

“Such is the power of the editor”¹

Translation of Middle English *for gode*

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¹ N.F. Blake. *The English Language in Medieval Literature*.

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Table of Contents

Table of contents.....	1
1. Introduction.....	2
2. Theoretical framework.....	4
3. Capitalisation in Middle English.....	5
4. Editing Middle English texts.....	6
5. “Middle English <i>For Gode</i> : ‘In Truth’ and not ‘By God’”.....	9
6. Ms. Bodley 34. <i>St. Juliana</i> and <i>Hali Meiðhad</i>	10
7. <i>Bevis of Hampton</i>	14
8. <i>The Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester</i>	15
9. <i>The South English Legendary</i>	17
10. <i>Genesis and Exodus</i>	19
11. <i>Poems</i> by William of Shoreham.....	20
12. <i>Old and Middle English c. 890-c. 1400: An Anthology</i>	21
13. <i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i>	23
14. <i>The Canterbury Tales</i>	27
15. <i>King Horn</i>	31
16. <i>for gode</i> in the <i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> and the <i>Middle English Dictionary</i>	34
16.1. <i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>	35
16.2. <i>Middle English Dictionary</i>	36
17. Conclusion.....	38
Works Cited.....	40

1. Introduction

Middle English (*c.* 1066-1500) and Modern English (*c.* 1500-1900) are different stages of the same language, which is reflected in the considerable differences in morphology, syntax, phonology, vocabulary and punctuation. Over time, the English language has changed from a synthetic language (Old English (*c.* 450-1066)) to an analytic language (Modern English). Middle English is clearly in the middle of these two extremes; it is less synthetic than Old English, but does not depend on word order, function words and punctuation as heavily as Modern English does to clarify the sentence. Because of this difference, editing and translating is an important aspect of dealing with Middle English texts. In student editions, texts are often modernised in order to make the text more accessible; words are translated, unfamiliar letters are changed, the word order is adjusted, and punctuation and capitals are inserted. Readers are often not aware of the changes that have been made. As Blake points out, “[t]he most influential critic a student reads is the editor of his set text, whose influence is perhaps the greater because it is rarely suspected” (55). However, even when reading an original Middle English text, translation cannot be avoided, as is also emphasised in Warren’s statement below:

No one of the twenty-first century has a ‘native’ knowledge of any medieval language, and so even the ‘original’ text is apprehended through various literal and metaphoric translations (cultural, editorial, linguistic, etc.). (...) The encounter with the medieval text is a multilingual encounter, even when one appears to be reading ‘English’ texts in ‘English’ in an ‘English’ classroom. (66)

Translation is thus an essential part of reading Middle English texts which can be done by the editor or the reader; in any case, mistranslations and differences in translation will occur and are difficult to avoid. Editors decide on the best translation and these choices are often copied into later editions. The fact that these translations are not always thought to be correct can be

seen in the translation of the Middle English phrase *for gode*. Seeing that *gode* besides *good* can mean *God*, and the inconsistency of Middle English spelling does not always provide a clear-cut meaning for a word, editors of Middle English texts generally interpret this phrase as referring to God (*by God*, or *before God*). According to Modern English spelling conventions the word is capitalised, which sometimes results in questionable translations of the phrase, as for example found in religious texts such as *Hali Meiðhad* (c. 1200) and *The Middle English Genesis and Exodus* (mid-thirteenth century). The capitalisation of *gode* and thus the interpretation of the phrase as referring to *God* can cause a limited view of the meaning of the phrase, without the readers being aware of it. Over the years, the capitalisation and translation of *for gode* as an oath to God has almost become general practise. My first encounter with the expression in *Hali Meiðhad* and the translation (*For God's sake*) in Treharne's *Old and Middle English c. 890-c. 1400: An Anthology* made me wonder what the phrase actually means and the way in which it was translated in this religious text. It seemed strange to use such a strong phrase in a text that emphasised how to lead a pious life. My investigations into the phrase *for gode* revealed that there are more editors and scholars who scrutinised the translation of the phrase and advocate interpretations that differ from the common interpretation as a reference to God. Smallwood, for instance, argues in his article "Middle English *For Gode*: 'In Truth' and not 'By God'" that the phrase *for gode* is often misinterpreted. With the evidence he provides, he challenges the standard translation of *for gode* as referring to God in several editions of Middle English texts, as well as the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* and the *Middle English Dictionary (MED)*. In addition, there are other editors of Middle English texts who do not translate the phrase as referring to God, but as an expression denoting *good*. Even though Smallwood has already carried out some research into the translations of this particular phrase, his work is based on a small sample of texts only. The main focus of this thesis will be a detailed study of the capitalisation and

translation of the phrase *for gode*. I will examine a wider range of texts and additional examples of the expression than have been studied so far and will also consider the way in which modern editors and medieval scribes deal with the phrase. The outcome of this study will provide an answer to the question which approach to and translation of the phrase is preferable; i.e. either Smallwood's, my own, and most medieval scribes' more basic reading of the phrase with a translation such as *good* or *truly* or most modern editors' method of capitalising the phrase and thus referring to God. This thesis will provide background information on capitalisation in both Middle and Modern English, the approach to editing Middle English texts and, most importantly, outline and discuss the texts and dictionaries mentioned in Smallwood's article and then provide additional examples and interpretations of the phrase in different texts and by different editors that have not yet been investigated. Despite a long tradition of interpreting the phrase as referring to God, the analysis of new material might prove the new interpretation by Smallwood and others to be more accurate than was believed up to now.

2. Theoretical framework

For the analysis of the examples of the phrase *for gode* in this thesis, I will take a philological approach. The aim is to investigate the original texts as far as this is possible. Preference is given to the earliest sources and conservative edited facsimiles as opposed to editions by modern scholars and editors, seeing that contemporary sources are more likely to identify the original meaning of *for gode* and these sources have not yet gone through several editing processes. The texts are analysed through close-reading and comparison within the context of the texts' production. Instead of taking a twentieth-century view, which might be misleading when it comes to the meaning of the phrase, a contemporary view is taken in order to try to discover and reveal the most probable meaning of the phrase.

3. Capitalisation in Middle English

A substantial problem with the interpretation of *for gode* is found in the capitalisation of the expression. As a result of irregular Middle English spelling, *gode* can mean *God* and *good*. The meaning of the phrase can be specified through the use of prepositions or it can be made clear through the context of the sentence. However, because of the probable meaning of *God* and the visible resemblance to the word God, the phrase is often seen as a reference to God and thus capitalised according to present-day spelling conventions, without further research being carried out into the actual meaning of the phrase. The capitalisation of the phrase immediately limits the meaning of the phrase to a reference to God. Seeing that there is a considerable difference in the use of capitals for Modern and Middle English, this modern, editorial change “may force the language of a medieval text to be more rigid than it was intended to be” (Blake 75). For Modern English there are strict rules concerning capitalisation, which have been provided in numerous spelling books and grammars from the fifteenth century onwards. This was not the case for Middle English where capitalisation was quite random if used at all. Because of these spelling differences, editors working with Middle English material can rarely fall back on the original text for capitalisation. In order to make the text more accessible to modern readers, editors have to decide which words to capitalise. The phrase *for gode* is likely to be capitalised, because of the modern practise of capitalising words that refer to God. This was not done in Middle English; even in an obvious oath to God, *god* would be written with a small letter. This difference in style and portrayal of words believed to refer to God causes the problems with the translation of *for gode*. Seeing that most modern editors immediately capitalise *gode*, a different, perhaps more suitable, translation of the phrase is discarded straight away. The habit of capitalising words that are believed to refer to God limits the research into the meaning of the phrase *for gode* and gives readers of modern editions a one-sided view of the possible meaning of the phrase. The method of

automatically capitalising words that are believed to refer to God, without mentioning this editorial change, can be found in many editions of Middle English texts as well as in student course books such as Crystal's *Encyclopaedia of the English Language*. The use of capitals over time is mentioned by Crystal, but the focus is mostly on the period from the seventeenth century onwards. The change of capitalising sacred words is not mentioned in the encyclopaedia at all, not even in the section that discusses change of punctuation over time. Crystal illustrates this change with an excerpt from Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (279) in which every detail concerning punctuation is mentioned. The change from *god* (1532: W. Thynne, *The Workes of Geffray Chaucer*) to *God* (1598: T. Speght, *The Workes of our Antient and Learned English Poet, Geffrey Chaucer*), however, is not focused on at all. This inaccuracy when it comes to capitalising words that refer to God could contribute to the 'over-capitalising' of words in Middle English editions and the misunderstanding of parts of texts that results from this unspecified use of capitals. In some of the editions examined for this thesis where the phrase is believed to refer to God (for example *Hali Meidhad* (c. 1200) ed. by Millett, *The South English Legendary* (early fourteenth century) eds. D'Evelyn and Mill and *Bevis of Hampton* (c. 1325-1350) eds. Herzman et al.), the *g* is capitalised following the modern capitalisation of sacred words. It is possible that this capitalisation gives a wrong impression of the actual meaning of the phrase. In addition to the examples that Smallwood provides in his article, more examples can be found in editions of for example *King Horn* (c.1225), *The Canterbury Tales* (end fourteenth century) and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (c. 1400).

4. Editing Middle English texts

The general focus when it comes to editing Middle English texts seems to be on the discussion of 'liberal editing' versus 'conservative editing'. The different methods of textual

criticism result in a range of different ways of editing. From what Hudson calls [1] the “unemended (45); respect for the individual manuscript [which] led to a dutiful recording of its idiosyncrasies, even when these are blatantly the result of scribal incompetence” (38) to [2] the “critical (45); stemmatic textual criticism: the editor collates all manuscripts and deduces from his variants a stemma of the relationships between them, chooses on this foundation a base text, (...) which he prints with necessary emendations and to which other variants are subordinated”, (40) to [3] the “eclectic” (45) which “is hardly a type, since its essence is individuality” (41). In the third, the eclectic type, the scribe’s version is questioned and emended freely by the modern editor. Most academic textbooks that deal with the editing of Middle English texts focus on the different methods of textual criticism with accompanying examples from editions through the years and the question which method is the ‘best’.

Although this discussion is important, the basics of an edition, whether liberal, conservative or somewhere in between, should be under discussion as well. There are no basic rules for an edition, no standards which every edition should meet such as guidelines for lay-out, glossing, translation and interpretation. Machan explains that “there are few (...) reference works for editing medieval vernacular texts” (2). He refers to the *OED* and *MED*, but these might not be as reliable as he thinks they are. Note that the entries for *for gode* in the *OED* and *MED* are examined in section 16. When it comes to editing Middle English texts, there are hardly any guidelines or reference works to consult and editors have a free hand in composing their editions. In the introduction to *Editing Medieval Texts*, Rigg makes the following comment on different kinds of editions:

The term “edition” embraces many kinds of scholarly production: facsimile reproductions (with or without transcriptions), diplomatic transcripts (sometimes with separate manuscript versions on facing pages, sometimes with accompanying “edited” texts), text based on a single manuscript (with or without an *apparatus criticus*), and

full critical editions (with or without a *stemma codicum*). Editions may be accompanied by introduction, textual apparatus, commentary, glossary, facing-page translation, or any combination of these aids. Punctuation may be modernized or adhere strictly to that of the manuscript. Spelling may be standardized (according to one or another norm) or may reproduce the slightest curlicue of the script. Editions may be directed to professional scholars, to graduate students, to undergraduates, to high school students, to the “general reader”, or to actors and producers. (3-4)

Despite this lack of uniformity, or means of qualifying an edition, most scholarly editions are automatically read as the ‘real’ text of for example *King Horn* (c.1225) or *The Canterbury Tales* (end fourteenth century). Most scholars are aware of the subjectivity of an edition, but their audience generally is not. In this thesis it will become clear that in several scholarly editions, for example editions by the *Early English Text Society* (EETS) that despite the present guidelines for editors show variation in their ways of editing, interpretations and changes made by the editor are not indicated as such and can be taken as the original text by an innocent reader. Editors do not merely provide a text, but are in a sense re-writers and translators of a text. This is also stressed by Warren in her chapter on translation:

[O]ne of the primary conditions of reading Middle English is translating it (linguistically, culturally, historically, etc.). In a very real sense, the way we translate the past (for students, for ourselves) creates knowledge of the past. As such, it may be one of the most powerful and least examined procedures of Middle English pedagogy – and by extension, of Middle English research. (66)

This aspect of translation and interpretation when dealing with Middle English texts is unavoidable (see section 1), but should be made clear to all people involved. In order for the readers to be aware of the changes that have been made, a clear and recognisable way of editing and emending should be used in every Middle English edition. This would greatly

contribute to the understanding of phrases such as *for gode*, where editorial emendation occurs more often than not, and readers might be steered in the wrong direction when it comes to the meaning of the phrase.

5. “Middle English *For Gode*: ‘In Truth’ and not ‘By God’”

In the earlier-mentioned article by Smallwood, several examples of the phrase *for gode* are discussed. He shows that in seven Middle English texts the phrase *for gode* is probably used “as some sort of exclamation-cum-emphasizer” (5) which literally means ‘for good’ and he wants to establish “that such a phrase, (...) did exist in Middle English” (5). He discovers that the sense of the phrase is mostly “exclamatory and emphatic” but also “more light and conversational” (5). The main reason for his interpretation is the spelling of the phrase. In one case he illustrates this through rhyme and for other examples he raises the question whether an oath invoking God would be appropriate in the given text. In addition, he questions whether such an oath, at that time, was even used as “a normal part of the language, spoken and written” (12). For the origin of the phrase Smallwood turns to other languages such as French (*pour de bon*), Spanish (*de los buenos*), Dutch (*een goede drie uren*), Italian (*di buono*), and German (*Ich habe guten Grund zu*) and explains that “[r]epeatedly, then, a word meaning ‘good’ has been used subject to a preposition in a terse idiomatic phrase to give emphasis of claim truthfulness” (10-11). Smallwood mentions that there are more texts, mostly from a later period, where the expression could be translated differently as is done in modern editions:

A handful of examples from between the mid-fourteenth and the very early fifteenth centuries could be quoted, but three of these happen to be in works of major literary importance, and they have been mistranslated so often that their identity would need to be demonstrated more carefully and lengthily than is possible here. (9-10)

During the research conducted for this thesis, I have found several occurrences of the phrase in texts other than those mentioned by Smallwood. The later texts he refers to might be *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (c. 1400), and *The Canterbury Tales* (end fourteenth century) which are examined in section 13 and 14. Furthermore, I examined more editions of the texts that Smallwood discusses, which provide new information on the phrase (e.g. *St. Juliana* (c. 1225), *Hali Meiðhad* (c. 1200) and *Bevis of Hampton* (c. 1325-1350)) and give additional examples of the phrase (*Poems* by William of Shoreham (c. 1320)).

6. Ms. Bodley 34. *St. Juliana* and *Hali Meiðhad*

Smallwood starts with examples from two texts found in MS. Bodley 34, *St. Juliana* (c. 1225): [1] “**for gode**² qð þe meiden þin hearm is þe mare” and *Hali Meiðhad* (c. 1200): [2] “**forr gode** hit is speatewile forte þenche þron” and [3] “**for gode** (...) þu ahtest (...) þis werc (...) ouer alle þing to schunien” (Smallwood 4). For these texts he compares the word *God*, which is governed by a preposition, to that of *gode*:

[T]here are sixteen examples of the word for ‘God’ subject to a preposition, and all of them are written *godd*. In the other three works in the manuscript (all five being in the same hand) there are twenty-two further examples of the same word subject to a preposition; twenty-one of these are spelt *godd* and one *gode*. This last singleton obviously blurs the argument a little, but the thirty-seven examples of *godd* to set against it must indicate the scribe’s normal form. And when he chose to write *for(r) gode* three times, the particular spelling in the particular context, it is hard not to believe that he intended a different word. (4-5)

² Emphasis added. This will be done for all following examples of *for gode* and the translations of the phrase in quotations from original texts and translations.

In addition to Smallwood's comments on the spelling of *for gode*, there are more indications that the phrase can be interpreted in a different way. In Cockayne's EETS edition of *Hali Meidenhad*, the first occurrence is translated as an oath to God ([2] "**before God** it is a nauseous þing to ðink þeron, and to speak þereof is yet more nauseous" (24)), but the second one is translated as *good*. He provides the modernised version next to the original text:

Modernised version:

[3] She hað from þe misshapen child sad care and shame, boð, and for þe ðriving one, fear, till she lose it **for good**, þough it never would have been in being for þe love of God nor for þe hope of heaven (34)

Original:

[3] Ha haueð of þe forfchuppet bearn far care t fchome baðe. t fearlac þat forðlich aðat ha hit leofe **for gode** þah hit neauer nere for godel luue ne for hope of heuene. (35)

Cockayne also published an EETS edition of *Pe Liflade of St. Juliana*. In this text he translates the expression as an oath to God as well: [1] "'**Before God**," quoð þe maiden, "þy injury is þe greater. Not, for all þat, þat þou hast not heard of him long since" (17). Even though he does interpret the phrase as an oath to God in one example in *Hali Meiðhad* and *St. Juliana*, his choice for the translation as *good* is remarkable. This shows that more scholars are aware that the phrase can also be translated as *good*. During the research that I conducted for this thesis, I found only one edition (Colborn, see below) that follows Cockayne's translation in the second occurrence in *Hali Meiðhad*, although his translation seems to fit the context better than for example the translation given by Treharne (*For God's sake*) in her *Anthology* (more occurrences in the *Anthology* are examined in section 12). Cockayne and Treharne use a different manuscript for their edition. Furnivall presents them both next to each other:

Bodley 34:

[3] þe haueð, of þet for-schuppet bearn, far & fcheome baðe; & fearlac of þet forðlich, a þet ha hit leofe **for gode**, þah hit nere neauer for godel luue, ne for hope of heouene, ne for dred of helle. (48)

Titus D. 18:

[3] Ha haueð, of þe forschuppet bearn, far care & fchome baðe, & fearlac of þat forðlich, a ðat ha hit leofe **for gode**, þah hit neauer nere for godel luue, ne for hope of heuene, ne for dred of helle. (49)

Compared to Furnivall's edition of Bodley 34, Treharne, who follows Millett's edition, starts her original version mid-sentence: [3] "**For Gode**, þah hit nere neauer for Godes luue, ne for hope of heouene" (302). The first part of the sentence is not included in the part with the title "On Sex and Pregnancy". In this way, the expression can be interpreted as an oath to God. Although the translation does not fit the religious meaning of the text, the sentence seems correct this way. However, when this sentence is compared to the full sentence as printed by Furnivall, Cockayne's translation seems to fit better:

[3] "She hað from þe misshapen child sad care and shame, boð, and for þe ðriving one, fear, till she lose it **for good**, þough it never would have been in being for þe love of God nor for þe hope of heaven (35).

Besides the fact that Treharne leaves out a part of the sentence and basically creates a new sentence, the words preceding *for gode*, "a ðat ha hit leofe" make more sense with Cockayne's translation of *for good* than with Treharne's translation of *For God's sake*. Treharne's sentence would roughly read 'till she lose it **for God's sake**, even if it were never for God's love' (Cockayne's and Treharne's translation combined). Cockayne's translation of *for gode* follows the manuscript's reading more closely and makes more sense than Treharne's presentation of the expression. As stated before, Colborn does follow Cockayne's reading of

the second occurrence of the phrase in his 1940's edition of *Hali Meidhad*. In the glossary he explains that *gode* in line 347 (example [1], see above) means *God* and that *gode* in line 502 (example [2], see above) means *good*. Colborn uses both manuscripts in his edition and the Bodley MS is printed the same way as found in Treharne's edition. Colborn does include the preceding words of the phrase, but also indicates a pause by way of a full stop: [3] “þe haueð of þet for-schuppēt bearn. sar. & scheome baðe. & fearlac of þet forðlich a þet ha hit leose. **for gode** þah hit nere neauer for godes luue. ne for hope of heouene. ne for dred of helle” (30). Despite this difference in sentence structure, both Colborn and Cockayne see *for gode* as a phrase with the meaning of *good*.

As stated before, *Hali Meidhad* and *St. Juliana* are religious texts. Therefore, it seems strange to translate the phrase as *by God*, which is done in both EETS editions (*St. Juliana* by d'Ardenne and *Hali Meidhad* by Millett) and in *Hali Meidhad* in Treharne's *Anthology*. Treharne's *For God's sake* is an even stronger translation than *by God* and does not fit the religious meaning of the text. According to the *OED* online, *for God's sake* can be used “[i]n earnest appeals or exhortations” which could fit the author's aim “to persuade and encourage” (Treharne 294). There are, however, no other comparable exclamations of persuasion in the text. Nevertheless, it is not fully convincing that these two statements should refer to the word *God*, instead of functioning as “exclamation-cum-emphasizer[’s]” (5), as Smallwood suggests. Treharne used Millett's work, including the EETS edition, in her introduction to *Hali Meidhad* and mentions in the general introduction that “for (...) *Hali Meidhad*, the work of previous scholars has proved invaluable” (xxix). Treharne probably used Millett's *by God* and changed it to *for God's sake*, which shows that the choice of one editor often survives in later texts, without new research having been carried out into the meaning of words or phrases.

7. *Bevis of Hampton*

For the interpretation of *for gode* in *Bevis of Hampton* (c. 1325-1350), Smallwood also uses spelling to illustrate his suggested reading of the phrase. In the edition that he uses, “the word for ‘God’ when governed by a preposition is invariably written *god*; this occurs eleven times in all” (5). He also refers to two instances of a real oath invoking God, where God is spelt *god* both times. Smallwood makes the following claim: “[t]he adjective or noun meaning ‘good’ is almost always spelt *gode* (...) Thus, there is no difficulty in seeing which word is intended when, seven times over, the scribe writes *for gode*”:

[4] ‘**For gode,**’ queþ he, ‘þat ich do nelle!’ (l. 271)

[5] ‘**For gode,**’ queþ Beues, ‘napeles, (l. 409)

[6] ‘**For gode,**’ a seide, ‘ich hatte Bef...’ (l. 542)

[7] ‘**For gode!**’ queþ Beues, ‘þat I nolde (l. 561)

[8] ‘**For gode,**’ queþ [Beues], ‘þat ich do nelle...’ (l. 1098)

[9] ‘Sire, **for gode,**’ a seide, ‘nay!’ (l. 3730)

[10] Line 1110 is almost a precise repetition of line 271.” (5)

It is striking that the variant readings from four later copies of roughly the same text give corresponding readings that support Smallwood’s interpretation: “There are (...) five of *sere* (‘Sir’), four of *nay*, one (in a fifteenth-century copy) of *be gode* (...). Thus the later scribes (...) almost always recognized and preserved the separateness of the phrase from oaths invoking God” (5-6).

In the TEAMS edition of *Bevis of Hampton*, edited by Herzman et al., *gode* in the phrase *for gode* is always written with a capital. The editors do not give a translation of the phrase. At the beginning of the book they explain their approach to editing as follows:

The editions maintain the linguistic integrity of the original work but within the parameters of modern reading conventions. The texts are printed in the modern

alphabet and follow the practices of modern capitalization and punctuation. (no page number).

This way of editing can be misleading without the readers even being aware of it. Both Smallwood and Herzman et al. do not give the note that Kölbing (whose text both authors use) provides for line 271: “The affirmation *For gode* occurs only once in Chaucer’s work” (vol. 3). Kölbing compares this to the occurrences in lines 409, 1098, 1110, 3730, 4266, leaving out three occurrences (l. 271, l. 542 and l. 561) and adding one at line 4266 (Herzman et al. translate this as “**For God,**” queth Saber”). Kölbing then refers to “H. Lange *Die Versicherungen bei Chaucer* p. 9”. Kölbing’s description of *for gode* as an *affirmation* can support the more basic reading of the phrase as *good*. According to the *OED* online, *affirmation* means “[t]he action of confirming anything established”, which fits the suggested meaning of *good*. Lange’s text on Chaucer and the example mentioned by Kölbing are examined in section 14.

8. *The Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester*

Other examples of the phrase can be found in *The Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester* (c. 1280). Again, Smallwood uses spelling to explain the meaning of *vor gode* (in this case with *v* because of the southern dialect):

Throughout the copy’s 12,000 lines the word for ‘God’ when subject to a preposition is always written *god*; there are just over forty examples. The word for ‘good’, on the other hand, is spelt either *god* or *gode* with roughly equal frequency. On these grounds alone the second word of *Vor gode* could hardly have meant ‘God’. (6)

Smallwood gives another reason for not translating the phrase as an oath: “RG contains almost no fully-fledged oaths, even when handling harshly dramatic subject-matter” (6). The examples from *The Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester* show “that by about the end of the

thirteenth century the phrase could be used much less earnestly than it had been in the Bodley 34 texts. (...) it is associated with the deliberate humour of an authorial aside” (6):

[11] **Vor gode** me þinkþ lute harm . þei it adde ibe a dogge. (l. 1563)

[12] Ac **uer gode** of þulke beste . ne com in ys mouþ nanmore. (l. 118)

[13] **Vor gode** þe nexte king Edward . þat after him supþe com. (l. 7000)

Example [14] does not express this sense of humour, but resembles the “adversative connotation suggested by the five examples in *Bevis* (...) ‘As a matter of fact, sir king...’” (7):

[14] **Vor gode** sire king quaþ þis þef . uor þi loue ich him slou. (l. 6361)

According to Smallwood, the phrase *for gode* can be compared to the Middle English phrase *for so(o)þ(e)* and the Modern English “emphasizers as ‘actually’ and ‘in reality’, notably when opening a statement (‘Actually, you’re wrong...’)” (7). As Smallwood explains, Pabst in *Flexionsverhältnisse bei Robert von Gloucester* (1891) interprets the phrase in the same way as Smallwood does. He translates the phrase as *fürwahr, im ernst* and compares it to Modern French *pour de bon*. (7) This shows that the phrase is translated in different ways and that there are more scholars who believe that the phrase does not refer to God. In Wright’s *The Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester* alternative readings for *for gode* are given, which are based on four different manuscripts that are all dated around the first half of the fifteenth century. In notes to three occurrences of the phrase the sources of the alternative translations are given. [12] l. 118:

for gvde (British Museum Add. 19677)

for god (Trinity College, Cambridge, R.4.26.)

[11] l. 1563:

For trewly (Bodleian Library, Oxford, Digby 205 and University library, Cambridge, Ee.31)

Forsouthe (Lord Mostyn's Library, Mostyn, Flintshire, No. 259.)

[13] l. 7000:

Bi god (Trinity College, Cambridge, R. 4.26 and Bodleian Library, Oxford, Digby 205)

By god (Lord Mostyn's Library, Mostyn, Flintshire, No. 259.)

In addition, an entry for the word *Gode* can be found in the glossary which reads “**Vor gode = by God**” with a reference to line 7000. It is striking that Smallwood (who uses Wright's edition) does not mention the translation that Wright gives himself. Smallwood does mention the alternative readings when he discusses the way in which the *OED* deals with the expression *for gode* (see section 16.1). These alternative translations are ambiguous and support both interpretations (in two cases even within the same manuscript), which shows that around the first half of the fifteenth century both interpretations were used.

9. *The South English Legendary*

Smallwood claims that *The South English Legendary (SEL)* (early fourteenth century) “offers the most evidence of the use of *for gode*” (7). In the examples Smallwood provides, he again shows that the phrase can be used with humour and innocence:

[15] “So wole euerich of zou bidde þat iwoned were so sore –

Ac **for gode** ich wene ich lize, þerefore I ne segge namore.”

[16] “So fareþ zut þis clerkes: hi ne wilnyeþ no maistrie,

Ne beo ichose to heze men – **for gode** ich wene ich lie.”

[17] “**For gode** þer is non of zou þat hure coupe habbe iwest so wel,

Ne so iued hure ne hure child, þat ne costnede worþ a strau.” (8-9)

He discusses six versions of the text and demonstrates his interpretation of the phrase on the basis of spelling. He starts with the Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 145: “Its near-

17,000 lines contain just over a hundred examples of the word for ‘God’ subject to a preposition, and all except two are written *god*. By contrast, the word for ‘good’, adjective or noun, is spelt *gode* in almost half its occurrences” (7). In addition, Smallwood considers British Library, MS Harley 2277: “Almost all the occurrences of the word for ‘God’ subject to a preposition are written *god*, while roughly half of those of the word for ‘good’, in fact almost all in which it is subject to a preposition, are written *gode*” (8). Smallwood makes the following comment:

The four other early copies of *SEL* in question are equally consistent, or near consistent, in spelling the word for ‘God’ subject to a preposition as *god*, while spelling the word for ‘good’ as *gode* fully as often as *god*; and they too read *for gode* (and never *for god*) at points corresponding to those in the CCCC and Harley copies. (8)

Just as with the variant readings of *Bevis of Hampton* and *The Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester*, other copies of the *SEL* have alternative readings for the phrase:

In fact the six copies taken together have (...) two readings of *For/for soþe*, two of *certes*, one of *nay*, one of *Vor* alone (in effect meaningless), one of *for godes loue* and three with no corresponding emphasizing words. Thus on all forty-five relevant occasions, without exception, the scribes declined to write the obvious oaths *for god* or *bi god*. (8)

From these variant readings it can be seen that contemporary scribes, who were closer to the Middle English language than Modern English scholars will ever be, generally regarded *for gode* as a more basic phrase, without a reference to God. In addition to Smallwood’s interpretation, the EETS edition for the *SEL* (by D’Evelyn and Mill) in which seven of the eight occurrences of *for gode* are capitalised, shows variation as well. The first *for gode* is not capitalised, but the reason is not completely clear. In a note for the particular line it says that

gode is omitted in MS. A (Bodley MS. Ashmole 43). The sentence would then read: [18] “**For** sire quap þis maide · zif ich hadde poer” (l. 203). The word *gode* can be left out, without changing the meaning of the sentence. The editors perhaps felt that if *gode* could be left out, it could not have meant *God*, a word that cannot be left out without changing the meaning of the sentence. This might be the reason why the editors did not capitalise the first occurrence of *for gode*, which shows that despite their capitalisation of the other occurrences, they might have realised that *for gode* does not always refer to God.

10. *Genesis and Exodus*

For the Middle English *Genesis and Exodus* (c. 1250), Smallwood questions whether the translation of *for gode* as an oath invoking God would be appropriate in the text. In *The Middle English Genesis and Exodus*, Arngart “translates the phrase as ‘by God’ (p. 232)” (Smallwood 9). The phrase occurs when Moses comes down from Mount Sinai and “hears the revelry of the Israelites worshipping the calf of gold. Joshua suggests that it is the noise of fighting” (9):

[19] ‘Nai, **for gode,**’ quod moyses, / ‘It is a song wikke and redles.’ (l. 3573–4)

In this text, spelling does not clarify the meaning of the phrase but Smallwood explains his interpretation in the following way:

There are no oaths sworn by or for God elsewhere in the work, and an exception would hardly have been put into the mouth of Moses, as a mere expletive, just after he had been talking with God and hearing Him command: *Tac ðu nogt in idel min name* (...) (3497). In contrast, the innocent *for gode*, its possible adversative overtone enforcing the *Nai*, fits perfectly. (9)

Smallwood does not mention the edition by Morris. In *The Story of Genesis and Exodus: an Early English Song, about A.D. 1250* the phrase is not translated, however, there is a note

referring to Chaucer: “p. 102. l. 3573 *for gode* is frequently employed by Chaucer” (165).

Chaucer’s use of the phrase is examined in section 14.

11. *Poems* by William of Shoreham

Another text in which the phrase is used is the *Poems* (c. 1320) by William of Shoreham: [20] **For gode**, / Hou myzte fayrer signe be / Þane of þe water and blode? (l. 89-91). Smallwood explains the meaning of the word *gode* through the rhyme with *blode* and he again questions whether an oath invoking God would be appropriate:

[T]he rhyme with *blode* indicates as clearly as a rhyme is ever likely to that the *o* of *gode* is long and tense. Shoreham was on the whole an accurate and conservative rhymers, and in the 3,300 rhyming lines that he has left us he seems never to rhyme short and long *o*, whether the latter is slack or tense. In sense, too it is hard to believe that he would have found an oath appropriate in the middle of a passage describing the sanctity and purifying power of baptism. (9)

Konrath, whose edition Smallwood uses, explains in his preface that he has emended some parts of the text “where the blundering copyist of the MS. has perverted it, or even managed to produce downright nonsense” (vii). This could affect Smallwood’s translation based on rhyme, because it is not always clear where Konrath has emended the text. Konrath, however, was aware of the meaning of *for gode* and in a note for line 89 he states: “*For gode*, truly, in good earnest; cp. Fr. *pour de bon*. The phrase occurs in the same sense in Rob. of Gloucester; see ‘Anglia,’ xiii. 284” (163). This note refers to *Flexionsverhältnisse bei Robert von Gloucester* by Pabst (see section 8). This again shows that more scholars interpret the phrase as an expression with the meaning of *good*. In addition to the one example named by Smallwood, *for gode* is found on four other occasions in *The Poems*:

[21] **For gode** nele nauzt þat þou hyt do (l. 183)

[22] Bote þat men lezþ **for gode** (l. 306)

[23] Quead **for gode**, and þat wyþ ryztte (l. 464)

[24] Hit was **for gode**, ase ich er sede, (l. 472)

Examples [22] and [23] have facing translations:

[22] only lying **for a good** purpose (p. 96)

[23] So bad things may serve **for good** purposes. (p. 145)

These examples show that when Konrath translated the expression, he did not see it as an oath to God, but as *good*, a meaning that fits the context of the religious text.

12. *Old and Middle English c. 890-c. 1400: An Anthology*

In the complete *Anthology* by Treharne, the phrase *for gode* appears nine times; six occurrences are written with a capital and three are not. It is striking that the three occurrences without capitals are in texts which do not have facing translations; these can be found in *Cursor Mundi* (late fourteenth century) [25] “**For gode** ending of al and all” (p.419, l.9987), *Wynnere and Wastoure* (first half fifteenth century) [26] “**For gode** day ne glade / getys þou never.” (p. 545, l. 440), and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (c. 1400) [27] “Þat forgat not Gawayn **for gode** of hymselfen” (p.639, l. 2031). For these texts, Treharne probably copied the phrase as she found them in the editions she used. She did not edit the phrase to refer to God by giving it a capital and an accompanying translation. It seems that the capitalisation and interpretation of the phrase is arbitrary and is only dealt with when the phrase is translated. The six examples in Treharne’s *Anthology* where the phrase is translated and written with a capital can be found in *Hali Meiðhad* (examples [2] and [3], see section 6), *Vercelli Homily X* (first half eleventh century) [28] “and him wæs unyðe þæt he **for Gode** aht dealde” (p. 102, l. 92), the *Passion of Saint Edmund* (early eleventh century) [29] “grædig and hungrig, and **for Gode** ne dorste þæs heafdes abyrian, ac heold hit wið deor” (p. 136, l. 84)

and [30] “rice for worolde, and unwitting **for Gode**, se radto þam halgan mid ricceterere swiðe” (p. 136, l. 124) and *Wulfstan’s Sermo Lupi Ad Anglos* (early eleventh century) [31] “Forþam her syn on lande ungetrywþa micle **for Gode** and for worolde” (p. 228, l. 45). In the last example, *for Gode* most likely does refer to God and the phrase is translated differently in this case than in the other examples: “**towards God**” (p. 229, l. 45). For the other examples, *for gode* is again translated as *for God’s sake*. It seems that Treharne translated all the occurrences of the phrase (except example [31]) in the same way, perhaps after the example of Millett in *Hali Meiðhad*. In the introduction, Treharne explains her method of editing as follows: “I have (...) provided modern punctuation, capitalizing the first person personal pronoun, and the names of the Deity and personal pronouns” (xxix). Treharne is clearly aware of the danger of editing and the importance of the original text: “[s]tudents ought to be able to study the Modern English alongside the original as a starting point in their study of early literature” (xxviii). This is why she provides “translations [that] adhere closely to the original” (xxviii). In addition, she argues that

[s]tudents should be aware that editing the material in the first place puts the edited version at one substantial remove from the actual text. (...) The edition necessarily becomes my interpretation of the text. This (...) imposes a subjective reading on the Old and Middle English that cannot, in any way, be regarded as the ideal substitute for the student’s own reading of the original text. (xxix)

Treharne seems to be aware of the difficulties that come with editing Old and Middle English texts, and the possible misinterpretation of *for gode* in several texts may have to do with her trust in previous editors such as Millett.

13. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is a poem dated around 1400. In the complete poem, the phrase *for gode* is found four times. It is striking that in most editions of the poem the phrase is twice translated as an oath to God, with the accompanying capitals, and twice as a phrase meaning *good*. The earliest editions of the poem by Madden (1839), Morris (1864) and Gollancz (1925) do not provide capitals and do therefore not imply that the phrase on two occasions refers to God. In order to show the change of interpretation and ways of editing over time, the four occurrences in several editions of the poem are printed side by side:

[32]

Gawan watz for gode knawen, & as golde pured,	(Madden, 1839, Morris, 1864 and Gollancz, 1925. l. 633)
Was Gawain known for good , and as gold refined,	(Andrew, 1931. p. 25)
Gawan watz for gode knawen & as golde pured,	(Gollancz, 1940. l. 633)
Gawain was acknowledged a good man, and like refined gold	(Jones, 1952. p. 39)
Gawain, known for goodness , and as gold made pure,	(Greenwood, 1956)
Like purified gold, Sir Gawain was known for his goodness ,	(Gardner, 1965. P. 249)
Gawan watz for gode knawen, and as golde pured,	(Tolkien et al., 1967. p. 18)
Was Gawain in good works	(Boroff, 1967. l.633)
Was this goodly Gawain and pure as purest gold,	(Cawley, 1971)
Gawain as good was acknowledged and as gold refinéd,	(Tolkien, 1975. P. 40)
Gawain was known as a good knight and as gold purified,	(Merwin, 2002. P. 45)
For Gawain was as good as the purest gold –	(Armitage, 2008. l. 633)

In Morris and Gollancz's editions the following note is printed on the side: "It well becomes the **good** Sir Gawayne" (Morris, 20. Gollancz, 20). For this occurrence [32], all editors agree on the meaning of *good*. It is striking that Gollancz at first (1925) followed Morris' and Madden's editions in not capitalising any occurrence of *for gode*. In the newer (1940) edition, which many editors use as a source text, he does capitalise the second and third occurrence of *for gode*. This might explain why for the second example [33] all editors except Armitage agree on an oath to God, whereas a translation of for example *for truly* fits as well. Armitage is the only one who does not give a translation of *for gode*, either as a reference to God, or with the meaning of *good*. It is unlikely that he would have left out an oath to God, so perhaps he thought of it as an innocent expression that could have been left out.

[33]

- | | |
|--|--|
| A menfk lady on molde mō may hir calle, / for gode; | (Madden, 1839. l. 964-5) |
| A mensk lady on molde mon may hir calle, / for gode; | (Morris, 1864 and
Gollancz, 1925. l. 964-5) |
| A worshipful wight you might well call her / fore God! | (Andrew, 1931. p. 37) |
| A mensk lady on molde mon may hir calle, / for Gode; | (Gollancz, 1940. l. 964-5) |
| A worshipful dame of this world one may call her, / God knows! | (Jones, 1952. p. 48) |
| A most magnificent lady you might call her / by God; | (Greenwood, 1956) |
| A wonderful lady in this world men might well call her / –to God. | (Gardner, 1965. P. 262) |
| A mensk lady on molde mon may hir calle, / for Gode | (Tolkien et al., 1967. p. 27) |
| “A beldame, by God , she may well be deemed, of pride!” | (Boroff, 1967. L. 964-5) |
| A worshipful old woman well might men call her, / Before God! | (Cawley, 1971) |
| that a worthy dame she was may well, fore God , / be said! | (Tolkien, 1975. P. 49) |
| A great lady on earth, one would have to admit, / before God! | (Merwin, 2002. P. 67) |

A grand old mother, a matriarch she might / be hailed. (l. 964-5) (Armitage, 2008. l. 964-5)

Davis (in Tolkien et al.) provides a note for this line:

965 *for Gode*. The rhyme shows that this is not *for gode* ‘for good’; *gode* with tense *ö* (...) would not rhyme with *brode* with slack *ö*, whereas in this group a short vowel may rhyme with a long one of the same quality (...). Alternatively, *brod* may have shortened its vowel, as later rhymes (...) indicate (...). The sense here is not ‘by God’ but rather ‘before God (this is true)’. (102-3)

This shows that Davis is aware of the alternative meaning of *for good*. In addition, his note that this is rather ‘before God’ (this is true), shows that even with a reference to God, he sees the expression as a phrase that emphasises the preceding statement.

[34]

- | | |
|--|--|
| “I wil no giftez for gode , my gay, at þis tyme; | (Madden, 1839, Morris,
1864 and Gollancz, 1925. l.
1822) |
| ‘I wish no gifts for good , my gay, at this time, | (Andrew, 1931. p. 70) |
| ‘I wil no giftez for Gode , my gay, at þis tyme; | (Gollancz, 1940. l. 1822) |
| ‘ In God’s name , I will have no gifts, dear lady, for the present. | (Jones, 1952. p.72) |
| ‘I want no gifts, before God , my gay, at this time; | (Greenwood, 1956) |
| “My lady gay, I can hardly take gifts at the moment; | (Gardner, 1965. p. 296) |
| I wil no giftez, for Gode , my gay, at þis tyme; | (Tolkien et al., 1967. p. 50) |
| Before God , good lady, I forgo all gifts | (Boroff, 1967. l. 1822) |
| ‘I will have no gifts, fore God , of your grace at this time. | (Tolkien, 1975. p. 70) |
| “I want no gracious gifts, lady, at this time; | (Cawley, 1971) |

“**Before God**, lady, I want no gifts at this time. (Merwin, 2002. p. 123)

‘**By God**, no tokens will I take at this time; (Armitage, 2008. l. 1822)

For this line [34], not all editors agree on the same translation. Andrew is the only one who translates the phrase as *good*, a translation that fits the sentence quite well. In addition, both Gardner and Cawley do not include *for gode*, just like Armitage in example [33]. They probably also saw it as an expression that could have been left out altogether. For the last example [35], all editors agree on a translation of *good*. Again, Cawley and Gardner do not include a translation for *for gode*. They probably felt that the phrase could be left out.

[35]

Ʒat for-gat not Gawayn, **for gode** of h̄y-feluen; (Madden, 1839. l. 2031)

Ʒat for-gat not Gawayn, **for gode** of hym-seluen; (Morris, 1864 and
Gollancz, 1925. l. 2031)

That Gawain forgat not **for good** of his soul. (Andrew, 1931. p.78)

Ʒat for-gat not Gawayn, **for gode** of hym-seluen. (Gollancz, 1940. l. 2031)

For his own sake Gawain did not forget that. (Jones, 1952. p. 78)

That forgot not Gawain, **for good** of his safety. (Greenwood, 1956)

The last thing on earth it was likely he’d forget! (Gardner, 1965. P. 304)

Ʒat forgat not Gawayn **for gode** of hym-seluen (Tolkien et al., 1967. p. 56)

Gawain, **for his own good**, forgot not that (Boroff, 1967. l. 2031)

He forgot not the girdle, the lady’s green gift; (Cawley, 1971)

that Gawain forgot not, of his own **good** thinking; (Tolkien, 1975. P. 75)

Gawain did not forget that, for his own **good**. (Merwin, 2002. P. 139)

for his own **good**, Gawain won’t forget that gift. (Armitage, 2008. l. 2031)

This comparison shows that even in a poem that has been edited for roughly hundred-seventy years, editors do not completely agree on the meaning of the expression. In addition, the actual oath by *God* is found five times in the poem; four times it is written as *bi god* (Morris lines 1110, 1245, 2122, 2250), and once as *bi godde* (Morris l. 2205), never as *bi gode*. Just as with the examples Smallwood provides, the spelling of the word *God* and the preposition used show that when the scribe used *for gode*, he probably intended a different word. This comparison can be seen best in line 1110: “Bi **god**,” *quoth* Gawayn þe **gode**, “I grant þer-tylle, & þat yow lyst for to layke, lef hit me þymken.” (Morris).

14. *The Canterbury Tales*

The Canterbury Tales were written during the end of the fourteenth century. The phrase *for gode* is found twice in the entire text. The first occurrence can be found in the *Miller's Tale*: [36] “¶ Why yis **for gode** / quod hende Nicholas” (Furnivall, Ellesmere Ms. l. 3526-7). This phrase is generally capitalised and when it is translated it is often translated as *by God*. Winny (43) and Benson (72) capitalise the expression, but they do not give a translation. Both Donaldson (118) and Abrams (245) give a translation. In their editions the note for *for gode* reads as follows: “For, i.e., by”. In addition to these examples, Burnley in *The Language of Chaucer* also interprets the phrase as an oath to God. He explains that the final –e in the phrase is a trace “of a dative inflexional –e” (11) from Old English. Burnley provides two other examples besides *for Gode*: *on honde* and *in lande* (11). In a note for this explanation he refers to “Ruth B. McJimsey, *Chaucers's Irregular –e*” and states that “[a] considerable degree of freedom existed in both the pronunciation and writing of final –e in such cases” (227). This might indicate that for the later examples of the expression (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (c. 1400) and *The Canterbury Tales* (end fourteenth century)) rhyme and spelling patterns may not be as reliable as for the earlier examples (*Hali Meidhad*

(c. 1200), *St. Juliana* (c. 1225), *The Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester* (c. 1280) etc.). In his *Chaucer Dictionary*, Dillon also interprets *for gode* as a reference to God in the *Miller's Tale*. He lists the line number of the expression under "GOD, the supreme Deity" (101). As mentioned in the sections on *Bevis of Hampton* (see section 7) and *Genesis and Exodus* (see section 10), both Kölbing and Morris refer to Chaucer's use of *for gode*. Morris explains that "*for gode* is frequently employed by Chaucer" (1865, 165). As pointed out above, during the research that I conducted for this thesis, I found only two occurrences of the expression in *The Canterbury Tales* and it did not become clear which examples Morris referred to. Besides the *Canterbury Tales*, I only examined *Troilus and Criseyde*, so Morris could be referring to other texts by Chaucer. There are no other examples of *for gode* found in *Troilus and Criseyde* (*Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*). The phrase *for god* (without final -e), however, is found in both *The Canterbury Tales* and *Troilus and Criseyde*. A search conducted in the *Corpus* gives a total eighty-two examples of *for god* in eight different manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales*, one more recent edition and a recent edition of *Troilus and Criseyde*. It might be possible that Morris did not distinguish between both expressions, although *for god* in almost all occurrences is used as a clear reference to God. Kölbing on the other hand, only names one example of *for gode* in Chaucer's work. He refers to *Die Versicherungen bei Chaucer* by H. Lange (vol. 3). Seeing that Lange lists both occurrences of *for gode* (both in *The Canterbury Tales*), it is strange that Kölbing only mentions one occurrence and it is not clear which of the two occurrences he refers to. Lange interprets the expression as an oath to God: "Das höchste und vornehmste himmlische Wesen, das man bei Versicherungen und Beschwörungen anruft, ist naturgemäss GOTT. Ohne weiteren Zusatz erscheint so die Formel by God, be God, auch for Gode" (8). Lange thus argues that the phrases *by God*, *be God* and *for Gode* all refer to God –the highest and most distinguished being that can be used for an oath. He then provides a list of examples of *By God* and *be God*

in Chaucer's work. *For gode* is listed separately. The examples for *for gode* are preceded by "Es wurde ermittelt" which roughly means *it was communicated*. Although Lange interprets *for gode* as an oath to God, this description fits the emphasising characteristic of the expression. He provides the examples found in the *Miller's Tale* [36] and the *Tale of Gamelyn* [37] (see below).

As opposed to the editors and scholars who interpret the phrase as a reference to God, there are others who do not capitalise the expression and who distinguish between the meaning of *God* and *good*: [36] "Whe, yis, **for gode**,' quod heende Nicholas," (Coote 119) and Cunningham: [36] "Why, yis, **for gode**,' quod hende Nicholas," (78, l. 418). Cunningham provides the following note: "Is *ther no remedie...lone and reed*: 'Is there no solution to this problem?' 'Yes, **by God** (*or, there is a good one*, depending on the use of a capital in the text), if you will act on my advice and instructions.'" (78) According to Cunningham, both interpretations are possible and through this note he shows that the sentence reads perfectly with a translation of *there is a good one*, perhaps even better than with the oath to God. Cunningham's overall attentiveness that makes him point out this minor editorial difference that has a substantial influence on the meaning of the sentence is explained in his introduction on "How to read Chaucer: (...) we must never take a word for granted, however simple it looks – always check with a good glossary, and, if necessary, update the word given there" (30). Such a critical attitude towards the Middle English language is important for the interpretation of ambiguous phrases such as *for gode*. In addition to Cunningham's interpretation of both *good* and *God*, two eighteenth-century modernisations of *The Canterbury Tales* have a more basic interpretation for the phrase as well. Bowden collected several modernisations of the tales and in two of them the line with the original *for gode* is found. She is aware of the possible subjectivity when it comes to modern editions:

Until recently academic custom (...) assigned perhaps too much validity to the products of our own century's unexamined prejudices and preconceptions including the evolutionary premises itself, according to which each critic's most recent interpretation must be proven the best of all possible interpretations. (...) Without a basis for comparison, analogously, readers of Chaucer cannot easily observe the extent to which the late twentieth-century academic context controls interpretation. Although we may be using superior technology to try to prove our responses objectively appropriate to the fourteenth century, nonetheless we are all modernizing Chaucer for ourselves and for our students. (...) these modernisations can contribute toward the concept of literary understanding as a form of translation. (xi-xv)

Only the first writer of the modernisations is identified, namely John Smith (1662-1717), who completed a B.A. and a M.A. and became a writer who was experienced in many literary genres (23). [36] "Is there no Remedy in this sad Case? / "Yes, yes, **full good** (quoth Gentle *Nicholas*)" (28). The second writer (1791) is anonymous: [36] "Are there no means her precious life to save? / "No chance to snatch her from a watery grave?" / "Means **yet** are left," the cunning clerk replied," (173). Both modernisations use a basic affirmative phrase for the original *for gode*. Smith uses *good* and the anonymous writer uses *yet* which emphasises the words surrounding the expression. This shows that both eighteenth-century writers did not interpret the phrase as referring to God and that their sources gave them no reason to do so.

For gode is also found in the *Tale of Gamelyn*: [37] "Ya **for gode** seyde Gamelyn I say it for me / If I faile on my syde yuele mote I þe" (Furnivall Corpus Christi Ms., l. 447-8). The *Tale of Gamelyn* is not found in many scholarly editions. In the editions consulted for this thesis, Skeat is the only one who prints the expression without a capital: [37] 'ze, **for gode!**' sayde Gamelyn · I say it for me, / If I fayle on my side · yuel mot I the! (17). French and Hale also give the original line but then with a capital for *gode*: [37] "Ze, **for Gode,**" sayde

Gamelyn · “i say it for me, / If i fayle on my side · mot i þe. (222). Rickert provides a modern translation of the line, and also interprets *for gode* as an oath to God: [37] ““Yea, **by God!**” quoth Gamelyn. “I speak for my-self: If I fail on my side, may evil befall me!” (101). This example in the *Tale of Gamelyn* probably is a reference to God; although Burnley emphasises that there is “a considerable degree of freedom” (227) in the use of the final –e, in only two of the ten manuscripts consulted for this thesis, the phrase is written as *for gode* (Corpus ms. and Harleian ms. 7334, ed. Furnivall, *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*). The other eight manuscripts contain *for god* (without final –e) (Royal ms. 18, Harleian ms. 1758, Sloane ms. 1685, Pethworth ms., Ellesmere ms., Cambridge ms., Lansdowne ms. and Hengwrt ms.) which is found in other *Tales* as well, almost always with an obvious meaning of God.

15. *King Horn*

King Horn is a romance that was probably composed around 1225. It survives in three different manuscripts which Hall prints together in his edition of *King Horn*. The earliest version of the romance is found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 108 “dated to c. 1300” (Treharne 463). The second manuscript is London British Library, Harley 2253 “dated to c. 1340” (idem) and the third manuscript is Cambridge University Library, Gg. IV. 27 (part II) “dated to the beginning fourteenth century” (idem).

[38]

1.	2.	3.
Dou wenft ich be a beggere	Dou wenft ich be a beggere	þu wenft ibeo a beggere,
For gode ich am a fyʒffere	ywis icham a fyʒffere	& ihc am a fillere,
(Hall, l. 1133-4)	(Hall, l. 1168-9)	(Hall, l. 1133-4)

From this comparison it becomes clear how the meaning of the phrase was interpreted by contemporary scribes. The earliest *for gode* is not interpreted as a phrase referring to God, but merely as a phrase that emphasises the following words. In most editions of *King Horn*, the phrase is copied from the manuscript. From the ten consulted editions, six are based on Cambridge University Library, Gg. IV. 27 (part II), two on London British Library, Harley 2253, and two editions contain all manuscripts. No one uses only Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 108 for a translation, which could explain why the phrase is generally treated as a basic affirmative phrase, without a reference to God. Both Cambridge University Library, Gg. IV. 27 (part II) and London British Library, Harley 2253 have a familiar alternative reading that causes little difficulty:

[38]

Cambridge University Library, Gg. IV. 27 (part II)

- Morris (1898): Ðu wenest i beo a beggere, / **And** ihc am a fissere, (1145-6)
- French and Hale (1964): Ðu wenest i beo a beggere, / **And** ihc am a fissere, (l. 1133-4)
- Garbáty (1984): Ðu wenest^o I beo^o a beggere, / **And** ihc am a fissere, ^o (1141-2)
- Sands (1986): Thu wenest I beo a beggere, / **And** ich am a fishere (l. 1141-2)
- Herzman et al. (1999): Thu wenest I beo a beggere, / **And** ich am a fissere (translated:
but) (l. 1143-4)

London British Library, Harley 2253

- Dunn and Byrnes (1973): Thou wenest^o Ich be a beggere. / **Y-wis**, ^o Ich am a fysshere
(translated as *indeed*) (l. 1133-4)
- Treharne (2004): Þou wenest ich be a beggere; / **Ywis**, Icham a fysshere (l.1133-
4)

Both Lumby and McKnight and Hall print the three manuscripts together. Lumby and McKnight provide a summary of the text on the same page, which reads as follows: “He refuses it, saying that he will have nothing ‘bote of coppe white,’ **and** that he is no beggar but a fisher” (51). Seeing that most editors follow the manuscripts and do not get distracted by *for gode*, it is striking that Allen does translate the phrase as an oath to God. His edition is a clear example of an “eclectic” edition (Hudson 45) (see section 4):

It is usual in this type of edition to emend a copy text with correct readings from other extant manuscripts, where the copy text can be shown to be in error. (...) Where no manuscript presents the right reading, it is essential for the editor to give some indication of this; if the only means of doing so is through the presence of square brackets enclosing his own conjecture, then such a danger signal has an important function. Where I have made conjectural emendations, I have first endeavoured to identify corruption, and secondly have suggested what the probable (and in some cases, certain) reading of the original was. This suggestion is not arbitrary, but based on clues afforded by the extant variation. (...) Whenever C [Cambridge University Library MS Gg. 27 (2)] is deficient or wrong in its reading, the omission or error is indicated by a square bracket, which contains either an extant right reading from O [Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 108] or L [London British Library, Harley 2253], or the conjectured right reading. (*King Horn: an Edition based on Cambridge University Library MS Gg.4.2.27 (2)*, 1-2)

He presents the lines as follows:

[38] “Pu wenest i[hc] beo * beggere / [**Bi Drizten**], ihc am * fissere” (l. 1155-6).

In the note for the line he also explains his way of editing:

“1156 **Bi Drizten]** For gode O; ywis L; **And** C.” (p. 220).

Despite the familiar varieties that the other two manuscripts provide, Allen decides to translate the phrase as referring to God. Following his own introduction and presentation of the text, apparently not a single manuscript provides the “correct” reading and this is his non-arbitrary, “based on clues” (1) conjectured reading. Where most editors agree on the meaning of the phrase, the word *gode* appeals to some as a word that can only be understood as a reference to God. It may thus be argued that this edition of *King Horn* gives a subjective view of the meaning of the phrase without most readers being aware of it.

16. *for gode* in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Middle English Dictionary*

According to the website of the *OED* online, the *OED* is “widely regarded as the accepted authority on the English language”. This 150-year-old dictionary is a credited source, often used by scholars who depend on it without a second thought. The *MED*, which took over seventy-five years to be completed, has been described as “the greatest achievement in medieval scholarship in America” (*MED* online). However, as Toswell explains in her introduction to *The Dictionary of Old English: Retrospects and Prospects*:

A dictionary has authority. It invokes a sense of awe, even of reverence. It records a truth in the use of words. It clinches arguments about spellings, usages, and meanings. (...) At the same time, a dictionary is also none of the above. Its authority is constantly challenged, for readers suggest refinements for entries, or challenge words as not belonging, or propose others for inclusion. The truth recorded is always contingent, depending upon the collective and the individual judgements of the entry-writers, revising editors, specialist consultants and editors. (3)

Smallwood questions the meaning given by both the *OED* and the *MED* for the phrase *for gode*. He argues that “existing dictionaries do not acknowledge the identity and use of ME *for*

gode, ‘for good’, as an asseveration or emphaziser. *OED* and *MED* quote examples of it, but only take them as examples of the oath ‘for God’” (12).

16.1. *Oxford English Dictionary*

In the *OED* entry for *for* one of the quotes from *Hali Meidhad* (see example [2] in section 6) is listed under “c. In asseveration; = BEFORE 5. (...) In later use replaced by FORE.” (*OED* online). For *before* 5, the following meaning is given: “Open to the knowledge of, displayed to or brought under the conscious knowledge or attention of. Hence, as an asseveration, before God! = As God knows, by God”. In addition, the phrase *for gode* can be found in the entry for *God*: “In oaths: 13. by God, before (or fore) God; also by God above, etc.” There are several quotes for this entry, including one from *Robert of Gloucester* [13] “**Vor gode** [v.r. **By god**] þe nexte king..ne 3ef hom no3t folliche so mucche” (see section 8) and one from *Bevis of Hampton* [8] “**For gode**, queþ Beues, ‘þat ich do nelle’” (see section 7) (*OED* online). As Smallwood states, the *OED* provides a variant reading for the quote found in *Robert of Gloucester* [13]. There are two variant readings for the occurrence in line 7000, both supportive of the interpretation of the phrase as an oath (*bi/by god*, see below). Smallwood does not agree with the *OED* and states that of the several variant readings of the phrase in the complete text, only this one is mentioned, which, according to Smallwood, gives a distorted view of the meaning of the phrase:

[A]lmost all the evidence of surviving later copies of RG shows quite the opposite of what *OED* is suggesting. The RS edition quotes variants for the four occurrences from seven later copies, with a total of twenty-four corresponding readings among them. Sixteen of these apparently read *Vor gode* (the preposition variously spelt); one, revealingly, has *for gvde*; two have *For trewly*; one has *Forsouthe*; one has *for god*;

and three have *Bi/By god*. (...) [O]nly on about one occasion in six was it replaced by an oath. (12)

It seems that the *OED* has a preference for portraying *for gode* as an oath and it seems to select its citations based on this meaning, without giving room to the different translations and interpretations found over time. In addition to Smallwood's interpretation, it is remarkable that in the entire entry for *god*, only the two examples mentioned above read (*for*) *gode*. In the other examples (more than forty), God is never written as *gode*, but for example as *god* or *godd*. Furthermore, only *godd* is mentioned as a different form, *gode* is not. This 'special form' might indicate that a different word was intended for these examples.

16.2 Middle English Dictionary

The *MED* mentions several occurrences of the phrase *for gode*. These can be found in the entry for *god*: In oaths and exclamations: (b) bi ~, for ~, biforen ~, ~ beforen (toforen), by God, for God's sake, etc. (*MED* online). The citations from *St. Juliana* [1] and *Hali Meidhad* [2] are given (see section 6), as well as the citation for *Robert of Gloucester* [13] (see section 8) and *Bevis of Hampton* [8] “‘**For** [vr. **Be**] **gode**,’ queþ Beues, `þat ich do nelle!” (see section 7). As in the *OED*, the variant reading for *Robert of Gloucester* is given. The *MED* also provides a variant reading for *Bevis of Hampton*, to which Smallwood opposes:

It (...) adds a later reading of the passage from *Bevis*, with *Be* rather than *For* preceding the *gode*, again of course implying that a copyist took the phrase to be the equivalent of ‘by God’. Few readers of the entry are likely to realize that out of twenty-three later readings given by Kölbing (...) *MED* has picked the only one that suggests interpreting *for gode* as an oath in this way. (12)

The *MED* also provides an example from the *SEL* (see section 9): “Hou thingth thou, nas heo hardi nozt? **For gode** me thingth heo was” (*MED* online). This is one of the seven instances

that D'Evelyn and Mill capitalise in their EETS edition. In addition, the *MED* provides a citation for *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as well (see section 13): [33] “A mensk lady on molde mon may hir calle, **for Gode** [rime: brode, lode]”. As discussed above, this is one of four occurrences in the poem and most editors agree on at least two more basic, affirmative readings of *for gode*, often translated as *good*. By only providing this quote, the *MED* gives a limited view on the meaning of *for gode*. Smallwood is critical as well:

Among its [the section on oaths using *God*] twenty-four quotations, with just seven devoted to the most common oath in Middle English, *bi god*, and its amplifications, there are no less than nine examples of *for gode*. This obvious excess, quite disproportionate in any case to the frequency of use of *for* in ME oaths in general, was presumably intended to smother doubts in the editors' minds, or ours, about the identity of the phrase. (12)

In the entry for oaths with the word *god*, it is striking that again spelling shows that the phrase *for gode* stands out from other oaths such as *bi god*. Smallwood gives the following explanation:

The section's thirteen quoted examples of undoubted oaths invoking God (in the singular), using a variety of prepositions, spell the word as *god/God* ten times, *godd* twice, and *good* once. Not once, therefore, do they spell it *gode*. Against this there are the nine examples of *gode*, unqualified, preceded by *for*. (...) It might always have been suspected that *gode* in these cases was a deliberate spelling of a different word. (13)

Just as the *OED*, the *MED* seems to portray a one-sided view of the meaning of the phrase, while there is sufficient evidence that shows that the phrase might not refer to God.

17. Conclusion

The first time I noticed the Middle English phrase *for gode*, it caught my eye because of the seemingly odd translation of *for God's sake*. For this thesis, I have thus examined the translation of *for gode* in order to find out more about this phrase. The examples of the phrase in several texts show that the meaning of the phrase is not clear-cut, seeing that *gode* can mean both *good* and *God*. Modern editors, however, often only see the phrase as a reference to God and capitalise the *g*, discarding any other possible meaning of the phrase. Readers are generally not aware of these editorial changes, seeing that in most editions these changes are not mentioned. The lack of guidelines and uniformity for editions of Middle English texts results in different interpretations of the same texts (see for example section 13 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*) and can lead to a subjective presentation of the text, without the readers being aware of it. In addition, the respected *OED* and *MED* provide one-sided arguments to explain their interpretation of the phrase as an oath invoking God. From their entries, the existing difference of opinion does not become clear, although this difference of opinion is present. Several editors and most medieval sources interpret *for gode* as a more basic phrase with the meaning of *good*, a meaning that often fits the (religious) context of the text better than a reference to God. The majority of the examples discussed in this thesis show that the phrase can be used as an emphasising phrase, sometimes with a humorous connotation, for the words surrounding *for gode*. Not only the context of the phrase advocates a different interpretation, the spelling of the phrase provides an argument as well. Smallwood's article and additional examples show that *for gode* generally has a distinct spelling compared to all other oaths referring to God and that a deliberate choice for *for gode* instead of for example *by/bi god* might indicate that the scribe intended a phrase with a different meaning than a reference to God. In addition, in most medieval sources the phrase is not interpreted as an oath to God. Alternative readings of the phrase found in different

manuscripts show that in most cases a more basic phrase with the meaning of *good* is used. Emphasising phrases such as *ywis* and *truly* are found as well. Although it is impossible to discover the actual meaning of the phrase as intended by the medieval scribe for every example, the research that I conducted for this thesis suggests that a translation of *good* instead of *God* is more suitable in almost all examples considered. This indicates that *for gode* is generally mistranslated by modern editors. Due to the scope of this thesis I was not able to investigate the meaning and translation of *for gode* in a number of Middle English texts, as for instance *Cursor Mundi* (late fourteenth century), *The Passion of St. Edmund* (early eleventh century), *Layamon's Brut* (last quarter thirteenth century) and *The Romance of Guy of Warwick* (fourteenth century). Further research should be conducted in order to reach a level of certainty that could for example argue for a revision of the entries found in the *OED* and *MED*. In addition, a general guideline for Middle English editions and proper explanation of editorial changes may contribute to a better understanding of Middle English texts. Seeing that translation cannot be avoided when dealing with Middle English texts, a clear and recognisable way of interpretation and editing is essential. For *gode*, patient reader, some phrases deserve a wider view and new research, even if this means questioning respected reference works and published editors.

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