Introduction: editing reported speech

Users of present-day English take for granted our quotation marks, which indicate passages of reported speech in written texts, but these markers are a purely modern convention and cannot be found in early English manuscripts. The presence or absence of these marks nonetheless changes our reading experience and our relationship to the written language in important ways. Compare this passage transcribed from the fifteenth-century Hengwrt manuscript of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*:

> She seith nat ones nay / whan he seith yee
> Do this seith he / alredy sire seith she

to its incarnation in the *Riverside Chaucer* (1987):

> She seith nat ones "nay," whan he seith "ye."
> "Do this," seith he; "Al redy, sire," seith she.

On first glance, the addition of quotation marks in the modern edition may seem a superficial difference. What this work proposes is that the difference between these two passages is in fact substantive: that the first text comes from a writing system in which speech was marked in less pronounced ways, and that the second, through the quotation marks, adds clear tags to the levels of narrative, tacitly asserting that the speakers are quoted verbatim and making presumptive editorial decisions about narrative voice in passages where the speaker and the boundaries of the reported utterance are less clearly demarcated.

These are issues that have been touched upon by scholars in recent years, yet there has been no full study of the methods of reporting speech in pre-modern English. The need for one was suggested by Suzanne Romaine when she speculated about pre-modern written texts that "the norms for reporting speech in discourse or verse may have been different then or could have varied according to genre" (1982: 125). This work provides the sort of study that Romaine anticipated. It examines the methods of reporting speech in late medieval manuscripts and texts, and employs the *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse* to search a broad range of texts. Further, it positions the results of this study in their cultural and

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literary context. In doing so, it raises and responds to a series of historical, linguistic and hermeneutic questions. What does it mean that manuscripts have less-determined ways of indicating reported speech? Did speakers and writers of English in the pre-modern period have the same assumptions about direct and indirect speech that contemporary speakers and writers of English have? What are the implications of these methods for our understanding of late medieval literary works? How did late medieval authors work with this fluid system of speech marking? Finally, what are the consequences of modern editorial practice, in which editors consistently add quotation marks when editing medieval texts? The answers to these questions can shed light on pre-modern conceptions of reading and writing.

Reported discourse is the intrusion of the voice (spoken or written) of one speaker or writer into the discourse of another. V. N. Vološinov's famous definition states that "Reported speech is speech within speech, utterance within utterance, and at the same time also speech about speech, utterance about utterance" (1973 [1929]: 118). The embedded "speech-within-in-speech" nature of reported discourse grows out of the ability – which speech reporting grants – for one speaker or writer to give the words of another. Attempting to describe the properties of this discourse embedding, though, is a thorny matter, owing to the divided allegiance of the words – their dual responsibility towards both the original context from which the words are represented and also towards the new frame into which they are being positioned. The problem is a long-standing one; Plato, for example, differentiates in Book III of the *Republic* between *mimesis*, in which the poet adopts the voice of another, and *diegesis*, in which the poet never attempts to assume the voice of another. The importance of organizing and representing discourse has made the analysis of reported speech a complex issue for linguists, narratologists, anthropologists and literary scholars, and the problems of assimilating reported speech into models of language have troubled many theorists. This is why Roman Jakobson, for example, described reported speech as a "crucial linguistic and stylistic problem" (1971: 130). Reported speech has been the subject of several full studies of present-day English that employ different linguistic approaches (Coulmas 1986; Holt and Clift 2007; Janssen and van der Wurff 1996; Semino and Short 2004; Vandelanotte 2009), and of historical French (Marnette 2005), and historical Russian (Collins 2001). Early English texts, though, can assist this conversation in important ways. The late Middle Ages are a particularly fruitful place to examine the tangling and untangling of quotation, as Bakhtin mentions in passing in laying the groundwork for his study of the double-voicing of the novel: "The relationship to another's word was equally complex and ambiguous in the Middle Ages … the boundary lines between someone else's speech and one's own speech were flexible, ambiguous, often deliberately distorted and confused" (1981: 69). A fuller consideration is

warranted, therefore, of what Bakhtin only gestures towards: the relation-
ship to another's words in the late Middle Ages.

Terminology

The imposition of another's words into a written or spoken narrative has
been named in a number of ways, and the terms are used sometimes in
contradictory ways, owing to the structural complexity of the phenomenon
and the interdisciplinary nature of its investigation. Direct speech or dis-
course (*oratio recta*) occurs when a primary speaker or writer presents the
speech or writing of a secondary person through the latter's own perspec-
tive, but as reported by the primary speaker:

   (1)   She said, "I ate the chocolate cake."[1]

Indirect speech or discourse (*oratio obliqua*) occurs when the primary
speaker or writer presents the speech or writing of the secondary person,
but rephrased to fit the perspective of the primary speaker:

   (2)   She said [that] she ate the chocolate cake.

The difference between (1) and (2) can be found in the shifters, the deictic
words that depend upon the orientation of the speaker, such as pronouns
and verb tenses. (1) and (2) together have been called represented speech
or reported speech. Yet these terms have also been applied to narrower
uses: "reported speech" has sometimes been used to refer specifically to
indirect discourse in opposition to "quoted speech" for direct discourse.
And "represented speech" is the term used by Jespersen to refer to a
blending of direct and indirect discourse, which has also been called free
indirect speech, style or discourse (1924: 291). Free indirect speech, first
discussed as *le style indirect libre* by Charles Bally (1912) and *uneigentliche
direkte Rede* (quasi-direct speech) by Gertraud Lerch (1919) and Vološinov
(1973 [1929]), employs the form of indirect speech while suggesting a direct
reporting of the words or thoughts of the reported person:

   (3)   Wow, the chocolate cake was too fabulous for words.

In free indirect discourse, the reporting clause can be omitted (it sometimes
appears as a parenthetical clause) and the speech-like structure of direct
discourse is possible (vocatives, interjections, direct question forms and so
forth) (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik 1972: 789). The free indir-
ect style characterizes modernist work (famous adherents include James

[1] Linguistic conventions for indicating direct speech vary between languages – some lan-
guages employ angle marks like French *guillemets* («»), others employ corner brackets, or use
quotation marks with the initial left quote in the "low 9 quote" position („ "). Languages
also vary in how they treat *inquit* clauses within quotation marks in whether these clauses
are included within quotation marks or not.

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Joyce and Virginia Woolf), though various beginnings have been posited for
it, dating back to the writings of Jane Austen.

It is possible to read medieval works as containing free indirect speech,
since they contain represented speech that employs some of the character-
istics of direct speech and some of indirect speech (as I discuss later in this
Introduction). I will avoid the term *free indirect speech* for describing this
phenomenon, though, preferring to reserve that term for modern texts that
employ the form to subvert the categorical distinction between direct and
indirect speech. I argue instead that pre-modern texts, rather than flouting
categorical distinctions, simply did not have such pronounced distinctions,
and that the more fluid system lent itself better to greater overlap between
the modes of discourse. Indeed, there is still some overlap between the
modes of discourse in present-day English, and they are much less separate
in actual use (especially oral use) than many grammarians acknowledge. But
present-day users do have more clearly defined analytic categories – and
this influences our ideas about discourse modes.

Researchers in historical sociolinguistics and pragmatics often use the
term *speakers* to collapse the categories of speakers and writers, and *speech*
as a general term in environments where speech or writing is meant. These
habits grow out of usage practices in the discipline of linguistics, which
focuses on present-day spoken language; much methodology in historical
English linguistics is an application of these present-day methods. Short,
Semino and Wynne point out that these usages are imprecise and establish
the importance of distinguishing between speech, thought and writing pres-
entation in their data (2002: 334). But the practice of using "direct speech"
to refer also to directly reported written discourse underscores the ways that
medieval texts used reporting strategies from oral language and the ways
that the conventions for direct reporting apply similarly to speech, writing
and thought. For this work, then, some of the slippage between the categor-
ies of speech and writing is not inappropriate, and I will use *direct speech* or
reported speech as category terms, using *speech* or *discourse* for the reported
embedded clause, and draw distinctions among speech, writing and thought
in those places where the distinction is relevant (reported thought is not
very common in these texts). *Discourse* is another problematic word: it is
sometimes used to refer to speech and writing but sometimes exclusively
to speech, and it has developed many complex theoretical senses in some
disciplines. In the wake of Foucault, of course, scholars have also used the
word to connote the means of communication within an institution or power
structure (de Beaugrande 1994). I will use *discourse* in its linguistic sense, to
refer to a continuous communicative unit of language above the sentence,
which contextualizes morphological and syntactic elements (a conversation,
a passage of a novel, the proceedings of a trial).

The term *voice* proves equally troublesome, since it has assumed many
complex meanings for the field of narratology (Spearing 2001: 727). I will

employ it to refer to the presence of a particular perspective in a passage of the text (the *I*-subject): words that originate from a particular person (fictional or otherwise). This work, furthermore, follows Coulmas (1986), Janssen and van der Wurff (1996), Collins (2001) and Holt and Clift (2007) in using the term *reported speech* as a category term for direct speech, indirect speech, and free indirect speech. Acknowledging reporting as a type of representation, I also use the terms *reported speech* and *represented speech* broadly interchangeably.

Direct discourse, we find, is not a unified phenomenon, but a mode that incorporates several types of intervention. It can mark the recorded, reconstructed or constructed words of an individual, or the quoted words of another text or author. A study that was interested primarily in the precise operation of direct discourse would need to carefully separate those functions in analysis and terminology.[2] This research, however, investigates the marking of direct discourse and therefore pursues the very fact of its amalgamated nature: the way that we use the same methods of marking one pragmatic function as another. The similarity in treating these divided pragmatic roles, in fact, unites them categorically. We mark the words of Aristotle, St. Paul, our next-door neighbor and the Wife of Bath with the same conventions, even though they present very different speech (or writing) events (or non-events).[3] While a cognitive investigation of the styles and modes of speech presentation should certainly distinguish between the types of reporting and the discourse reported, this study focuses rather on what unifies the forms of direct discourse – the fact that they have been conceptually lumped together in our pragmatic methods of marking them. In present-day English, we use quotation marks for all of these functions, and early English also used similar quotative strategies in approaching all of them.

Editing reported speech in medieval manuscripts

Nearly all present-day readers of late medieval literature approach works through edited texts. We accept this mediation as necessary and even desirable, since most of us would have no wish to tangle with fifteenth-century book hands every time we sat down to read a passage – even if this were practicable. Different aspects of published editions alter our reading and understanding of the edited works, however, and reported speech is a particularly fraught aspect of a text.

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[2] For discussion of pragmatic functions of reported speech, see, for example, Vincent and Perrin (1999) or Sternberg (1982:109–110).

[3] Mark Atherton points out that in Old English homilies there is little stylistic difference between a quotation from an author and the report of a turn in a dialogue within a narrative; both are "sayings." (2000: 11).

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Present-day English marks reported direct speech with quotation marks, and editors typically add these to edited medieval texts. Editors of introductory texts explain these emendations by asserting that they increase a text's accessibility. Ann Haskell, for example, introduces *A Middle English Anthology* with: "Since the appearance of a medieval text can be overwhelming to the inexperienced reader, I have supplied punctuation, capitalization, and accent marks where they seem necessary" (1969: xi). Equally often these explanations are taken for granted, as in the case of R. T. Davies's anthology *Medieval English Lyrics*: "Modern punctuation and use of capital letters have been introduced throughout" (1963: 47). Even scholarly editions, which rigorously provide footnotes and apparatus to record every variant spelling in the manuscripts, still typically add punctuation. And certainly editorial precedent supports this practice; editors have been punctuating direct speech in different ways and with varying consistency since the sixteenth century.

This is why, for the most part, current editorial scholarship adjudges punctuation to be more vulnerable to modern intervention than other features of a text. Many recent editors have been working under the tutelage of W. W. Greg's influential essay "The rationale of copy-text," which draws an often-repeated distinction between the "substantive" and the "accidental" elements of a text (1950: 376). Greg defines *substantives* as features that influence the author's meaning or the essence of the text and *accidentals* as affecting its formal presentation. For accidentals he gives spelling, punctuation and word-division as examples. Greg's choice of terms places punctuation in a subordinate position, an *accident* of textual presentation. His exclusion of punctuation from the semantic center of the text exemplifies the historical tendency of editors to exhibit reluctance in changing the actual words of a text, but to take greater liberties in altering the surrounding context. Himself a scholar of Renaissance texts, Greg was aware of the potential importance of punctuation, and acknowledges in a footnote that punctuation may have effects on meaning. Greg's categories, however, are usually repeated without his mitigating note. Fredson Bowers, for example, borrows the substantive/accidental distinction without repeating Greg's concession about punctuation and meaning, and the Anglo-American tradition of editorial theory has followed suit (1972: 452). D. F. McKenzie, therefore, regards Greg's distinction as responsible for engendering a tradition of editorial theory that does not incorporate the history of the book (2002: 201). By dividing the text into primary and secondary attributes, editors are encouraged to unravel aspects of a work from the whole, resulting in an editorial perspective that approaches a work as a collection of components rather than as a unified creation.

Other recent theorists, led by McKenzie and Jerome McGann, have come forward to advocate a vision of textual editing that considers the content of the words together with their appearance as writing on the page. This model

privileges not an abstract ideal of the work in an author's imagination, but the physical aspects of the text as it was produced and circulated. McGann's best-known contribution to editorial theory is his reshaping of the notion of authorial intention. Prior to McGann, scholars tended to assume that the final published version of a literary work was the most authoritative because it represented the author's final intentions. McGann pointed out that an author's intentions are not reliable as a measure of textual integrity. He cites examples such as *Childe Harold*, *Don Juan* and *The Giaour* – which have multiple surviving manuscripts, multiple corrected proofs and several early editions proofed by Byron (McGann 1983: 21–22, 51–54). Determining the authorized poem through the panoply of versions proves impossible.

The attempt to reconstruct an author's intentions in editing, a chancy endeavor even for texts from the last century or two, becomes still more vexed when applied to pre-modern texts. Intention can only be guessed at by using what we know from cultural history, which always presents an incomplete picture. Our knowledge is not sufficient to accommodate differences between authors and for different genres, and we do not always know the extent to which we are retroactively applying our own perspectives and habits on early texts. The entire concept of an author, in fact, is something of a back-projection onto late medieval English works (Goldschmidt 1943: 30; Minnis 1988). Pre-modern models of the *auctor* did not seem to permit authoring a work in the vernacular. Medieval scholars recognized Latin *auctores*, and they recognized English writers, but the notion of English *auctores* did not fit well into existing paradigms (Machan 1992: 6–7). The conception of authorial intention, therefore, is elusive enough that it should be approached with caution in editing medieval works. Since our knowledge of the author's intent is always speculative, I will focus whenever possible on production and on textual function rather than authorial intention.

Even in the wake of contemporary criticism of authorial intention, which promotes meticulous attention to elements of the physical page, punctuation continues to elude categories constructed by theorists. McGann divides textual authority into two domains, the linguistic and the bibliographic (1991: 60, 66–67). To editors, according to McGann, authorial intentions have carried weight only with respect to the linguistic text, and not for the bibliographic aspects of the text, over which publishers hold sway. Punctuation does not fit easily into this binary, however. It marks linguistic aspects of the work, such as syntax and prosody, and is included within the text. Both of these features would appear to make it part of the linguistic coding of a text. But editors have traditionally assumed greater authority over punctuation than they would over the words of a text, which would make it instead part of the bibliographic code. Punctuation, then, seems at once to be linguistic and bibliographic code and neither.

Other Anglo-American editorial theorists have created alternate categories to attempt to shape McGann's notions for editorial practice. G. Thomas

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Tanselle discriminates between material intended for publication and
material not so intended (1981: 34). His claim is that editors should repro-
duce material not meant for publication as faithfully as possible since they
have no authority to guess how an author would have proceeded if faced
with publication. Works intended for publication are differently problem-
atic because an author's intention is not necessarily satisfied by any par-
ticular reproduction. Therefore, an editor is completely within his rights
in deciding to alter punctuation in the edition to assist in presentation of
the underlying work. Tanselle's divisions have been questioned by modern
historians, however (Taylor 1981). And medieval documents pose an even
greater problem for Tanselle's categories. Many of them were intended for
"publication" in the sense of circulation, but there was no standardizing
print medium. Following Tanselle, then, does a scholarly editor have the
right to guess what an author would have done if faced with the prospect
of modern publication with our modern conventions? Intention to publish
does not make the best criterion for editing texts from such a great histor-
ical distance.

The elusiveness of punctuation for the categories of editorial theory
occurs because of several fractures in its identity. Punctuation can either
facilitate the sense of a sentence, or assign a different sense to it. It aids in
the conveyance of meaning and creates meaning of itself. Even medieval
writers could play with this dual identity, as we find in a few surviving verses
that artfully employ the metrical punctuation of the poetic line to create a
divided reading. One from Cambridge Univ. MS. Hh. 2.6. reads:

In women is rest peas and pacience.
     No season · for-soth outht of charite ·
Bothe be nyght & day · thei haue confidence ·
  All wey of treasone · Owt of blame thei be ·
  No tyme as men say · Mutabilite ·
    They haue without nay · but stedfastnes ·
In theym may ye neuer fynde y gesse · Cruelte
    Such condicons they haue more & lesse ·

[In women lies peace and patience ·
     At no time · truly out of charity ·
Both by night and day · they are confident ·
of treason · blameless they are ·
at no time · fickleness ·
    they have without doubt · steadfastness ·
you will never find in them · cruelty
    Such conditions they have more and less ·][4]

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[4]   I have provided modernizations for most of the Middle English passages in this book. These
    are primarily included to assist readers who are less familiar with Middle English, so they
    aim to be more literal rather than more felicitous.

Reading across the line produces a tribute to women: they have peace and patience, they are never out of charity, and so forth. If, however, we locate the syntactic divisions at the *caesurae* (as marked by the mid-line dot) rather than the line breaks and read the lines as joining the second half line to the first half line succeeding it, the reading is not so flattering: women have peace and patience at no time, they are always out of charity, and so forth. (My modernization loses the sound cues to the syntactic units: rhymes occur at the midline as well as at the line ends.) The poem either praises or condemns, therefore, depending on how the punctuation defines the syntactic unit, and the humor depends on the doubleness that grows out of the less-constrained punctuation conventions. R. H. Robbins cites this verse together with two others about priests and the law; he calls them "punctuation poems" (1952: 101–102; see also Machan 1994: 136). This kind of humor does persist after the medieval period in an oral form; a similar joke can be found in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when Peter Quince gives the prologue to the play with the pauses in the wrong places. Theseus comments of the comic inversions of meaning that "this fellow does not mind his points" – the fellow does not heed his punctuation.[5]

Thus, the decision to add punctuation can be either an assistance to expressing semantic content or the imposition of an entirely different semantic content. Even when editing modern texts, decisions about punctuating a text must be made on a case-by-case basis, since different authors had different approaches to the use of punctuation. A poet such as Marianne Moore, for example, took a great deal of care in punctuating her poetry and maintained close control over her punctuational revisions. W. B. Yeats, on the other hand, seems to have used minimal punctuation in the expectation that his editor would mark the works for him (Finneran 1991). Altering punctuation would be an instantiation of authorial intention for one poet and a rejection of it for the other. And these are writers at only a single century's remove, for whom the conventions of punctuation were relatively similar to those of their present-day editors. Approaching pre-modern texts presents still greater challenges, since the conventions of textual marking are so different and since very little can be known about the intentions of the writer.

Punctuation marks are both historical and ahistorical. They depend upon the conventions of textual marking in the period from which they derive, but they can assist us in eliciting meaning from texts, regardless of time period. The punctuation problem, therefore, revisits the central issue of all modernizations: does modernizing make meaning accessible to modern readers, or does it interfere with the transmission of meaning by imposing alternate standards of interpretation upon earlier texts? Clearly, in the case of punctuating direct speech, it does both: simultaneously aiding and

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[5] Thanks to Míċeál Vaughan for this example.

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inhibiting the decipherment of older works. By adding features that make medieval texts more approachable, we make their meaning more accessible even as we obscure the parts of its identity that do not fit into the modern paradigm.

This work argues that adding quotation marks to medieval texts obscures the indeterminate, shifty nature of reported speech in medieval texts and that this practice has effects, sometimes significant ones, for our interpretation of older works (a related discussion of syntactic questions can be found in Blockley 2001: 40–42; see also Nunberg 1991: 130–131). I will not advocate the strict position that medieval editions should not contain quotation marks, as Howell Chickering does in his discussion of punctuating Chaucer editions (1990). I am not convinced that removing the quotation marks will lead to an improved reading experience of pre-modern texts. First of all, we read differently than did earlier readers: more quickly and more often silently. Second, we expect different things from our written works, and structure our approach to the page around those expectations. Just as we cannot restore the mindset of early twentieth-century automobile travel by simply removing the street lights from intersections, so we cannot simply remove the signposts that govern a present-day reader's experience in order to achieve authentic pre-modern readings. This work accepts Bernard Cerquiglini's opinion that editors must punctuate for the sake of most readers – despite the fact that certain aspects of the text are lost altogether for some researchers – and it answers his call to determine those aspects through scholarship (1999 [1989]: 25–26). Quotation marks are, I believe, a necessary interpretational layer for bringing medieval texts to a modern audience, but we need to address how these quotation marks change our reading experience. As readers we need not remove all modernizing aids to older texts. But if we are to be careful readers of the past, we must endeavor to keep modern interpretational tools distinct in our minds from the original source material. We must bear in mind that quotation marks change the pragmatic functions of a text, creating a layer of mediation: a pragmatic palimpsest. This work examines these palimpsests to investigate the hermeneutics of speech reporting.

Methodology and approaches

The object of this study, then, is not to ask whether there should be quotation marks in edited medieval texts, but to ask what these anachronistic marks cover up. How did medieval writers (both authors and scribes) mark the intrusion of other voices in discourse, and how did they understand these markings? By asking such questions, we can arrive at a sharper understanding of the people behind the page, the communities that created and circulated written manuscripts, and the human decisions that permeated manuscript production.