In sondry londes, sondry ben vsages.
>
> (II, 22–28)[2]

The narrator notes synchronic, geographic differences ("In sondry londes, sondry ben vsages") and stresses the equally significant long-term, diachronic change ("With-inne a thousand 3eer," "in sondry ages"). Over such long periods and large distances, the value of words can shift drastically; their once-great "pris" can dwindle into meaninglessness. Such observations suggest Chaucer's uneasiness about the reception of his own words—would they be thought "nyce and straunge"?—a concern that returns with renewed anxiety in the poem's envoy (V, 1786–99). There is more to this passage than the poet's reflections on, and anxieties about, the mutability of language, however.

I contend that the II, 22–28 stanza documents an instance of linguistic change that was already well underway in Chaucer's time—the loss of voiced final *-e*.[3] Further, I will argue that, in this single, self-reflexive stanza, the

2. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are taken from B. A. Windeatt's variorum edition, *Troilus and Criseyde: A New Edition of the Book of Troilus* (London, 1984), which is an important resource for the analysis of scribal variants that follows below. Like the more widely circulated *Riverside Chaucer* edition by Stephen Barney, Windeatt's text is based on Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 61. The only major difference between the two editions of this stanza is that Windeatt maintains MS yogh, whereas Barney gives modernized [Y]/[y]. He also maintains scribal *fo[ur]me*.

3. The issue of the Chaucerian final *-e* occupies its own small corner of twentieth-century medieval studies. The debate reached its most heated—if not its most revelatory—point in the years 1947–49, when in *PMLA* James G. Southworth and E. Talbot Donaldson traded annual barbs over the phonological, morphological, and prosodic causes and effects of the final *-e*. See Southworth, "Chaucer's Final *-E* in Rhyme," *PMLA* 62 (1947): 910–35; Donaldson, "Chaucer's Final *-E*," *PMLA* 63 (1948): 1101–24; Southworth, "Chaucer's Final *-E* (continued)," *PMLA* 64 (1949): 601–9; Donaldson, "Chaucer's Final *-E* (continued)," *PMLA* 64 (1949): 609; and Southworth, "Chaucer's Final *-E* (continued)," *PMLA* 64 (1949): 609–10. Later decades saw more quantitative linguistic analysis applied to the issues, yielding a more thorough understanding of the long decline of final *-e*. See, for instance, Marina Tarlinskaja, *English Verse: Theory and History* (The Hague, 1976); Steven R. Guthrie, "Babcock's Curve and the Problem of Chaucer's Final *-E*," *English Studies* 69 (1988): 386–95; and Donka Minkova, *The History of Final Vowels in English: The Sound of Muting* (Berlin, 1991), especially chaps. 6–7 on schwa and prosody. See also Nicholas Myklebust, "Misreading English Meter: 1400–1514," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin (Austin, 2012), especially his third chapter, "Chaucer's Meter," which links the conscious preservation of final *-e* with Chaucer's prosody. For recent developments of the parallel discussion of final *-e* in other English poetries, see Eric Weiskott, "Phantom Syllables in the English Alliterative Tradition," *Modern Philology* 110 (2013): 441–58.

poet plays with a visually present but aurally absent final *-e* to comment on that change. To do so, he deploys elision throughout the passage to avoid metrically significant *-e*, a strategy which in turn allows him to maintain a dominant iambic, decasyllabic meter. Following a brief discussion of the historical decline of final *-e* and a closer look at Chaucer's concern with linguistic change, I will turn to the textual evidence and prosody of the passage to argue that the visual record of final *-e* is authorial. In so doing, I hope to demonstrate some of the critical potential found at the intersections of philological analysis and formalist criticism.[4] Chaucer's stanza offers an instance where poetic form engages historical, linguistic, and orthographic matter to document (and so preserve) a vanishing element of the English language.

Final *-e*, voiced or elided, is a hallmark of Chaucerian literary English, but it is one that can complicate analyses of Chaucer's grammar, orthography, and prosody. As Steven Guthrie comments, Chaucerian final *-e* "is a grammatical fact, a metrical wild card, and an instrument of phonological fluency."[5] Chaucer employs the sonant final *-e* throughout his works, and several members of his literary circle use it consistently, including John Clanvowe in his *Boke of Cupide*.[6] However, as Derek Pearsall notes, the sonant final *-e* "was already becoming archaic in [Chaucer's] own day."[7] According to M. L. Samuels, "from the mid-fourteenth century onwards there were progressive types of London English in which *-e* no longer survived, and . . . Chaucer must therefore have used what was, for the London of his time, a more formal, possibly more archaic, register." While Chaucer's final *-e* was "a

4. In many respects, the promotion of a philological and formalist fusion builds on the past decade's developments in what has come to be known as the New Formalism. For developments in New Formalism, particularly where medieval literature studies are concerned, see Helen Marshall and Peter Buchanan, "New Formalism and the Forms of Middle English Literary Texts," *Literature Compass* 8 (2011): 164–72.

5. Guthrie, "Babcock's Curve," 394. I would be remiss were I not to add a bit of temper to Guthrie's "wild card" statement. As will be demonstrated and discussed below, scholars have shown that Chaucer's use of final *-e* has metrical implications that are, with some very few exceptions, generally predictable.

6. V. J. Scattergood, "The Authorship of *The Boke of Cupide*," *Anglia* 82 (1964): 137–49, at 143.

7. Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate* (Charlottesville, 1970), 61. George Saintsbury writes that, in the decades before 1400, the sonant final *-e* "had become a mere archaic nuisance, representing the *débris* of twenty different forms, and possessing no longer any real grammatical value as a written thing, . . . [and had] begun to lose some of its value as a spoken one" (*A History of English Prosody from the Twelfth Century to the Present Day*, 3 vols., 2nd edn. [1923; repr. New York, 1961], 1:293). While Saintsbury is generally correct that final *-e* was losing its ground in both written and spoken Middle English, he is incorrect when he says that it had no grammatical value. Indeed, as M. L. Samuels, David Burnley, and Simon Horobin have shown, final *-e* is most consistently maintained in a number of grammatical functions, such as inflecting strong, monosyllabic adjectives and as a mark of plurality in adjectives. See M. L. Samuels, "Chaucerian Final '-E,'" *Notes and Queries*, n.s. 19 (1972): 445–48; David Burnley, "Inflexion in Chaucer's Adjectives," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 83 (1982): 169–77; and Simon Horobin, *The Language of the Chaucer Tradition* (Cambridge, U.K., 2003).

conservative relic," the register to which it belongs was "yet one which was well known and familiar because it partly coincided with the more conservative dialects of the neighbouring rural areas."[8] The gradual disappearance of final *-e* continued in the next century, for it is frequently absent from fifteenth-century poetry, with the significant exceptions of John Lydgate and Thomas Hoccleve. Lydgate, Chaucer's most aureate successor, whose diction, syntax, and spelling conventions are "often deliberately archaic and 'poetic' in imitation of Chaucer," maintains sonant final *-e* in much of his poetry.[9] Hoccleve, too, employs the final *-e* in his compositions to maintain a strict meter.[10] The retention of final *-e*, then, can be seen as a traditionally conservative gesture similar to Chaucer's approach to meter in *Troilus and Criseyde*. B. A. Windeatt observes that "Chaucer's remarks about language at the end of [*Troilus*] imply a conservative attitude to the metre dependent upon it, at least in this poem, and a consciousness of holding on to certain aspects of English against the tide of usage."[11]

That Chaucer was interested in, and indeed concerned with, linguistic change is no revelation.[12] He says as much in the envoy to his "litel book":

> And for ther is so gret diuersite
> In Englissh and in writyng of oure tonge,
> So prey I god that non myswrite the,
> Ne the mysmetre for defaute of tonge.
> And red wher-so thow be or elles songe,
> That thow be vnderstonde, god I biseche.
>
> (V, 1793–98)

8. Samuels, "Chaucerian Final '-E,'" 446–47. Compare Samuels, "Some Applications of Middle English Dialectology," *English Studies* 44 (1963): 81–94.

9. Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, 59–61. Samuels points out that retaining final *-e* is limited to Chaucer's English successors, for "Final -e had been lost much earlier in the north, and Scottish poets had had a longer period in which to learn to handle the language in its changed state" ("Chaucerian Final '-E,'" 448). Compare Horobin, *The Language of the Chaucer Tradition*, 125–37.

10. See, for instance, Judith A. Jefferson, "The Hoccleve Holographs and Hoccleve's Metrical Practice," in Derek Pearsall, ed., *Manuscripts and Texts: Editorial Problems in Later Middle English Literature* (Cambridge, U.K., 1987), 95–109; and John Burrow, "Some Final *-e*'s in the Hoccleve Holographs," in Michael Calabrese and Stephen H. A. Shepherd, eds., *Yee? Baw for Bokes: Essays on Medieval Manuscripts and Poetics in Honor of Hoyt N. Duggan* (Los Angeles, 2013), 45–53.

11. B. A. Windeatt, "'Most conservatyf the soun': Chaucer's *Troilus* Metre," *Poetica* (Tokyo) 8 (1977): 44–60, at 49. (My thanks to Dr. Joel Deshaye of Memorial University of Newfoundland for helping me corner this fugitive article.)

12. Tim William Machan demonstrates that Chaucer is by no means an outlier among late-medieval English readers and writers in this respect (*English in the Middle Ages* [Oxford, 2003], 86–96).

Here Chaucer is less worried about long-term, "thousand 3eer" change that will undermine his deep fame than he is with synchronic threats to the integrity of his poem. He invokes a view that presents the regions of England as "sondry londes" where "sondry vsages"—a collective "gret diuersite"—stand to corrupt the "fourme of speche" of his "tragedie."[13] In this conventional criticism of scribes, he identifies a failure of prosody as a chief concern (second, perhaps, to outright miscopying or interpolation); he fears that scribes will "mysmetre" the text "for defaute of tonge."[14] Chaucer's play on *tonge*, which refers both to scribal error and to differences in pronunciation, emphasizes discrepancies between written and oral language—between that which is "red" (silently) "or elles songe."[15] Elsewhere in the poem, the narrator calls attention to acts of reading, often distinguishing between the text read silently and the text read aloud. For instance, the lovers tend to read each other's letters silently and, with the occasional exception of a looming Pandarus, privately (see, for example, II, 1173–83, and V, 470–76). By contrast, when Pandarus first calls on his niece—not sixty lines after the Book II proem's comments on linguistic change—he finds Criseyde and two ladies in a paved parlor where "they thre / Herden a mayden reden hem the geste / Of the siege of Thebes, while hem leste" (II, 82–84). This oft-cited scene of communal reading highlights the link between the written word and its oral performance even as it

13. F. N. Robinson suggests that Chaucer had the final *-e* issue in mind when he penned these lines: "The *diversite*, which Chaucer rightly recognized as a cause of corruption, consisted partly in dialectical variations and partly in growing disregard of final *-e*" (*The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 2nd edn. [1957], qtd. in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn. [Boston, 1987], 1056).

14. In this respect, the envoy anticipates Chaucer's later *Adam Scriveyn*, where the poet chastises (whether in earnest or in game) the scribe for his hasty errors that corrupt the poetry. For recent discussions of Chaucer's words to his scribe, see, among others, Alexandra Gillespie, "Reading Chaucer's Words to Adam," *Chaucer Review* 42 (2008): 269–83, which does not accept the Chaucer-Pinkhurst theory wholesale but convincingly argues for the value of speculative work in philological and new formalist investigations; and Glending Olson, "Author, Scribe, and Curse: The Genre of *Adam Scriveyn*," *Chaucer Review* 42 (2008): 284–97, which examines the poet's complex responses to his dependence on scribes and "the limitations of authorial power in secular manuscript culture" (285). For a recent doubting of the Chaucerian link, see A. S. G. Edwards, "Chaucer and *Adam Scriveyn*," *Medium Ævum* 81 (2012): 135–38, which argues that John Shirley's attribution to Chaucer is incorrect and that the brief poem may be read as an anonymous "scribal malediction" (136) instead. Whether or not the Shirleian attribution is correct, the *Tr* envoy suggests not only that Chaucer was aware of, and concerned with, scribal error but that he may have had a few maledicta of his own.

15. Commenting on this contrast in lines 1796–97, J. A. Burrow writes, "Chaucer's reference to the 'singing', presumably oral performance, of the text suggests that the difficult phrase 'defaute of tonge' could refer to failures, not in the written text, but in the reading of it out loud" ("Scribal Mismetring," in A. J. Minnis, ed., *Middle English Poetry, Texts and Traditions: Essays in Honour of Derek Pearsall* [York, 2001], 169–79, at 169; compare Daniel Wakelin, *Scribal Correction and Literary Craft: English Manuscripts 1375–1510* (Cambridge, U.K., 2014), 32.

subtly suggests the differences between the two.[16] These same discrepancies are at play in the proem to Book II.

Chaucer's use of (pronounced) final *-e* and the elision thereof is remarkably consistent throughout the surviving manuscripts of *Troilus*. Windeatt comments on the vital role final *-e* plays in establishing and sustaining the meter of the poem: "Were the view that final *-e* was not to be pronounced applied to *Troilus*, few lines would then have any regular pattern of content."[17] That Chaucer deployed voiced final *-e* to maintain a regular meter can be seen in the envoy passage quoted above. Due to the "gret diuersite / In Englissh," the narrator explains, "So prey I god that non myswrite the." *Myswrite* appears to be a Chaucerian coinage.[18] Chaucer could very well have crafted the word without a final *-e* (the base verb appears several times throughout the poem spelled *writ*), but he uses final *-e* in his neologism. The chief rule

16. The frontispiece of the Corpus Christi 61 manuscript, which shows a pulpited Chaucer reciting (or reading) poetry to a gathered group of nobles, similarly points to an oral/written binary. See, for instance, Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge, U.K., 1996), 158–60.

17. Windeatt, "'Most conservatyf the soun,'" 48. While the last century witnessed the odd challenge to the dominant view of Chaucer's prosody, it is now generally accepted that Chaucer used a flexible long line with a norm of ten syllables, one broadly identified as a sort of iambic pentameter. (As several scholars of prosodic history suggest, Chaucer likely inherited aspects of this form from his French and Italian sources, especially Boccaccio's hendecasyllabic *ottava rima*.) Commenting on the regularity of Chaucer's pentameter in *Tr*, Windeatt suggests that "Modern indecision over pronunciation of etymological final -e . . . be seen against this background of manuscript tendencies towards preserving regularity in the TC metre" (47). Further, he notes that "the practice of scribes in the early MSS bears witness to an assumption of syllabic regularity" (47). As Stephen A. Barney puts it, "It is . . . incredible to deny *Troilus* ordinary iambic pentameter, with its recognized variation, because it accounts for so regular a set of expected inflections. . . . [T]he formal and material causes integrate with such consistency that contrary hypotheses are incredible. The principle is economy" (*Studies in Troilus: Chaucer's Text, Meter, and Diction* [East Lansing, Mich., 1993], 79, 87). On Chaucer's pentameter, see Charles Barber and Nicolas Barber, "The Versification of the *Canterbury Tales*: A Computer-Based Statistical Study," *Leeds Studies in English* 21 (1990): 81–103, and 22 (1991): 57–84; and Martin J. Duffell, "Chaucer's Pentameter: Linguistics, Statistics, and History," *Chaucer Review* 49 (2014): 135–60. For the Italian and French influences on Chaucer's pentameter, see Duffell, "'The craft so long to lerne': Chaucer's Invention of the Iambic Pentameter," *Chaucer Review* 34 (2000): 269–88; and Martin Stevens, "The Royal Stanza in Early English Literature," *PMLA* 94 (1979): 62–76. On the regular meter of *Tr* specifically, see Windeatt, as well as M. B. Parkes, "Palaeographic Description and Commentary," in M. B. Parkes and Elizabeth Salter, intro., *Troilus and Criseyde: A Facsimile of Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 61* (Cambridge, U.K., 1978), 1–13.

18. *Myswrite* is also a hapax legomenon—not just in *Tr*, but in the whole of Middle English literature. The *OED* notes an Old English instance in the *Grammar* of Ælfric (ca. 1000): "*Barbarismvs*, þæt is anes wordes gewemmednyss, gif hit byð miswriten oððe miscweden of þam rihtan cræfte" (*Barbarism*, that is a word's corruption if it is either miswritten or misquoted from the [source]). The next known use of the verb, nearly four hundred years later, is Chaucer's. The Middle English period comes to a close before Sir Thomas More uses it in his *Apology* (1533): "These wordes seme to be miswritten, either in the principall booke, or in the copy." My thanks to Abigail Bleach for her advice on translating Ælfric.

for voiced final *-e* in Middle English states that final *-e* is sounded before a consonant but elided when the next word begins with a vowel. (Similarly, when the following word begins with a voiceless glottal fricative, [h], final *-e* is left unvoiced.)[19] Line V, 1795 provides an instance of metrically significant final *-e*:

u / u / u / u / u /
So | prey | I | god | that | non | mys | writ | e | the

The use of sonant final *-e* in *myswrite* allows the poet to sustain the regularity of the pentameter line.

Chaucer was aware of the endemic shift away from final *-e*, but, as a poet writing in a deliberately conservative (if not explicitly archaic) register, he was also aware of discrepancies in the "sondry vsages" of English. He uses the self-reflexive stanza at II, 22–28 to comment on the disappearance of final *-e*, and, in so doing, contrasts the conflicting speeds of change in written and spoken language. In Windeatt's variorum edition of the stanza (and in *The Riverside Chaucer*), there are eleven words that bear a final *-e*:

> 3e *knowe* ek that in *fourme* of *speche* is *chaunge*
> *With-inne* a thousand 3eer, and wordes tho
> That hadden pris now wonder *nyce* and *straunge*
> Us thenketh hem, and 3et thei *spake* hem so,
> And *spedde* as wel in *loue* as men now do;
> Ek forto wynnen *loue* in sondry ages,
> In sondry londes, sondry ben vsages.
> (II, 22–28; emphasis mine)

In nine of these eleven words the vestigial vowel remains unvoiced. Ten of the eleven words appear before a word starting with a vowel or an /h/, and so follow the rules of final *-e* pronunciation to the letter. The two line-end words, *chaunge* and *straunge*, stand to complicate matters somewhat: the consensus view of Chaucer's final *-e* usage maintains that line-final *-e* is pronounced. Lines 22 and 24 would thus each contain eleven syllables. This does not upset the regularity of the *Troilus* meter, however: while Chaucer's

19. See, for instance, Norman Davis, "Language and Versification," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, xlii–xlv; and Elizabeth Solopova, "Computer-Assisted Study of Chaucer's Metre," *Parergon* 18 (2000): 157–79. In his study of the *Tr* meter, Barney singles out Corpus 61 as adhering to these principles while promoting a regular meter (*Text, Meter, and Diction*, 98).

metrical norm is a ten-syllable line, a hendecasyllabic line is permissible provided that it contains a feminine ending.[20] This is most likely the case in lines 22 and 24. Moreover, by including line-end sonant final-*e* in the words *chaunge* and *straunge*, Chaucer further underscores the strangeness and varied pace of linguistic change, just as his triple repetition of *sondry* in lines 27 and 28 calls attention to the geographic and temporal factors of linguistic and amorous difference.[21] The effect of this stanza is a visual record of the still-lingering final *-e*, but one that is all but erased when the passage is read aloud.

The list of manuscript variants for the II, 22–28 stanza reinforces my hypothesis that the deliberate and explicit inclusion of final *-e* in the passage is authorial.[22] Although alterations, insertions, and omissions occur in other words, phrases, and passages—the Rawlinson manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian MS Rawlinson Poet. 163) omits the proems to Books II, III, and IV, for instance—the surviving manuscripts of *Troilus and Criseyde* nearly always maintain final *-e* throughout this passage. The few exceptions may be taken as scribal in origin, but, importantly, no additional syllables are introduced; that is, the meter of the passage remains constant and consistent across all the manuscripts. In line 22, four manuscripts contain variants to the otherwise accepted *ek that*, but in each case the line maintains the meter. The most striking of these four instances occurs in London, British Library Harley 4912 (H5) where the scribe inverts the formation, substitutes *well* for *that*, and inserts

20. See note 17 above.

21. There is an alternative reading of these lines, albeit one that troubles the consensus view that line-end final *-e* is always pronounced. The conventional rule states that the final *-e* in *chaunge* (22) is pronounced not only because it appears at the end of the line but because it precedes *With-inne* at the head of line 23. (The enjambment of these lines further emphasizes this point: written out as prose, the sentence "ȝe knowe ek that in fourme of speche is chaunge with-inne a thousand ȝeer" insists on a voiced final *-e* in *chaunge*.) It thus follows that, in order to maintain the rhyme, *straunge* also includes an audible final *-e*, despite the enjambment with line 25, where a vowel follows *straunge*: "now wonder nyce and straunge / Us thinketh hem, . . ." On the page (and to the silent reader, medieval or modern), this is not too problematic a proposition. However, for a reader reading the passage aloud—like Criseyde's maiden in the paved parlor or Chaucer at the podium in the Corpus Christi 61 frontispiece—the acceptance of the voiced final *–e* in *straunge* requires an uncomfortable (if quiet) glottal stop between lines 24 and 25. Such a reader thus must choose between a commitment to the phonemic repetition of the rime royal structure and the omission of a flow-marring hiccup. Whether one skirts the sonic Scylla or dodges the chaotic Charybdis, the reader is acutely aware of just how *straunge* the *chaunge* of *speche* can be.

22. On scribal attention to such minute detail and scribes' faithful transmission of verse-form and meter, see Wakelin, *Scribal Correction*, esp. chap. 2, "Inviting Correction," 19–42, and chap. 9, "Form," 217–45. Compare Horobin, *Chaucer Tradition*, 144–45. For a discussion of Chaucer's scribes in particular, see Barry A. Windeatt, "The Scribes as Chaucer's Early Critics," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 1 (1979): 119–41.

a final *-e* in *eke*: *I knowe well eke in fourme of speche is chaunge*.[23] The meter is maintained, however, for the next word is *in*, and thus the final *-e* in *eke* remains silent when read aloud.[24] All manuscripts maintain the spelling of *straunge* at the end of line 24, with the exception of London, British Library Add. MS 12044 (A) and Durham, University Library MS Cosin V.II.13 (D), which omit the remainder of the line following *now*, an obvious oversight. In line 25, MSS A, H5, and London, British Library MS Harley 2392 (H4) give *speken* for *spake* (found in the other twelve manuscripts that contain the proem), but Windeatt assures us that this slip in tense is a typical scribal error.[25] For line 26 *spedde*, attested in thirteen of the extant manuscripts, A gives a variant spelling, *spede*, but maintains the final *-e*. H4 and London, British Library MS Harley 3943 (H2) read *did* instead. Although this substitution removes one of the visual traces of final *-e*, it does not upset the meter of the line.

There remains the case of San Marino, Huntington Library HM 114 (Ph; formerly Phillipps 8252), a manuscript famous for its omissions and later insertions of marginalia and entire folia. Ph contains a marginal insertion for line 26 which reads "And sped yn love as wele as we now do." Robert K. Root cites this manuscript as an emblem of his α group of manuscripts representing an earlier phase of composition of the poem. Windeatt, so frequently at odds with Root, agrees that "Ph is an important MS in that it presents throughout a text with readings sometimes apparently closer to [*Il Filostrato*] and possibly nearer to the composition of the poem."[26] He reminds us, moreover, that the earlier manuscripts of *Troilus* "do try to observe such minute matters [as final *-e*], and they are closer in transmission to MSS overseen by the poet and owned by contemporary admirers."[27] Nothing is certain about the

23. The other variants are *wel þis* (H2 and Ph) and *ek this* (H4). H5 is one of six manuscripts that substitutes *I* for *Ye*. (Caxton and Thynne do so as well.) This change does not affect the meter.

24. The substitution and syntactic inversion in H5—*ek that*] *well eke*—does not result in an added unstressed syllable in the *knowe* of position 2. The two *w*'s bookending this final *-e* blend into one another, effectively eliding the *-e*.

25. Windeatt, "'Most conservatyf the soun,'" 46. Compare Burrow, "Scribal Mismetring." At the beginning of line 25, both Oxford, Bodleian MS Digby 181 (Dg) and Oxford Bodleian MS Arch. Selden, Supra 56 (S2) alter *Us thinketh hem* to *It thynkis vs*.

26. Windeatt, "List of Manuscripts," 73. He notes, however, that the text of the manuscript "is characterized by a tendency to unmetrical lines, with disregard for final *-e*, much minor omission, re-ordering within lines, and paraphrase." See Robert K. Root, ed., *The Book of Troilus and Criseyde* (Princeton, 1926).

27. Windeatt, ed., *Troilus,* 57. Compare Burnley's observation that the Hengwrt manuscript makes a highly regular use of final *–e* inflection ("Inflexion," 173). Horobin's data on fifteenth-century manuscripts of *CT* tell a similar story (*Chaucer Tradition*, 98–106). For instance, Horobin's tabulation of the preservation and loss of adjectival final *-e* in *WBPro*, III 21, 42, 608, makes clear that in manuscripts dating to the period 1400–1425, "the majority of instances show final <-e> in its correct grammatical environment" (99).

relationship of the Ph manuscript to authorial composition or drafts, but it is worth noting that, although the variant line in Ph lacks the final *-e* in *sped(d)e* (line 26) found in the other manuscripts, it adds an additional final *-e* to *wele* two words later. Due to the vowel that follows in *as*, the extra unstressed vowel in *wele* is elided and so conforms to my model of the visually present, but aurally absent, final *-e*.

Chaucer uses the proem to Book II of *Troilus* to document an important moment of change in English pronunciation, orthography, and prosody. Through the careful orthographic and formal construction of the passage (faithfully passed on by subsequent generations of scribes), he comments on the pace of development in written and oral forms of the language, between the consciously elevated diction of the literary text and common vernacular utterances. In the Book Two, lines 22–28 stanza, one of his most literarily self-reflexive passages, Chaucer demonstrates his close interest and involvement in contemporary issues of language change, and in the detail with which he observed and responded to them. He thus reveals himself as a vernacular maker concerned not only with raising new buildings but also with actively incorporating monuments to the past.

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