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Artifact as Text:

the layout of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Tale of Sir Thopas*

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Introduction

Chaucer's 'drasty' tail-rhyme romance *The Tale of Sir Thopas*, for a long time discussed only in terms of its relentless and wilful ineptitude, has attracted some sporadic interest on account of its unique layout, not seen anywhere else in the *Canterbury Tales*, in a number of early manuscripts:[1]

Listeth lordes / in good entente ⎯⎯⎯⎯

And I wil telle verrayment ⎯⎯⎯⎯

Of myrthe / and of solas ⎯⎯⎯⎯

Al of a knyght was fair and gent ⎯⎯⎯

In bataille / and in tornament ⎯⎯⎯⎯

his name / was sir Thopas ⎯⎯⎯

(VII 712-7)[2]

It is a layout reproduced, to varying extents, in less than half of the manuscripts in which *Thopas* survives and, subsequently, only one printed edition of the *Tales*. The following discussion traces the history of the use of this layout, which Rhiannon Purdie has called 'graphic tail-rhyme,'[3] in *Thopas*: from the origins of the tail-rhyme stanza and its unique layout, to the appearance of an amplified version of this element in the context of the *Thopas-Melibee* section, and its transmission in the fifteenth century manuscripts of the *Tales*.[4] This history intersects at various points with many of the key concerns of both late medieval literature and medieval manuscript production: the enabling tensions between orality and literacy, the role of the late medieval author, and the transmission of vernacular literature in the fifteenth century.

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[1] The first to discuss this layout in any detail was Judith Tschann in her article "The Layout of *Sir Thopas* in the Ellesmere, Hengwrt, Cambridge Dd.4.24, and Cambridge Gg.4.27 Manuscripts," *The Chaucer Review* vol. 20 no. 1 (1985), 1-13; though E. G. Stanley mentions it briefly in "The Use of Bob-Lines in Sir Thopas," Neuphilologische *Mitteilungen* vol. 73 (1972), 417-26.

[2] Transcribed from Paul Ruggiers ed. *The Canterbury Tales: Geoffrey Chaucer: A Facsimile and Transcription of the Hengwrt Manuscript* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979).

[3] Rhiannon Purdie first uses this term in "The Implications of Manuscript Layout in Chaucer's *Tale of Sir Thopas*," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* vol. 41 no. 3 (2005), 263-74.

[4] For reasons of space I have been unable to extend the current discussion to printed editions of the *Tales*. Generally, there is a editorial reticence towards the layout of *Thopas*: from Caxton to the most recent edition of the *Riverside Chaucer* only Wynken de Worde, in his 1498 4th edition of the *Tales*, has reproduced the layout as it is appears in the likes of El, Hg, Dd and Gg. See Thomas Garbáty's "Wynkyn de Worde's *Sir Thopas* and Other Tales," *Studies in Bibliography*, vol. 31 (1978), 57–67.

As Seth Lerer writes in *Chaucer and His Readers*, the literary text exists 'not as some individuated and recoverable "thing", but as one element in the process between author, audience and publisher.'[5] It is this 'process' in which I am interested and, as such, the following discussion will be concerned with both authorial intention on the part of Chaucer, and how this can be discussed in terms of the placement of *Thopas* in Fragment VII of the *Tales*, as well as the various manuscript manifestations of the layout and how *this* relates to the transmission of a growing English vernacular literature. In considering *Thopas* and its layout I engage with recent work by Christopher Cannon, D. Vance Smith and Martha D. Rust; each of whom has sought, in subtly different ways, to reconsider the relationship between formal analysis and book history.

As is discussed in more detail below, these two concerns, with medieval material forms and authorial intention, do not always sit together particularly comfortably. However, it is impossible to discuss the *Thopas*-layout in purely literary terms: a manuscript or book is not merely the vessel for a text; rather the relationship between text and physical form can be vital in the constitution of meaning. Similarly, to consider only the transmission of the *Thopas*-layout would be to remove it from its particular literary context as part of a robust appraisal of poetic voice and tradition in Fragment VII; that is, to ignore the literary implications of a unique element of the *Tales*, an element that even in its most partial form arrests the eye as one leafs through the pages of the *Tales*.

In this dual approach I emphasise the status of the *Thopas*-layout as what Gerard Genette calls a 'paratext.' Paratexts are those conventions and liminal devices, such as titles, prefaces and epigraphs, that constitute the complex mediation between author, publisher and reader. Genette suggests that whilst paratexts are predominantly textual - or at least verbal - some may be iconic (such as illustrations) or material (such as typography).[6] Genette borrows the term 'illocutionary force' from linguistics in order to discuss the

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[5] Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers*: *Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 9.

[6] Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: thresholds of interpretation* Jane E. Lewin trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 7.

function of various types of paratexts, arguing that whilst these elements often occupy a problematic interpretative position as to whether they can be said to 'belong' to the text, 'in any case they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to *make present*, to ensure the text's presence in the world.'[7] Genette emphasises ways in which authors might exploit the '"undefined zone" between the inside and the outside' constituted by the paratext, and it is this type of impulse that seems central to Chaucer's use and amplification of the traditional graphic tail-rhyme layout.[8]

However, precisely its status as a paratext - as 'a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*'[9] - marks the *Thopas*-layout with a sense of precariousness. In those manuscripts and printed editions in which the layout is not reproduced it is 'outside' of the text in a obviously fundamental way, whilst in those manuscripts in which the layout is reproduced partially or in a reduced manner this 'transaction' takes the form of a variety of individuated scribal or editorial responses to the layout. In these instances our attentions must turn from authorial intent to the historical conditions of this precariousness: the ways in which the complex mediation between, in this instance, author and scribe encodes considerations as to an increasing unfamiliarity with the graphic tail-rhyme layout in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as well as, more generally, the late medieval conception of literary production as a contingent process in which intention was often disaggregated and distributable.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

Of course, there is no critical consensus on the extent to which paratextual elements of the *Tales* can be discussed in terms of authorial intent, due at least in part to the divergent views on the *Tales* early publication history. However, the presence of this layout in the Hengwrt, Ellesmere and Cambridge University Library manuscripts Gg.4.27 and Dd.4.24 suggests that it is authorial. Chaucer's familiarity with a range of tail-rhyme romances is

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[7] *Ibid*, 1.
[8] *Ibid*, 288-91.
[9] *Ibid*, 2.

clear enough throughout *Thopas*, and though graphic tail-rhyme is not particularly common, at least in those manuscripts that have survived, it seems likely that he would have been familiar with it: *Beves of Hamptoun* is copied in graphic tail-rhyme in two surviving extant manuscripts and the fragment London, Gray's Inn MS 20 – dating from the mid-fourteenth century – contains a copy of *Sir Isumbras* copied in graphic tail-rhyme. Furthermore, *Sir Ferumbras* in the holograph manuscript Oxford, Bodleian Library Ashmole 33 – dating from around 1380 - is copied in graphic tail-rhyme, suggesting it was a feature used by authors as well as scribes. The graphic tail-rhyme layout had a long history, from its origins in Latin Hymnody and its use by Anglo-Norman scribes in the twelfth century, to its appearance in some sixteenth century copies of medieval plays and lyrics,[10] and I return to this history in Chapter One below to situate *Thopas* in a detailed formal and generic context.

If it is the case that the amplified version of this layout in *Thopas* originated with Chaucer, it raises some interesting considerations for our understanding of the *Thopas-Melibee* section of the *Tales*. Rhiannon Purdie has discussed the *Thopas*-layout in terms of Chaucer's burlesque of '[English] romances…as they are found in contemporary vernacular manuscripts,' as well as his 'evident fascination with book culture and the experience of reading,'[11] and it is from this basis that I attempt to re-embed a discussion of the *Thopas*-layout in the context of Chaucer's authorial self-definition in the *Thopas-Melibee* section, and the generic and formal experimentation of Fragment VII as a whole. Any discussion of the medieval context of authorship is, as Stephanie Trigg discusses at length in *Congenial Souls*, 'perhaps the most complex and the one that bears the heaviest burden of methodological self-consciousness for medievalists.'[12] Following the broad schema of Raymond William's 'residual', 'dominant' and 'emergent' discourses,[13] Trigg identifies three competing models of late medieval authorship: the 'socially oriented' *poet*, in decline by the end of the fourteenth century, concerned predominantly with the transmission of traditional forms rather than individual poetic voice or ownership of

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[10] Purdie, "Implications," 264-5.

[11] *Ibid*, 271. See also Purdie's *Anglicising Romance* (Cambridge: D.S Brewer, 2008), 74-78.

[12] Stephanie Trigg, *Congenial Souls: Reading Chaucer from Medieval to Postmodern* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 50.

[13] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121-27.

material; the *writer*, working predominantly within 'the inherited textual tradition'; and finally, and most problematically, the emerging figure of the *author*.[14] In *Thopas*, and indeed throughout his works, Chaucer exploits the gaps between these broad catergories to produce a tale with multiple interpretative levels.

As Maura Nolan writes, at certain points in late medieval literature we can see 'emergent forms lurking beneath the medieval conventions of which [a poem] is comprised…they illustrate what happens to a certain kind of representation when a severe challenge is posed to the ideologies and forms through which the social is constructed and the political is ordered.'[15] In *The Treatsie on the Astrolabe* Chaucer famously portrays himself as a 'lewd compilator.' However, in the same way we know the *Troilus* frontispiece of Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 61 is a fifteenth century fiction of Ricardian literary reception, we are aware that Chaucer's reductive self-description does not accurately reflect the multivalent literary processes with which he engages. As Alistair Minnis argues, from the base of his self-identification with the 'writer' and the *compilatio* genre, Chaucer is able to engage in the types of self-reflexive formal and generic experimentation that structures the *Tales*,[16] a work 'fundamentally about literature itself.'[17] In turn, this experimentation is subsumed by the larger destabilising force of the interactions between orality and literacy. Ward Parks, amongst numerous others, has shown that oral tradition is one of the explicit subjects of the *Canterbury Tales*:[18] it is widely accepted that Chaucer wrote for both reading and listening audiences, and that the increasing use of 'texts' was one of the central areas of literary exploration in the late Middle Ages.

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[14] Trigg, *Congenial Souls*, 50-55.

[15] Maura Nolan, *John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 13.

[16] See Chapter Five "Literary Theory & Literary Practice," Alastair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, reissued 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010) .

[17] Seth Lerer, "The Canterbury Tales," in *The Yale Companion to Chaucer* ed. Seth Lerer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 245.

[18] Ward Parks, "Oral Tradition and *The Canterbury Tales*," in *Oral Poetics in Middle English Poetry* ed. Mark C. Amodio (Oxford: Taylor & Francis, 1994), 150.

In recent times the oral to literate scale implied by Walter Ong's influential *Orality and Literacy* (1982) has been superseded, with the 'Darwinian distinction' between the two poles, and the model it established of a movement from 'primitive' orality to 'civilised' literacy, largely replaced by a continuum model 'along which cultures and individuals move back and forth.'[19] The work of Ward Parks, Mark Amodio and Leslie Arnovik has been particularly influential in reconceptualising the poles of orality and literacy as theoretical constructs that 'illuminate the mixed states found in the world,' rather than 'concrete realities.'[20] The continuum model has enabled a less rigidly teleological discussion of the ways in which late medieval authors like Chaucer exploited the 'strained fusion' of a predominantly oral tradition and a growing level of literacy and proliferation of written poetry.[21]

Joyce Coleman's introduction of 'aurality' has further contributed to this increasingly dynamic view of how late medieval literature could be experienced.[22] Aurality, 'the shared hearing of written texts,' combines aspects of both orality and literacy in order to reconceptualise the 'evolution' of orality into literacy and, in turn, moments such as Chaucer's injunction to those unlikely to appreciate the *The Miller's Tale* to 'turne over the leef and chese another tale.'[23] Coleman emphasises the 'bimodality' of medieval reading practices: in the same manner Criseyde hears the 'siege of Thebes' read aloud but then later retires to read Troilus's letter privately, the late medieval 'reader' may hear a book read aloud one evening, then return to it alone the next day.[24] Importantly, Coleman stresses that aurality is not transitional, and emphasises that whilst the experience of literature in 'aural groups' stretches from the ancient Greeks and Romans to the modern audio-book, 'what *did* phase out in the late Middle Ages, relatively, was the minstrel

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[19] Leslie K. Arnovik, *Written Reliquaries: the resonance of orality in medieval English texts* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2006), 12.
[20] *Ibid*, 12-13.
[21] *Ibid*, 320. See also Arnovik's ""In Forme of Speche" is Anxiety: Orality in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," *Oral Tradition* vol. 11 no. 2 (1996), 320-45.
[22] See Joyce Coleman, "Aurality," in *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Middle English* ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 68-85. For a fuller account of Coleman's arguments see *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
[23] Coleman, "Aurality", 69.
[24] *Ibid*, 71.

performance of texts.'[25] Coleman's emphasis on the 'bimodality' of medieval reading practices is of particular importance to *Thopas*; though speaking in the voice of the traditional English 'poet,' Chaucer's use of graphic tail-rhyme is an aspect of the tale that functions primarily for those readers able to see the text as a written artifact.

<div align="center">*</div>

Christopher Cannon's recent writings on form provide a particularly useful way of approaching Chaucer's use of graphic tail-rhyme in *Thopas.* Cannon's approach seeks 'the integration of formal levels, [a commitment] to a comprehensive order in which every contour has a meaningful part to play.'[26] In the case of *Pearl*, for example, the poem's structure at the levels of word, line, stanza and stanza unit produces a repetition and circularity that organises its words themselves into the shape of the object it describes: the pearl. As Cannon suggests, this circularity thwarts the dreamer's search for a 'progressive...linear movement toward some relief for his overwhelming confusion, or some comfort for his unbearable grief.'[27] For Cannon, form in this instance is 'uniquely *comprehensive*,' amounting to

> '[an] insistence that the form of a text not only consists of all the structural levels we traditionally anatomize when we refer to 'literary form' (...metre, rhyme scheme, or style...metaphors or patterns of imagery...generic affiliations or plot), but of the integration of all those levels, *along with any other aspect of a particular text which may seem to structure it*.'[28]

It is with this comprehensive and inclusive definition of form in mind that I seek, in the first section of Chapter Three, to suggest ways in which the *Thopas*-layout can be considered not simply as Chaucer's unthinking use of a traditional layout, but as an important part of the form of *Thopas* itself, a tale that in the broader context of Fragment

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[25] *Ibid.*

[26] Christopher Cannon, "Form," in *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Middle English* ed. Paul Strohm, 187.

[27] *Ibid*, 187-8.

[28] *Ibid*, 178, my italics.

VII constitutes part of Chaucer's examination of the resources on offer to the English poet writing at the close of the fourteenth century, and with the potentially problematic nature of interpretation itself. As such, Cannon's approach to form provides a way of thinking about how Chaucer might incorporate a particular paratextual feature into *Thopas* as part of a specific 'textual *activity*' that enfolds considerations as to the interconnectedness of form, genre, reading practices and the materiality of the manuscript page.[29] This reading of *Thopas* also owes much to Timothy Morton's environmental approach to formal analysis: of considering how every poem organises not only content and time, but also the *space* of the page on which is appears.[30]

If, following Cannon and Morton, it is possible to read from the form of *Thopas* 'an initiating thought (or thoughts)'[31] then it is clearly important to suggest what might structure Chaucer's use and placement of the *Thopas*-layout, not least as a tale that he assigns to himself in the context of the *Thopas-Melibee* section of the *Tales.* Of particular importance in this instance is his poetic self-reflexiveness, his experimentation with the mutability and instability of his sources and the related exploration of narrative time and temporality, his exploitation of the fluidity of late medieval conceptions of 'genre,' and his responses to the complex interactions between orality and literacy. I return to these broad, and often overlapping, features at length in Chapter Three below, so the following points trace only some outlines.

Throughout his career Chaucer seems concerned with issues as to the status and role of the poet in the late medieval period. *The House of Fame* articulates many of these concerns with this status and the boundaries of poetic vision and similarly much of the *Tales* is concerned with the status and practices of the poet: not least *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, the subject of Peter W. Travis's detailed recent study *Disseminal Chaucer: Rereading The Nun's Priest's Tale*.[32] Travis emphasises the importance of Chaucer's

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[29] *Ibid*, 179.
[30] See, for example, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Ethics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007).
[31] Cannon, "Form," 178.
[32] Travis, *Disseminal Chaucer: Rereading The Nun's Priest Tale* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).

establishment of a 'parapoetical' environment in the tale, an environment that functions not as a platform from which to foreground his poetic achievements, but rather the 'poetological *problems*' with which Chaucer concerned himself throughout his career.[33]

Of course, such considerations are intricately bound with Chaucer's approaches to his source material, both traditional and continental. The *Troilus*-narrator's well-known side-stepping of the question as to whether Criseyde has any children ('wheither that she children hadde or noon, / I rede it naught' I.132-33) is only one of many moments during the poem when Chaucer exploits sources to create textual fissures in his own version of the Troy-narrative. Criseyde's first appearance as 'a moving, speaking, thinking, laughing being,' rather than the object of another's gaze, takes place in the scene in which Pandarus interrupts her reading 'the siege of Thebes' (II.84).[34] As Alan Renoir suggests, this 'siege of Thebes' would likely have invoked the Old French *Roman de Thèbes* in the minds of medieval readers of *Troilus*, a work in which Criseyde would have been able to read the story of her own life.[35] This sense of mutability, of how literary tradition can be reconstituted through the re-structuring of more or less familiar material is clearly important in the parody of *Thopas*; a parody that, as Lee Patterson has shown, is more complex, and draws on a wider range of both traditional and continental genres and motifs, than its 'drasty' surface suggests.[36]

As David Benson has convincingly shown, much of the *Canterbury Tales* revolves around Chaucer 'experimenting with the possibilities of literary genre.'[37] The contrasts between Chaucer's three fabliaux in the early stages of the Tales well exemplify the potential fluidity of medieval conceptions of genre.[38] From the 'almost totally delightful' *Miller's Tale* we progress to *The Reeve's Tale* which, in John and Aleyn's enactment of

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[33] *Ibid*, 14.

[34] Martha D. Rust, *Imaginary Worlds in Medieval Books* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 106.

[35] Alain Renoir, "Thebes, Troy, Criseyde and Pandarus: An Instance of Chaucerian Irony," *Studia Neophilologica* vol. 32 (1960), 15-16; cited in Martha D. Rust, *Imaginary Worlds in Medieval Books*, 106.

[36] Patterson, ""What man artow?"", 127-8.

[37] C. David Benson, *Chaucer's Drama of Style: poetic variety and contrast in the* Canterbury Tales, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 132.

[38] See Alfred Hiatt, "Genre Without System," in *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Middle English* ed. Paul Strohm, 278.

the 'law' that 'gif a man in a point be agreved, / That in another he sal be releved.' (I. 4179-82), begins 'to expose the limits of the physical appetites celebrated by the genre,' and then on to *The Shipman's Tale*, which offers a disconcerting vision of a world 'that pays lip-service to love, friendship and faith, but is actually devoid of any concern except material self-interest.'[39] Chaucer exploits this seemingly non-systematic approach to genre even at the level of terminology: the rapid sequence at the start of *Melibee* in which he calls it 'a litel thyng in prose,' 'a moral tale vertuous,' 'a litel tretys,' and 'a murye tale' (VII 937-64) foregrounds certain generic expectations precisely in order to undercut or frustrate them.

The at once constitutive and problematic tensions between orality and literacy in some senses form an overarching structure under which many of the considerations mentioned above play out. The late medieval period is one of 'cultural diglossia,'[40] and this ambiguity between the oral and written is central, for example, to the sense of authorial self-awareness that marks the *House of Fame*. Here, the opposing attractions of the oral and literate are 'nurturing and constructive, not impoverishing or destructive.'[41] This creative tension is indicative of the way in which the gradual movement along the oral to literate cline during the medieval period bred a hybridity in which 'oral tradition idiom...seems to play a constitutive and enabling role in poetry that is clearly non-performative.'[42]

This concern with authorial intention in relation to a 'paratextual' element of the tale is not shared by all of those who have recently produced scholarship on what can be broadly termed 'book history.' As Coleman Hutchison writes 'This mystification of the author and his or her work often distracts us from the matter at hand...and occasionally determines in advance our experience of that matter.'[43] This is certainly a danger: the image of Chaucer as the 'Father' of English Literature - the 'great originator' - is a

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[39] Benson, *Chaucer's Drama of Style*, 116.
[40] Mark C. Amodio, *Oral Poetics in Middle English Poetry*, 21.
[41] Arnovik, *Written Reliquaries*, 175-6.
[42] *Ibid*, 13.
[43] Coleman Hutchison, "Breaking the Book Known as Q," *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* vol. 121 no. 1 (2006), 46.

popular one, and when we look so far into the past there is always a risk of overemphasising certain aspects of it based on our admiration of the potentialities we can observe. Hutchison goes on to reference Barthes and Foucault in emphasising a focus on 'the reader and not the author – on the matter rather than the heart of the matter.'[44]

Of course, such decisions on the extent to which authorial considerations are applicable depend on the matter under consideration: specific layouts, seem potentially more dependent on authorial intent than page breaks (Hutchison's main area of consideration in "Breaking the Book Known as Q"), for example.[45] But in either case, in a brief theoretical aside, the extent to which the likes of Barthes attempted to bury the author has arguably been overstated. Read alongside *S/Z* and, in particular, *Sade Fourier Loyola*, 'The Death of the Author' may more realistically be renamed 'The Death of the Realist Author.'[46] Barthes's notions of the 'logothete' and 'text' – essentially 'author' and 'oeuvre' - in *Sade Fourier Loyola* well exemplify the 'massive disjunction' that opens up 'between the theoretical statement of authorial disappearance and the project of reading without an author.'[47]

However, in light of the preceding comments on Barthes, what *is* important to acknowledge in this instance is that discussing the layout of *Thopas* in terms of authorial intent does risk an over-dependance on an abstraction away from its actual realisations from manuscript to manuscript, with the object under consideration becoming not any individual manifestation of the layout but rather some kind of authorial ur-text based on, but not necessarily limited to, those manuscripts in which the *Thopas*-layout is reproduced fully. This Platonic, dematerialised conception of the medieval text is in some sense unavoidable, and, furthermore, it is clear that it is not just contemporary readers under the aegis of the critical edition that think this way. The way medieval scribes approached the texts they copied, the sense that a medieval book was never entirely

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[44] *Ibid.*

[45] In this instance it is clearly important to distinguish between specific layouts such as graphic tail-rhyme which, as in the instance of the Ashmole *Sir Ferumbras*, could be used by authors, and the more general sense of 'layout' as synonymous with 'page design.'

[46] I borrow this re-naming from Seán Burke's *The Death and Return of the Author*: *Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 44.

[47] *Ibid*, 165.

finished or indeed *finishable*, suggests a dual approach to the literary work that seems delicately poised between considerations of the 'text itself' and its necessarily individuated rendering in the world. Thirteenth century Britain produced a range of writings on form, drawing on rich Platonic and Aristotelian traditions, and Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas in particular considered the various and contesting ways in which form describes 'the borderline between thought and things.'[48]

However, it is also an axiom of medieval studies that each manuscript must be considered *sui generis*, as an individual moment the realisation of which is dependent on a variety of factors. Like many medieval works, there is not one form of *Thopas*, but multiple forms, each of which indexes a variety of social and literary influences. As such, there is a difficulty in generalising about manuscripts that requires we enforce 'an exacting methodology of historical recovery.'[49] How then should we read those numerous instances in which the layout is omitted, attempted then abandoned, or copied in a simplified manner? Do these manuscripts represent a lamentable textual disintegration, the 'rape' Chaucer bemoans in Book V of *Troilus* and in 'Chaucers Wordes unto Adam'? Or, is it possible to read these approximations of a 'complete' *Thopas*-layout as important textual elements in themselves? That is, as moments through which authorial intent and scribal practice converge on the page itself to produce new meaning each time the layout is attempted.

Whilst Cannon's conception of form introduced above is important in addressing the 'poetic activity' of the *Thopas*-layout in the context of the *Thopas-Melibee* section, the various incomplete and partial realisations of the *Thopas*-layout suggest a greater sense of the inseparability of literary meaning and the physicality of the manuscript page than Cannon's 'contours' of the text allows. In the Introduction to *The Grounds of English Literature*, Cannon emphasises that his conception of 'materiality' is 'rarely' concerned with manuscript composition, but rather with 'the written shape that unspools on any page on which that text could be said to appear – the shape it has as a particular instance of

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[48] Christopher Cannon, *The Grounds of English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 8.
[49] Jessica Brantley, "The Prehistory of the Book," *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* vol. 124 no. 2 (2009), 637.

writing (the layout, the sequence, the ordinance) in *all* those versions that can be taken to be enactments of the thoughts that caused it.'[50] Cannon's Hegelian-Marxist theory of form is well suited to those works, such as *Pearl*, marked by their singularity. However, it is perhaps not as applicable to those instances, like *Thopas*, in which the varied manuscript forms of the text in many cases provide additional literary nuance, or at least information on conditions of literary production, rather than simple context.[51]

For D. Vance Smith in "Medieval *Forma*" and *The Book of the Incipit*, the sense of brokenness or partiality that marks the medieval manuscript offers a way into history, an entry point into the complex literary and material considerations and intentions that are at work in the production of any codex.[52] For Smith, form need not be an 'exclusive intellectual formation, resistant to the material, to the deviant, and to difference,' but rather a way of describing 'what [a] poem does artefactually.'[53] It is in this context that I discuss the varied realisations of the *Thopas*-layout not as instances of 'bad' texts as such, but as mirrors of the literary, material and social conditions that produced them: a sense of their variability not as an irredeemable *failure,* but as a necessary and inevitable trace of the human presence that made them, speculative entry points into considerations of the ways in which manuscripts and books are 'caught up by (or lost to) new systems of reference...'forgotten' at times, and at other times 'transformed.'"[54]

The turn to a literary study that emphasises the history of the book, of how systems of thought and meaning are not only revealed but created by their physical structure, is clearly of particular importance to medievalists.[55] Questions like 'Can we group elements of manuscript form – headings, rulings, images, rubrics, the stitching and binding of

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[50] Cannon, *The Grounds of English Literature*, 12.

[51] Helen Marshall & Peter Buchanan, "New Formalism and the Forms of Middle English Literary Texts," *Literature Compass* vol. 8 no. 4 (2011), 166.

[52] D. Vance Smith, *The Book of the Incipit: Beginnings in the Fourteenth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); "Medieval Forma," in *Reading for Form* ed. Susan J. Wolfman & Marshall Brown (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 66-79.

[53] Smith, "Medieval *Forma*," 69.

[54] Alexandra Gillespie, "Books," in *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Middle English* ed. Paul Strohm, 91.

[55] Brantley, "The Prehistory of the Book", 632.

quires – with elements of genre, diction, and stylistics?'[56] dilate on closer inspection, begging further considerations as to how the form of the medieval book produces literary meaning in 'a distinctive and historicizable manner.'[57] The layout of *Thopas* is a particularly interesting element to consider, as it represents, in its varied manuscript realisations, a zone of 'transaction' between author, scribe and reader. Therefore, the following discussion attempts to both describe the way this feature is one of many Chaucerian attempts throughout the *Tales* - indeed, throughout all of his works - to establish a sense of 'literariness', and in turn how the manuscripts of the *Tales* 'effect this process while negotiating the demands made…by the cultures to which they belonged and still belong.'[58]

Bibliographers have long emphasised those hermeneutic concerns (textual instability, the productivity of misreading and the slipperiness of authorial intention) that in a reinvented form constituted the core of much poststructuralist thought, and by reading the *Thopas* layout as an intersection of historicist, material, formal and theoretical considerations I follow Leah Price in emphasising that 'far from replacing hermeneutics by pedantry, book history insists that every aspect of a literary work bears interpretation – even, or especially, those that look most contingent.'[59] The *Canterbury Tales* is defined partly by its incompleteness, its inability to offer the kind of closure modern readers are accustomed to. And of course this incompleteness is both textual and material: Harry Bailey's plan for two tales from each pilgrim on the way to Canterbury and another two on the way back goes unfulfilled, and from manuscript to manuscript we are presented with different collections of tales, often in different orders. Manuscript culture more generally is one of fragmentary texts and unstable relationships between authors and their work and this textual instability results in a variety of forms of the *Thopas* layout, each of which creates different 'interpretive spaces' for the reader, enacting new reading experiences each time it is realised.[60]

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[56] Marshall & Buchanan, "New Formalism and the Forms of Middle English Literary Texts," 165.
[57] *Ibid*, 164.
[58] *Ibid*, 169.
[59] Leah Price, "Introduction: Reading Matter," *PMLA* 121.1 (2007), 11.
[60] Rust, *Imaginary Worlds in Medieval Books*, 30.

My final theoretical model - one that in many senses synthesises D. Vance Smith's emphasis on the numerous intentional acts that produce the medieval manuscript and Cannon's emphasis on an inclusive conception of 'form' - is Martha D. Rust's formulation of the 'manuscript matrix,' in which each manuscript not only bears detailed study as a material object, but also establishes a 'liminal dimension' that is 'associated with books but constituted by a reader's cognitive realization of the interplay among diverse semiotic systems that is only *in potentia* on the physical page.'[61] For Rust, the manuscript matrix is thus the triangulation of the actions of author, scribe and reader brought forth by the reader's gaze on the physical book: an 'imagined, virtual dimension in which physical form and linguistic content function in dialectical reciprocity, a space in which words and pages, 'colours' of rhetoric and colors of ink, fictional characters and alphabetical characters, covers of books and veils of allegory function together in one overarching, category-crossing metasystem of systems of signs.'[62] Rust's model is particularly valuable in the way in which it provides a view of how medieval readers might approach the manuscript page not as a flat surface of meanings rigidly compartmentalised between actions of author, scribe and illustrator, but as a dynamic textual-visual locale that promoted an active and involved reading process.

The notion of 'reflexivity' is central to Rust's readings from the manuscript matrix, and I explore the extent to which even in those manuscripts with the most minimal attempts at differentiating the layout of *Thopas*, there seems to be an acknowledgement that a vital aspect of the tale is that should appear on the page explicitly *as* a certain type of literature, and how, in turn, in manuscripts such as Dl, the confusion the manuscript should only *stage* becomes a more intrinsic part of its material textuality.

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[61] *Ibid*, 9.
[62] *Ibid*.

The following discussion therefore proceeds thus: I begin in Chapter One with a contextualising discussion of the origins of the tail-rhyme stanza, the English tail-rhyme romance and the graphic tail-rhyme layout, in order to situate *Thopas* in a detailed generic and formal context. Chapter Two examines in detail, with the aid of a number of diplomatic editions of certain sections of *Thopas*, the manuscripts that reproduce this layout. I also contextualise these manuscripts through a comparison to some of those that do not reproduce the layout. The first section of Chapter Three engages with the considerations introduced above in order to examine further both Chaucer's apparent formal experimentation in the context of the much derided genre of medieval popular romance and the explorations of authorial self-definition in the *Thopas-Melibee* section of the *Tales*, including through some brief comparisons with the work of certain contemporary poets. In the second section of Chapter Three I return to a small number of manuscripts in order to examine how some of the varied or erroneous realisations of the layout might be (re)read as individual interpretative spaces, archives of moments of literary reception, rather than relatively less sucessful instantiations of a reconstructed 'authorial intent.'

1.

The origins of the tail-rhyme stanza, the Middle English tail-rhyme romance, and the graphic tail-rhyme layout

Before a more detailed discussion of the various manuscript forms of *Thopas*, it is necessary to trace a brief history of the tail-rhyme romance and its origins as a uniquely English formation. That, at the close of the fourteenth century, Chaucer can use tail-rhyme in *Thopas* as shorthand for the whole English romance tradition is a sign of its prominence. By this time the tail-rhyme stanza is rivalled only by the rhyming couplet as the most popular romance verse form in English and the extent to which tail-rhyme and romance became linked justifies the critical tradition of talking of these works as a 'coherent group,' in a way that couplet romances, for example, are not.[1]

The thirty-six romances wholly or partly in tail-rhyme account for around a third of all known Middle English verse romances. The earliest surviving Middle English verse romances – *King Horn*, *Havelok*, and *Floris and Blauncheflur* – date from the thirteenth century and are all composed in rhyming couplets. All three appear in manuscripts that predate the famous Auchinleck compendium of c.1330-40: *King Horn* and *Havelok* appear in Oxford Bodleian Library Laud Misc. 108, while *Floris and Blauncheflur* appears, alongside another copy of *King Horn*, in Cambridge University Library Gg.4.27 Pt. II. However, though it does not contain the earliest surviving examples of Middle English romance, the Auchinleck manuscript does contain the earliest examples of tail-rhyme romance. The seven romances wholly or partly in tail-rhyme are *The King of Tars*, *Amis and Amiloun*, the stanzaic *Guy of Warwick*, *Reinbrun*, *Bevis of Hampton*, *Roland and Vernagu*, *Horn Childe* and *Maiden Rimnild*.

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[1] Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, 1. The following chapter is indebted to Rhiannon Purdie's thorough account of the origins and development of the tail-rhyme romance and the graphic tail-rhyme layout in *Anglicising Romance* and "Implications".

Middle English romances in tail-rhyme are predominantly composed in twelve line stanzas rhyming *aabccbddbeeb*. The couplets commonly carry four stresses and the tail (*b*) lines three. The basis of a tail-rhyme stanza is its asymmetric units rhyming *aab* or, occasionally, *aaab*. There is often variation from this basic form: *Amis and Amiloun*, *Horn Childe*, *The King of Tars* and the first forty-five stanzas of the tail-rhyme *Guy of Warwick* use a more 'rigorous' rhyme scheme of *aabaabccbddb*.[2] Other tail-rhyme romances, such as *Percyvell of Gales*, *Sir Degrevant* and *The Avowing of King Arthur*, extend the rhyming couplets to triplets to produce a sixteen line stanza. Others, such as *Thopas*, use stanzas of only six lines, though this is also subject to variation. The term 'tail-rhyme' clearly encompasses a variety of stanzaic sub-forms, encompassing texts that maintain the *a*-line for the whole stanza (*aabaabaabaab*), as well as those that vary the *a*-line (*aabccbddbeeb*). Tail-rhyme texts can also vary in stanza length and line length: some are isometric (lines of the same length), others are heterometric (lines of varying length).

The popularity of these various forms of tail-rhyme amongst English romance-writers is striking, particularly as many would have had to refashion the couplet or *laisse* form of an Old French source to accommodate it. The tail-rhyme stanza clearly carried with it particular literary associations that fourteenth century romance-writers sought to exploit. What were these associations? And why were they utilised by romance writers to produce, by combining a genre native to French literature and a continental verse form, a uniquely English innovation?

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

Before turning our attention to the closely linked Anglo-Norman and Middle English tail-rhyme poetry that preceded the tail-rhyme romance for clues as to the literary associations Middle English romance writers sought to employ, it is necessary to attempt to trace the origins of the verse form itself. Purdie elucidates the two most pressing difficulties in attempting to establish a history of what has come to be called 'tail-rhyme'.

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[2] *Ibid*, 4.

Firstly, the term has come to encompass a variety of stanza forms, many of which may in fact be unrelated in origin. The second, and perhaps more fundamental, problem is the assumption that there is a single, linear descent to be discovered at all. Tail-rhyme is a relatively simple verse form and as such may have multiple, though now largely inseparable, origins.[3] Certain theories of its origin are more plausible than others though, and these are important if we are to understand fully the significance of Chaucer's use of this form, and its peculiar layout, in *Thopas*.

The popularity of tail-rhyme in late medieval England led many critics, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to identify Old English poetic traditions as the source for the tail rhyme stanza and for much of its character. Trounce and Luick in particular sowed the seeds for a theory of the development of the tail-rhyme stanza from Old English that has been difficult to uproot.[4] In an 1889 article Luick attempted to equate the lines of the stanzaic *Awntyrs of Arthure*, *Golagros and Gawane* and the *Pistel of Susan* (all with the stanza pattern *abababab-c-dddc*) with the two-stress half-lines of Old English alliterative poetry.[5] The *d* line was, in Luick's view, derived from the first half of the alliterative line, and the *c* line from the second half. Luick goes on to use this theory to discuss romances wholly in tail-rhyme such as *Sir Degrevant* and *Sir Percyvell of Gales*, arguing that the apparent laxity of the Old English alliterative rules in these instances is due to some kind of formal entropy. However, as can be seen by comparing, for example, *Beowulf* to the tail-rhyme poems mentioned above, Old English verse tradition 'offers neither rhyme nor contrasting line lengths as possible structural features':[6] the relationship of Old English to tail-rhyme does not seem to go beyond the influence of the English language itself.

An alternative line of descent for the tail-rhyme stanza has been sought in the work of the Troubadour poets. The importance of the influence of the twelfth and thirteenth century troubadours of Occitan on medieval vernacular poetry is well known: around 460

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[3] *Ibid*, 13-4.
[4] See *Ibid*, 16, n. 9 & 10.
[5] Luick, "Zur Metrik der Mittelenglischen Reimend-alliterierenden Dichtung," *Anglia* vol. 12 (1889), 437-53; cited in Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, 16-7.
[6] Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, 19.

troubadours are known by name, and some 2500 poems have come down to us. As such, any discussion of developments in medieval versification is well advised to consider the troubadour tradition for potential sources. There are close links between the troubadours and Middle English and Anglo-Norman poetry. Eleanor of Aquitaine, queen of Henry II, was the granddaughter of the man traditionally hailed as the first troubadour poet: Guilhem de Peitieu, the seventh count of Poitou and ninth duke of Aquitaine.[7] Several troubadours are known to have visited England at various times and Eleanor's son King Richard is himself cited as a troubadour poet. There is some evidence of direct troubadour influence on Anglo-Norman poetry and this was likely reinforced by the influence of the Northern French trouvère poets, a movement that though initially inspired by the troubadours soon became its Northern counterpart, with influence moving in both directions.[8]

However, in terms of the troubadour poetry itself, there is little evidence of a direct influence on Middle English tail-rhyme. The troubadour poets prized formal variety and novelty - in the *descort* genre, for example, the rhyme scheme usually changed with each stanza - so although troubadour poems utilising a stanzaic form that could be termed tail-rhyme may have been known to English writers, it seems unlikely that they could have formed a coherent enough group to exert such an influence on English romance writers. The range and popularity of English tail-rhyme texts would seem to preclude their genesis in a limited and incoherent pattern of usage by a small number of troubadours.

The poetry of the northern French trouvères and the Anglo-Normans would seem to provide some closer affinities with the later Middle English romance than the Old English and Troubadour traditions. As mentioned briefly above, the trouvère poets developed as a northern French counterpart to the troubadours, from whom they derived their stylised themes and sense of the importance of formal variety. Much of the surviving trouvère poetry was copied by a guild of poets in Arras, also the location of a number of the *puys* held across northern France.

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[7] *Ibid*, 21.
[8] *Ibid*.

Gotthold Naetebus catalogued the non-lyric forms of northern French poetry: all six of his examples of the tail-rhyme patterns *aa*8*b*4*aa*8*b*4 and *aa*8*b*4*cc*8*b*4 are Anglo-Norman.[9] Interestingly, Naetebus also lists twenty texts with isometric tail-rhyme stanzas, predominantly *aabaab*8: a form relatively widespread in continental French poetry. Further poems with a reduced *aabaab*6 stanza form of both Anglo-Norman and continental French provenance are also listed. Mölk and Wolfzettel's survey of lyric poetry does not evince as great a distinction between French and Anglo-Norman practice. Within the lyric tradition the use of the tail-rhyme patterns *aabaab* and *aabccb* is striking: of twenty-one poems with the *aabaab* form, twelve are hymns or pious songs. Of the *aabccb* texts, ten of eleven are hymns, sequences or pious songs.[10]

The pattern of usage here appears to be related to subject matter rather than national preference: that is, it seems clear that in the poetry of the Anglo-Normans and northern French trouvère there was a 'nascent association' between tail-rhyme and pious material.[11] This association of pious material and the tail-rhyme form appears to result from the tradition of Latin hymnody that lies behind it. A particular form, the Victorine sequence, is widely considered to be the most influential of the regularly rhymed forms of Latin sequence that had evolved by the twelfth century. The Victorine sequence, named after Adam of St Victor (1110-92), likely originated from the fifteen-syllable trochaic tetrameter couplet in Latin. In these initially unrhymed couplets each line commonly has a caesura after the eighth syllable. By doubling the first eight-syllable half-line and assigning rhyme to the two seven-syllable half-lines the Victorine form is produced. As such, a Victorine sequence commonly rhymes *aabccb*, though the example below of the first two stanzas from 'Stola regni' in Paris, BN lat. 14452 exemplifies the potential for variation between *aabccb* and *aabaab*:

Stola regni laureatus
summi regis est senatus

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[9] Gotthold Naetbus, *Strophformen*, 98-100 & 152-3; cited in Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, 23.
[10] Mölk & Wolfzettel, *Répertoire;* cited in Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, 23.
[11] Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, 25.

cetus apostolicus;

Cui psallant mens et ora

mentis munde uox senora

hymnus est angelicus.

Hic est ordo mundi decus

omnis carnis iudex equus

noue preto gratie;

Ab eterno preclectus

cuius floret architectus

ad culmen ecclesie.[12]

Victorine sequences also survive with rhyming triplets linked by tail-lines, a form that invokes those romances, such as *Sir Degrevant*, written in sixteen-line stanzas.

The Victorine sequence was an important part of the lives of those stationed at the abbey of St. Victor: it was essential for each major altar patron to have a sequence, and of the 72 sequences of the late twelfth century Victorine repertory, two-thirds were for the saints in whose honour the altars were dedicated. These sequences were an integral component of the everyday processes of Victorine worship and 'for those designing the twelfth century Victorine church, sequences, especially those they wrote themselves, and altars and their relics were essential and interrelated features of an architectural and liturgical program.'[13] More generally, the incorporation of elements of vernacular poetry and verse into sermons during the medieval period was an important way of maintaining an audiences' attention. The regular forms and melodies of sequences of this type leant themselves to translation and imitation, and the relatively self-contained nature of each stanza enabled preachers to modulate tail-rhyme texts with additional inter-stanzaic refrains.

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[12] For the whole sequence see Margot Elsbeth Fassler, *Gothic song: Victorine sequences and Augustinian reform in twelfth-century Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 305-6.
[13] *Ibid*, 251.

Though the records of Medieval Latin poetry are scant, the Victorine sequence seems the most credible formal origin of the English tail-rhyme romance stanza. Particularly in combination with the evidence from manuscripts such as Cambridge, Trinity College MS B.14.39, in which a Latin hymn 'Gaude virgo mater Christi' in the Victorine form is copied alongside an English translation in graphic tail-rhyme.[14] However, the gap between Latin hymnody and secular romance in terms of subject matter and content is problematic. As such, though this particular type of twelfth century Latin hymn provides the distant formal origins of English tail-rhyme romance, it is only through the closely linked Anglo-Norman and English traditions of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that the seemingly disparate aspects of popular romance converge to produce the works on which Chaucer draws in writing what he calls his 'rym…lerned longe agoon' (VII 709).

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The first texts composed in England that utilise the tail-rhyme form date from the twelfth century and were in Anglo-Norman. As in continental French poetry a clear trend emerges in those Anglo-Norman works that utilise tail-rhyme: these texts commonly deal with material that is morally or spiritually instructive and, as such, one will not find any Anglo-Norman tail-rhyme fabliaux, epics, comic tales or romances, other than those which are clearly satirical.[15] Tail-rhyme is found in texts from a variety of genres, including lyrics, sermons, debate poems and saints' lives (of which Beneit's *Vie de Thomas Becket* is of particular importance). What these texts have in common, in addition to the general tradition of Latin hymnody their form would invoke, is an attempt to offer broad moral and spiritual edification to a large audience.

Lyrics - The majority of lyrics in tail rhyme are devotional, with a particular focus on the Virgin. The trilingual Harley 2253 manuscript, well known for its variety of English lyrics, contains the Anglo-Norman tail-rhyme 'Marie pur toun enfant.'[16] London, Lambeth Palace Library MS 522 contains 'Prium en chatant,' with each of its five stanzas

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[14] Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, 28.
[15] *Ibid*, 32-33.
[16] *Ibid*, 35.

comprising of a monorhyme quatrain (*aaaa*) followed by a six-line tail-rhyme section (*bbcbbc*).[17]

The Harley 2253 manuscript also includes a 'Lament for Simon de Montfort,' the leader of the Baron's Revolt killed at the Battle of Evesham in 1265. In this instance the anonymous author utilises an *aabccbddeffe* rhyme scheme, with the couplet lines carrying six stresses and the tail-lines four. Though the rhyme scheme suggests six-line stanzas the scribe uses brackets to organise the poem into twelve-line stanzas, with a cue for a six-line refrain inserted next to each bracketed stanza. Pierre de Langtoft's early fourteenth century *Chronicle* also contains a small number of Anglo-Norman lyrics in tail-rhyme. In these instances de Langtoft exemplifies the potential for variation in line length both between and within poems deemed to utilise the tail-rhyme form: a tail-rhyme section detailing the defeat of the Scots by Edward I gradually lengthens its couplets from four to eight syllables and later in the *Chronicle* a tail-rhyme section with lines of four syllables also gradually modulates its line length, in this instance to revert to the common Anglo-Norman tail-rhyme syllable pattern of *aa*8*b*4*cc*8*b*4. In the Cambridge, University Library MS Gg.1.1 copy of the *Chronicle* all of these varied realisations of the tail-rhyme form are copied in graphic tail-rhyme, demonstrating further that tail-rhyme was a form with a broad definition for medieval audiences.[18]

Nicholas Bozon was one of the most prolific writers in Anglo-Norman between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and it is of little surprise that some of his vast poetic output utilised tail-rhyme. His lyric 'Les Femmes a la pie' in British Library Additional MS 46919 draws on the familiar bestiary image of the peacock as a symbol of vanity ('E femme fet la sue / Plus long eke nule coue / De poun ou de pie' l.16-18), but seems predominantly to be one of the uses of tail-rhyme in satirical texts mentioned briefly above.[19]

[17] See David L. Jeffrey & Brian J. Levy, *The Anglo-Norman Lyric: An Anthology* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1990), 33-7.
[18] Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, 36-7.
[19] See Jeffrey & Levy, *The Anglo-Norman Lyric*, 223-9.

Sermons - The incorporation of lyrics into sermons was one way of disseminating devotional texts, though it was also the case that whole sermons could be composed in verse: the use of tail-rhyme in Anglo-Norman and English sermons from the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is something of a pre-cursor to the adoption of the form for longer narrative works. The earliest tail-rhyme sermon, surviving in four manuscripts, is the anonymous *Grant mal fist Adam*, dating from the first half of the twelfth century.[20] The *Grant*, with 118 stanzas rhyming *aabccb*5, runs to over 700 lines, as does the *Deu le omnipotent*, a late twelfth century sermon of Anglo-Norman origin with hexasyllabic lines.[21] The *Distichs* of Cato were also translated into tail-rhyme: the late twelfth-century version by Elie of Winchester uses tail-rhyme only for the first four books, but the twelfth century version by Everart and an anonymous thirteenth century version both translate the whole text into tail-rhyme stanzas.[22]

Returning to Nicholas Bozon, two tail-rhyme sermons of his survive in British Library Add. MS 46919, an early fourteenth century manuscript compiled by Bozon's contemporary William Herbert.[23] The first of these, the 'Ben e Mal unt fet covenant' is suggestive of both actual medieval feasts, as well as certain romance scenes, in its descriptions of the contrasting meals for the 'Mal' and 'Ben'. These scenes – reminiscent also of Fear's descriptions of Heaven and Hell in *Sawles Warde* – detail the damned dining on 'Vil reproche de lur pecché' (l. 19-20) rather than bread, washed down with a drink of 'soufre et venym' (l. 22); in contrast to those at the table of Abraham whose first course alone is 'conusaunce / De kankes est fet par la puissance / Dampnedee' (133-5).[24] The purpose of Bozon's sermon is clear enough, even if, as in *Sawles Warde*, there is a hint of Lacanian *jouissance* in the piling-up of potentially imminent torments.

That Middle English romances would draw on narrative works in tail-rhyme such as the saints' lives discussed below is perhaps to be expected, but it is interesting to note how

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[20] Ruth Dean, *Anglo-Norman Literature: A Guide to Texts and Manuscripts* (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society), 331.
[21] *Ibid.*
[22] Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, 40.
[23] *Ibid*, 53.
[24] See Jeffrey & Levy, *The Anglo-Norman Lyric*, 127-36.

works such as the 'Ben e Mal' also show affinities with the emerging 'forcefully moralised style of romance' English poets began to employ with the tail-rhyme stanza.[25] Such correspondences well exemplify Alfred Hiatt's contention that although statements of genre do exist in the Middle English period, they were not meant to be 'prescriptive, comprehensive codifications of generic rules,' rather they were 'either partial, contingent, or retrospective in nature.'[26]

Saints' Lives – In her catalogue of Anglo-Norman literature Dean groups saints' lives with miracle tales such as the story of 'Little Saint Hugh of Lincoln' surviving in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Franç. 902 and numerous versions of the 'Miracles of the Virgin.[27] Of the 87 works in this broad category only three are in tail-rhyme: the *Miracle de sainte Madeleine*, the *Vie de Saint Eustache* and Beneit's *Vie de Thomas Becket*. The *Miracle* dates from the late twelfth or early thirteenth century and survives as a 78 line fragment discovered in a book binding and now catalogued as Trier, Stadtbibliothek, Mappe X [altfranz. Fragm.] 2.[28] The *Miracle* recounts the story of the conversion of the king of Marseille to Christianity by Saint Madeleine and the subsequent death of his formerly barren wife in childbirth whilst at sea on the way to Rome. The wife's body and that of the child are left on a rock to which the King returns, after touring the holy land with St. Peter for two years, to find the child alive and the wife merely sleeping. Though the *Miracle* does not seem to be have been drawn upon directly by any of the later romance writers, the motif of the abandoned queen and/or child resonates with the narratives of *Bevis* and *Havelok*. The Trier fragment begins just after the sailors have left the dead bodies of the queen and child on the rock and ends after the king rediscovers them alive and well on his return journey.[29]

The *Vie de Sainte Eustache* also survives only in a fragment, forming a flyleaf of Oxford, St. John's College MS 183. The fragment is copied in an early fourteenth century hand with stanzas of the form *aabccb*5-6 and exhibits a 'suggestive closeness' to the thirteenth

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[25] Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, 54.
[26] Hiatt, "Genre without System," 279.
[27] Dean, *Anglo-Norman Literature*, 294 & 308-10.
[28] Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, 41.
[29] *Ibid*.

century English tail-rhyme life of *St Eustas* in Oxford, Bodleian Library Digby 86.[30] There are similarities between *St Eustas* and the later tail-rhyme romance *Sir Isumbras* in plot structure, though there does not seem to be any direct textual correspondences between the two texts, and it may have been that a now lost French lay 'Ysanbras len veyse' was the direct source of the later English romance.[31]

Beneit's *Vie de Thomas Becket* and *Bevis of Hampton* – Beneit's tail-rhyme life of Thomas Becket was composed between 1183 and 1189, relatively shortly after the murder of the then Archbishop of Canterbury in 1170. Beneit was a Benedictine from the abbey at St Albans. Relatively little is known about him compared to other late twelfth century chroniclers of Thomas Becket's life such as Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence, and his *Vie* is generally subordinated to those versions deemed to be more historically accurate or of greater literary value. Beneit's work warrants only a brief paragraph and single footnote in Michael Staunton's recent *Thomas Becket and his Biographers*, and even then only to suggest that the *Vie* drew extensively on Robert of Cricklade's now lost *Life of Thomas Becket*.[32]

Emmanuel Walberg, in *La Tradition Hagiographique de Saint Thomas Becket*, echoes this ambivalence towards Beneit's *Vie*. For Walberg 'La valeur historique et littéraire du poème de Benet est médiocre…Son style, sans nerf, abonde en chevilles; la versification, comme dans la plupart des textes anglo-normands, est souvent incorrecte.' However, as Walberg goes on to acknowledge: 'Malgré tout, on verra que le poème n'est pas dénué d'intérêt.':[33] namely, for the current purpose of attempting to establish a link between the predominantly didactic and edifying early tail-rhyme works produced in England and their later secular romance counterparts, the link between Beneit's *Vie* and the English romance *Bevis of Hampton*.

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[30] *Ibid*, 42.
[31] *Ibid*.
[32] Michael Staunton, *Thomas Becket and his Biographers* (New York: Boydell & Brewer, 2006), 6 n.2.
[33] Emmanuel Walberg, *La Tradition Hagiographique de Saint Thomas Becket* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1975 [1929]), 13.

The sparse narrative of the *Vie*, which moves rapidly towards its suspenseful dénouement, as well as the presentation of Becket as a figure whose renown is not limited to his home shores, clearly resonate with later popular romances. As does Beneit's assertion that Becket's spiritual and moral values, as well as his revered socio-economic standing, are accompanied by a suitable sense of physical beauty and courtly manners. Furthermore, an entry in the 1389 library catalogue of the Benedictine Priory in Dover records that a now lost manuscript contained the *Vie* alongside a Middle English *Proverbs of Hendyng* and French and Anglo-Norman antecedents of Middle English tail-rhyme romances *Octavian* and *Sir Ferumbras*.[34] Beneit's *Vie* is not the only surviving saint's life to exemplify how such works were engaged in an increasing symbiotic relationship with the romance tradition; however, it is the only such example that is composed in tail-rhyme.

Clearly Beneit's *Vie* displays some interesting coherences with elements of the emerging popular romance tradition. Furthermore, that it seems to have circulated in manuscripts alongside Anglo-Norman and French antecedents of Middle English tail-rhyme romances is further suggestion of the perceived potential for overlap between the two genres in the medieval period. However, as is mentioned above, there are some particularly noticeable similarities between Beneit's work and *Bevis of Hampton*.

Only the first 474 lines of *Bevis* are in tail-rhyme, at this point the poet switches to couplets. However, the $aa4b2cc4b2$ form of this opening section forms what Purdie calls 'an exact accentual rendition' of Beneit's $aa8b4aa8b4$, though one with a simplified rhyme-scheme.[35] In terms of content the two texts also share a number of features. Most obviously, both are concerned with English national figures engaged in events embedded in a specifiable English locality. Whilst in many saints' lives nationality is little more than an additional detail, Becket's life, and death, revolve around his responses to Henry II's abuses of royal power. Similarly, the *Bevis*-poet amplifies the 'Englishness' of the

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[34] Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, 45.
[35] *Ibid*.

Anglo-Norman *Boeve de Haumtone*, including a battle through the streets of London and references to 'Notinghame', 'Hamteschire' and the 'Temse.'

The *Bevis*-poet's use of tail-rhyme therefore may have been motivated by a wish to intimate some similarities between his secular anti-Oedipus and the secularised English saint of the *Vie*. However, the use of tail-rhyme for the opening section of *Bevis* is also due to the poem's Anglo-Norman source. The *Boeve de Haumtone* was composed around the end of the twelfth century in assonanced *laisses*, predominantly of six lines, with occasional variations of plus or minus one line. As first observed by A.C. Baugh the six-line tail-rhyme stanzas of *Bevis* roughly correspond to these six-line units in *Boeve*.[36] Furthermore, the point at which the *Boeve*-poet switches to a system of lengthened *laisses* (l. 415) roughly corresponds with the point of the narrative where the *Bevis*-poet switches to couplets: a moment marked by a four-line decorated initial in the Auchinleck manuscript despite the fact it does not represent a particularly noticeable textual division. A comparison of *Bevis* to *Boeve* therefore displays the poet's formal dependence on his Anglo-Norman source material, though in this instance tail-rhyme would seem to be used as equivalent to the *laisse* form, rather than an attempt at a direct translation.[37]

Early Middle English Tail-Rhyme – As in the Anglo-Norman tradition, lyrics provide the most numerous examples of tail-rhyme in Middle English, outwith the romance tradition. The Harley 2253 manuscript contains eleven lyrics in tail-rhyme, with 'The Flemish Insurrection,' an account of a 1302 Flemish uprising against the French that predates most surviving Middle English tail-rhyme romances, of particular importance due to its evident borrowings from the romance tradition.[38] As in the Anglo-Norman tradition, there are numerous Marian lyrics composed in tail-rhyme. 'Stond Wel, Moder, Ounder Rode' survives in a number of manuscripts, including Harley 2253 and Digby 86. 'Stond wel' is composed in six-line stanzas rhyming *aabccb*, with the first asymmetric unit of each stanza (*aab*) spoken by Christ, beginning 'Moder' or 'Swete moder', and the

[36] A.C. Baugh, "Improvisation in the Middle English romance," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* vol. 103 (1959), 431-2.
[37] Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, 48.
[38] *Ibid*, 56.

second (*ccb*) by Mary, each beginning 'Sone.' The Harley 2253 version includes an additional two stanzas at the end not present in the Digby 86 copy that, departing from this pattern, detail Christ's resurrection. The British Library, Royal 12. E. I copy also includes musical notation alongside the text, which, in combination with the uniformly divided stanzas, suggests it may have originated as a piece performed in church.[39]

Generally the use of tail-rhyme in Early Middle English roughly corresponds to its presence in Anglo-Norman poetry, though there are a small number of interesting departures. Not least the 786-line tail-rhyme section of the *Cursor Mundi*, introduced as 'De lamentacione Marie' in the Cotton manuscript copy. This section forms a largely self-contained narrative and thematic unit within the vast expanses of nearly 30,000 lines of predominantly four-stress couplets and comprises of an apostrophe to the Virgin by the narrator, a dialogue between Mary and Christ on the cross, a narrative of the Crucifixion and Resurrection, an apostrophe to St John and a brief rumination on the importance of guarding one's virginity.

This use of tail-rhyme - with its clear pious, lyrical and didactic associations – seems to have been intended to emphasise the importance of what is the 'emotional and thematic core' of both the *Cursor Mundi* and, for Christians, the most important narrative in the history of mankind.[40] Whilst the poet does not approach the level of conceptual immersion in the crucifixion scene of the likes of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, the switch from couplets to tail-rhyme enables him to establish a certain amount of pathos at those moments that most vividly recall the extensive Marian lyric tradition:

Moder murnand, wepe coth þou,

Þis soru seand o iesu?

"Mi soru I can noght sai,

Naild on þat rode tre

Ful sorufulli be-heild he me,

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[39] See Elaine Treharne ed., *Old & Middle English c.890-c.1450: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2nd ed. 2004), 330-1, for the lyric and the two additional stanzas found in Harley 2253.
[40] Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, 60.

I thinc it euer and ai."

(l.24059-64)[41]

Another interesting departure from the Anglo-Norman use of tail-rhyme is the short fabliau *Dame Sirith*, which dates from the third quarter of the thirteenth century, making it the earliest surviving example of the genre in Middle English. The narrative of the lovesick Wilekin enlisting the help of the aged Dame Sirith in order to seduce the Lord's wife Margery is composed predominantly in six-line tail-rhyme stanzas, with a few sections of couplets. In this instance the presence of tail-rhyme seems to owe more to the text's affinities with certain early French dramatic works, perhaps as well as the *aa*8*b*4*bb*8*c*4*cc*8*d*4 etc. verse form of the French fabliau *Richeut* and employed frequently by the thirteenth century French poet Rutebeuf for satirical material.[42]

In terms of those works that more closely correspond to the Anglo-Norman uses of tail-rhyme, there are numerous instances of tail-rhyme in a range of religiously instructive poems and sermons. The Anglo-Norman translations of Cato's *Distichs* correspond with Middle English collections of proverbs such as the *Proverbs of Hendyng* and *The Sayings of St. Bernard*. On the evidence of the likes of the Vernon manuscript, compiled around 1390, it would seem that even after the form had largely been appropriated by romance writers, works of religious and spiritual instruction continued to be produced that utilised tail-rhyme.[43]

A small number of Middle English saints' lives in tail-rhyme also survive: the copy of *St Eustas* in the Digby 86 manuscript mentioned briefly above, as well as *St Alexius* and *St Anne*. Digby 86 also includes the moralising debate poem *The Thrush and Nightingale*, the earliest known example of what would become the standard Middle English romance

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[41] Quotations from Rev. Richard Morris ed. *The Early English Version of the "Cursor Mundi" EETS 68* (London: Early English Text Society, 1893), 1396.
[42] Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, 61.
[43] *Ibid*, 57-8.

tail-rhyme stanza: *aa*4*b*3*cc*4*b*3*dd*4*b*3*ee*4*b*3. It is similar in tone to many Middle English lyrics, and in content to Bozon's later lyric 'Les Femmes a la pie.' [44]

It is clear from this brief survey that the use of tail-rhyme in Middle English romances emerged from a sustained use of the verse form in both Early Middle English and Anglo-Norman texts from as early as the mid twelfth century. Though the vast majority of these works share a related purpose in that they are primarily pious and spiritually or morally instructive, the generic range of works in which tail-rhyme was employed opened it up to further uses and developments. As such, though it seems clear that Middle English romance writers turned to tail-rhyme in order to exploit these pious associations, it is important to recognise how this took place only after tail-rhyme had been used in works such as Beneit's *Vie*, the *Cursor Mundi* and *The Thrush and Nightingale* that exemplify the fluidity of medieval genre.

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As mentioned above, the Auchinleck manuscript contains the earliest examples of tail-rhyme romance, and this pre-eminence has often lead to an uncritical repetition of Laura Hibbard Loomis's suggestion that Chaucer may have used the manuscript as his primary source for *Thopas*.[45] It is not just the presence of the earliest tail-rhyme romances that makes the Auchinleck manuscript an important artifact: it also contains six further tail-rhyme texts pious in tone and clearly intended for moral edification that well exemplify the tradition from which those neighbouring romances in the manuscript had developed.

The Auchinleck compiler's concern with matters of 'Englishness' is well documented: the romances therein are concerned not just with a real or imagined English history and the recasting of continental romance narratives in a recognisably local setting, but also with the English language itself and its status and role in an emerging vernacular

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[44] *Ibid*, 59.

[45] See Laura Hibbard Loomis, "Chaucer and the Auchinleck Manuscript: *Thopas* and *Guy of Warwick*," in *Essays and Studies in Honor of Carleton Brown* (New York: New York University Press, 1940), 111–28.

poetry.[46] *Guy of Warwick* and *Bevis of Hamptoun* are, as their names suggest, concerned with specifically English protagonists, whilst the events of *Sir Tristrem*, *Sir Orfeo* and *Owayne Miles* (an Irish knight in all other versions) are transposed onto a specifiable English backdrop.

The Auchinleck manuscript therefore exemplifies both the formal and thematic development of the English tail-rhyme romance. As is discussed above, *Bevis* in particular demonstrates the development of tail-rhyme as an equivalent to the *laisses* of the French and Anglo-Norman sources; and it is used, as the *laisse* form is used in the French *chanson de geste*, in order to recount the narrative of a supposedly historical national hero. English romance writers could have turned to alliterative verse in order to emphasise the nationalistic dimension of their new hybrid works, but alliterative poetry necessitates a large poetic vocabulary that was likely unavailable to those writing outside of areas such as the West Midlands with a tradition of alliterative prose writing.[47] The tail-rhyme stanza, with its similarly insular provenance, was not as formally exacting, and in the evidently popular Anglo-Norman *Vie de Thomas Becket* English romance writers also already had an example for imitation.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

Having attempted to account for the origins of the English tail-rhyme romance and the tail-rhyme stanza form itself, our attention can now turn to the graphic tail-rhyme layout. What are its origins and functions, and what effect did its use by scribes have on the development of the tail-rhyme form?

The use of page layout, bracketing, punctuation - or a combination of these elements - to highlight verse form is a relatively common feature of medieval manuscripts. Brackets could be used to mark rhyming couplets and even entire stanzas, as an alternative or accompaniment to paraph marks or coloured initials. This use of brackets can be seen in

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[46] See Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, 96-107.
[47] *Ibid*, 105. As Purdie notes, it is telling that no tail-rhyme romances seem to originate in the West Midlands.

some of the manuscripts of the *Tales* discussed below: in Dl, for example, brackets are used throughout the *General Prologue*, for sections of the *Knight's Tale* and *Physician's Tale* and later in the manuscript in the "Nabugodonosor" section of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. In Mm brackets are used to link rhyming lines throughout, though, as is discussed in detail in the following chapter, these brackets quickly lose their utility as the scribe simplifies his bracketing system as the copying of the manuscript progresses. In certain manuscripts verse form was marked by leaving a space between stanzas, but this was a practice reserved for the works of only the most prestigious authors, and even then was by no means common.

Also of clear importance are considerations as to the stage of the manuscript's production at which the layout is added. In some of those manuscripts discussed in the following chapter, particularly the likes of El and Gg, it is clear the scribe planned for and then implemented the layout as the text was copied. That is, in these instances, the layout appears to be an element of the tale inseparable from its textual totality. By contrast, in the likes of Ry[1], with only a partial realisation of the *Thopas*-layout, it is similarly apparent that a reduced form of the layout was added at a later date, in the instance of Ry[1] by a second hand.

The indication of rhythmic structure through page layout can be seen in manuscripts from the fifth century and sixth centuries. In the copy of Prudentius's *Liber Cathemerinon* in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS lat. 8084, the scribe copied each verse on a single line, but indicated stanza structure by aligning the first verse with the left-hand margin and indenting the following verses.[48] By the early Middle Ages the teachings of Isidore of Seville had contributed to the increased use of *littera notabiliores* to commence each line of verse, a practice that continued until the fifteenth century.[49]

This development, which emerges most clearly around the ninth century, was based on the use of *littera notabiliores* in prose in order to begin a new period. However, with the

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[48] Malcolm Parkes, *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 97 & 231.
[49] *Ibid*, 98.

development of Latin hymnody alluded to above, other influences on the layout of verse, particularly stanzaic forms, were becoming apparent. Latin hymnody introduced the practice of singing stanzas with a recurring melody, enabling readers to recognise the rhythmic structure of a text, resulting in the stanza being treated comparably to a prose paragraph beginning with a decorated initial. The concurrent increase in the use of assonance and rhyme also contributed to the layout of verse: rhyme became a 'structural feature' as it often marked the ends of verse *cola*.[50]

It is in this context that graphic tail-rhyme may have its origins: scribes initially altered the layout of poems with a leonine rhyme scheme in order to emphasise the 'symmetry' of the verse, as in the following example from a twelfth-century collection of Latin poetry:[51]

Miles ad arma fre   } mit   vita fraus Hectora d   } emit
Vrbem pugna pre   troia sub hoste tr__

Other scribes were perhaps influenced by this innovative diagrammatic approach to verse layout and extended its use to other stanzaic forms, such as tail-rhyme, with a comparable rhyme structure, with scribes clearly willing to transfer the practice to the copyng of vernacular texts.[52] The earliest copy of Beneit's *Vie de Thomas Becket* in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century fragment Cambridge, Gonville & Caius College MS 123/60 would seem to confirm the relationship between the two layouts. The four surviving pages are copied in graphic tail-rhyme apart from one short section in which one of its two scribes experiments with placing the common final letter of the couplets off to the right, connected by brackets, with the tail-line following. Evidently this is not an identical reproduction of the leonine layout, as the final letter is rarely in itself the common rhyme sound, but the scribes intention to produce a version of it seems clear enough. As is the way in which the presence of these two layouts in a copy of Beneit's *Vie* exemplifies the

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[50] *Ibid*.
[51] Oxford, Bodl. Lib., MS Lat. Misc. d.15, fol. 10V; Parkes, *Pause and Effect*, 99 and, for a plate of the manuscript folio and accompanying transcription, 238-9.
[52] *Ibid*, 99.

importance of Anglo-Norman literary traditions in the evolution of the Middle English tail-rhyme romance.[53]

Parkes argues that the function of a diagrammatic layout in the copying of a lyric from the fifteenth century Findern manuscript is to 'guide a reader towards an interpretation of the poem,' with the lines in the right-hand column marking 'conclusions of successive stages in the development of the poem's theme.' He goes on to suggest this reinforcement may have been provided for 'less sophisticated' readers.[54] Whilst this seems a plausible explanation for Parkes's example, it would be difficult to argue this to be the case for uses of the graphic tail-rhyme layout in romances. Indeed, in the majority of romances the vacuity of many of the stock *b*-lines – a feature Chaucer parodies most blatantly in *Thopas* - would seem to suggest their use was anything but an attempt at thematic development.

Even with Parkes's plausible explanation of the origins of graphic tail-rhyme in mind, its development and continued, albeit sparse, use up until the sixteenth century is still somewhat puzzling. In order to position the tail-rhymes in a separate right hand column the scribe would have had to either rub out part of the ruled line, or simply write over the top of it. The use of graphic tail-rhyme in British Library, MS Egerton 2862 gives us an insight as to the complexity this process. The scribe begins *Bevis* on f.45 in graphic tail-rhyme, but is forced to re-proportion his page layout from f.46 in order to counteract the *b*-lines extending untidily beyond the right-hand margin. In the copy of *Amis and Amiloun* from f.135 he switches to a two-column layout with square brackets to the right of the columns to indicate the stanza form. However, as will be seen in a number of the *Thopas* manuscripts, the scribe often links the wrong lines with brackets. After these errors, the scribe cuts his losses and copies the final tail-rhyme romance in the manuscript, *Sir Eglamour of Artois* (f.148), in a single column without any attempt to show the stanza form through layout or bracketing.

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[53] Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, 73-4.
[54] Parkes, *Pause and Effect*, 100.

For medieval and modern readers alike graphic tail-rhyme requires the constant switching of one's gaze from the left column to the right and back again. Of course medieval readers would have been more familiar with this layout than their modern counterparts, but for both the relatively time-consuming and potentially confusing reading process is the same. In terms of the tale being read aloud it is obviously difficult to postulate the effect the layout would have had, but it seems likely that for even the most accomplished medieval reader it would have produced a performance that occasionally faltered. Particularly - as can be seen in the case of Egerton 2862, and as is discussed in the following chapter - as scribes had individual ways of conveying the layout and many had problems copying it clearly and correctly even when they did so in a simplified form.

Graphic tail-rhyme is used in only a small number of surviving Middle English romances. *Sir Isumbras* survives in three extant graphic tail-rhyme copies: Gray's Inn MS 20; Edinburgh, Advocates MS 19.3.1; and Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 175, though here the scribe abandons the layout after the first page. The Gonville manuscript also contains a copy of *Bevis of Hampton* in graphic tail-rhyme, though this is also quickly abandoned. The copy of *Bevis* with the relevant section copied in graphic tail-rhyme in Egerton 2862 is discussed above. British Library, Additional MS 31042, copied by Robert Thornton, contains graphic tail-rhyme copies of the later romances *The Sege of Melayne* and *Duke Rowland and Sir Otuell of Spayne* and Thornton also used the layout in the copy of *Sir Degrevant* in Lincoln Cathedral MS 91. Finally, the copy of *Sir Ferumbras* in the Ashmole manuscript, the author's holograph, includes the layout for its tail-rhyme section.[55]

This list of surviving romance copies in graphic tail-rhyme is not long and, furthermore, most of the manuscripts containing romances that utilise the layout also contain romances in which it is not used. No romance other than the unique copy of *Sir Ferumbras* exists solely in graphic tail-rhyme. What then is the function of this awkward and inconvenient layout for English romance writers and their scribes? As mentioned above, the use of graphic tail-rhyme can be traced back to manuscripts containing Anglo-Norman tail-

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[55] Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, 69-70.

rhyme poetry from the late twelfth century and it is in this notion of the 'tradition' of the layout that many answers as to its use in Middle English poetry may be uncovered. Five of the seven manuscripts of Beneit's *Vie de Thomas Becket* copy the work in graphic tail-rhyme and its presence in what was a widely circulated work concerned with a recognisable English national hero may have been particularly important in establishing graphic tail-rhyme as a component of a coherent insular tradition.[56] Furthermore, a variety of tail-rhyme texts that utilise the layout predate the earliest Middle English tail-rhyme romances, including many of the Anglo-Norman and Middle English lyrics discussed above, as well as Langtoft's *Chronicle* in Cambridge, University Library MS Gg.1.1.[57]

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

With this history of the tail-rhyme romance and its layout in mind our attention can now turn to *Thopas*: the apparently less than complimentary parody through which its precursors are often re-read. *Thopas* is comprised of eighteen stanzas rhyming *aabaab*, eight rhyming *aabccb* and five bob-line stanzas of varying format. The first of these stanzas consists of seven lines with a rhyme scheme of *aabcbbc*, whereas the other four bob-line paragraphs are of ten lines rhyming *aabaabca(a)c*, *aabaabcddc*, *aabccbdccd* and *aabccbdeed*. The *a*-line 'That to him durste ride or goon' in the second bob-line stanza is present in only eight of the *Thopas* manuscripts and is absent in the likes of Hg, El, Ad³, Ph¹ and Ld¹. However, as Larry D. Benson argues in his explanatory notes to *Thopas* in *The Riverside Chaucer*, it seems 'hard to believe' that a corrector could have echoed *Guy of Warwick* 148.7-9 unwittingly: 'In this world is no man non / That ogaines him durst gon, / Herl, baroun, no knight.'[58] This missing line causes a number of scribal headaches in the *Thopas* manuscripts and will be returned to in the following chapter.

The bob-line stanzas are immediately reminiscent of those in the English *Sir Tristrem* – which was copied alongside the tail-rhyme romances in the Auchinleck manuscript - and,

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[56] *Ibid*,72.
[57] *Ibid.*
[58] Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer*, 920.

to a lesser extent, the more rigorous 'bob and wheel' stanzas of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. *Amis and Amiloun*, *Guy of Warwick*, *Bevis of Hamptoun*, *Lybeaus Desconus*, *Sir Launfal*, *Perceval of Gales* and *Sir Eglamour* are all more or less explicitly invoked through verbal similarities and Chaucer refers specifically to 'Horn child and…Ypotas, / …Beves and Sir Gy, / …Sir Lybeux' (VII 898-901).

Christopher Cannon closes *The Grounds of English Literature* with a discussion of the proliferation of popular romance in the late medieval period as an indication of the 'closing down of formal possibilities that marked the end of the early part of Middle English.'[59] Cannon emphasises, against the grain of much scholarly criticism of the Middle English romance, that this is not to say that these texts are somehow intrinsically and irretrievably *worse* than the likes of the *Ormulum*, *The Owl and the Nightingale* and the *Ancrene Wisse* and the texts of the *Katherine*-group. Rather, that they are the first form of writing in English that 'actually *knows* of such multiplicity.'[60] Therefore, the English popular romance can be described 'as revolutionary in a classically Marxist sense: in this period, English Romances are the 'ideological forms' in which a more 'material transformation' is making itself available for scrutiny.'[61] Chaucer seems well aware in this instance of the 'prys' of English literature, and of course this Marxist terminology is particularly applicable as the very multiplicity of romance works was brought about by a 'substantial change in underlying 'economic conditions'…a general increase in demand for, and a consequent elaboration of, the means for producing writing in English.'[62]

Thopas is commonly referred to as a 'parody' or 'burlesque' of the romance genre: specifically of the verbal multiplicity and thematic interchangability that characterises a form with a 'surfeit,' an excess that enables its audience and future writers to 'take its constituents for granted.'[63] Whilst this is unquestionably true at a certain level, there is a danger of revelling *too* much in Chaucer's apparent back-handed compliment of

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[59] Christopher Cannon, *The Grounds of English Literature*, 172.
[60] *Ibid*, 173. My italics.
[61] *Ibid*, 173.
[62] *Ibid.*
[63] *Ibid*.

including such a work in the *Tales* at all. George Edmondson suggests part of Chaucer's intent in adopting a form that differs so markedly from his usual poetic voice may well have been to '[preserve] a native literary form by mortifying it: subjecting it to one form of violence, parody, in order to protect it from another, the juridical violence at the heart of natural history.'[64] However, literary appropriation looks not only back to the tradition it seeks to question, but also forward to 'future readers who have been preshaped by its dynamic presence.'[65] As in the romance section of Walter Map's *De Nugis Curialium*, *Thopas*, in both content and form, is not simply *a* romance, or a heartless parody thereof, but also fundamentally '*about* romance, and the roles of author and audience in its telling.'[66] Like *The Book of the Duchess*, *The House of Fame* and *Troilus*, it is a work clearly concerned with its own textuality, with how genres are constituted and disseminated, as well as with the ways in which late medieval literary texts were developing increasingly complex interactions between oral and literate forms.

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[64] George Edmondson, "Naked Chaucer," in *The Post-Historical Middle Ages* eds. Elizabeth Scala & Federico (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 154.
[65] Karla Taylor, "Chaucer's Volumes: Toward a New Model of Literary History in the *Canterbury Tales*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* vol. 29 (2007), 47.
[66] Melissa Furrow, *Expectations of Romance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2009), 36.

2.

The forms of *The Tale of Sir Thopas*

With the preceding discussion of the origins of the tail-rhyme romance and the graphic tail-rhyme layout in mind, the following chapter presents a detailed descriptive survey of those manuscripts that reproduce the *Thopas*-layout. As mentioned briefly in my Introduction above, though it appears the layout of *Thopas* originated with Chaucer, its varied realisations suggest that talking of a single '*Thopas*-layout' implemented to a greater or lesser extent from manuscript to manuscript is potentially misleading.

Of the fifty three manuscripts in which *Thopas* survives, twenty use the graphic tail-rhyme layout of writing tail rhyme lines in a separate column to the right of the couplets for at least part of the tale. Of these, fifteen use a two-column layout with brackets throughout, eleven of which also mark Chaucer's innovative bob lines consistently, whether through punctuation, layout, or a combination of both. Of these eleven manuscripts four are of particular importance due to their early dating and authoritativeness: the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts, and Cambridge University Library manuscripts Dd.4.24 and Gg.4.27. I discuss these twenty manuscripts, plus nine others that use brackets in combination with punctuation or decorated initials and parpahs to differentiate *Thopas* from the rest of the *Tales*, in four groups: Group One is made up of the eleven manuscripts that use the full graphic tail-rhyme layout throughout, and differentiate Chaucer's innovative bob-lines from the preceding *b*-line; Group Two is the manuscripts that do not consistently differentiate the bob-lines but which use brackets and write the tail-rhyme lines to the right in a separate column throughout; Group Three is the four manuscripts that bracket the lines throughout but which only use the 'full' two-column layout for part of the tale; Group Four is the nine manuscripts that, though not copied in two columns, differentiate the *Thopas* layout, to varying extents, through partial bracketing in combination with the use of decorated initials and paraphs or punctuation.[1]

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[1] I therefore follow Judith Tschann's grouping of the manuscripts in "The Layout of *Sir Thopas*." The full list of the manuscripts in each group is as follows: Group 1 – Hg, El, Dd, Gg, Ad³, Ph¹, En¹, Ra³, Ds¹, Ld¹,

These groups are not perfect, and potentially suggest an aesthetic or textual uniformity between group-members that, as will be seen, is not necessarily present. As such, they are useful only in as much as they formalise certain points of similarity: each of the twenty-nine manuscripts that differentiate the layout of *Thopas* from the other tales does so in an individualised manner. However, even in those group four manuscripts, such as Ha4, with the most minimal attempts at differentiating the layout of *Thopas*, there seems to be an acknowledgement that an aspect of the tale is that it should, in some sense, appear on the page explicitly *as* a certain type of literature. Furthermore, the extent of the layout is also contingent on the interaction of text and layout: in the heavily edited Ra¹, for example, the realisation of the layout is precluded by the rewriting of the tale to subsume the bob-lines in to a uniform *aabaab* rhyme-scheme throughout.

Importantly, the graphic tail-rhyme layout was clearly not the preserve of more elaborate manuscripts. Scribes seemingly recognised that it functioned not as a decorative feature reserved only for deluxe manuscripts, though in many instances this would appear to be an important *dimension* of its use, but as as an indispensable aspect of the tale's form. Certainly in all manuscripts in which it is reproduced, to whatever extent, it arrests the eye as one leafs through the *Tales*. However, the layout is subject to the pragmatic concerns of the scribe(s) of each manuscript and the subsequent caprices of its owners. It is in this multivalent dimension of apparent authorial intent and scribal response that the layout is realised: the various copies of *Thopas* well exemplify the axiom that the medieval work as it is encountered in the modern critical edition is not, and never was, a single unchanging literary essence, but is rather a concordance of a number of tangible, damageable *things* that have travelled through time, gathering dust on the way.[2]

Group 1 –

Ch; Group 2 – Cn, Ii, Mc, Py, Ra¹; Group 3 – Ad¹, Dl, En³, Ry¹; Group 4 – Bo¹, Gl, Ha³, Ha4, Ht, La, Lc, Mm, Sl².

[2] See Alexandra Gillespie's discussion of Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and the 'dust of books' in "Books," Strohm eds., *Middle English: Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature*, 90-1.

It is surely no coincidence that the four early manuscripts generally considered to be of the highest textual authority - El, Hg, Dd and Gg – represent arguably the clearest realisations of the graphic tail-rhyme layout as it is used in *Thopas*. However, it seems fitting to begin the currrent survey of the *Thopas*-layout with the Ellesmere and Hengwrt manuscripts not just because of their continuing pre-eminence in textual studies of the *Tales*, but also because they both include some interesting differences in their realisations of the layout.

El – El is commonly dated to between 1400 and 1415: on linguistic evidence Michael Samuels suggests a date between 1410 and 1412.[3] Kathleen Scott, after-comparing the border illuminations to those, seemingly by the same artist, from the pre-1397 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Hatton 4, argues that El was unlikely to have been copied after 1405.[4]

The *mise-en-page* of the manuscript was evidently minutely planned and carefully executed: it includes the twenty-three pilgrim miniatures, seventy-one elaborate borders and an extensive system of decorated initials and paraphs. The marginal heads, glosses and incipits and explicits were added by the scribe. As such, El well exemplifies the way the *Thopas* layout is a feature that could function both as an important aspect of the textuality of the tale itself, as well as part of a coherent system of decoration and illumination. The layout includes three distinct columns with all rhyming lines linked by clearly drawn, ruled brackets. The columns for the *a* and *b*-lines had clear guide lines so that the tail-lines are justified, a practice also seen in Hg but rare in the *Thopas* manuscripts generally.

Needless to say, the El *Thopas* enacts a very different reading experience to that which one experiences when the tale is encountered in modern printed editions. Not least in how the tale functions as an aesthetic, as well as generic and formal, contrast to the dense,

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[3] Michael Samuels, "The Scribe of the Hengwrt and Ellesmere Manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* vol. 5 (1983), 49-65.
[4] Kathleen Scott, "An Hours and Psalter by Two Ellesmere Illuminators," in Martin Stevens & Daniel Woodward eds. *The Ellesmere Chaucer: Essays in Interpretation* (San Marino, CA & Tokyo: Huntington Library & Yushodo Co., Ltd., 1995), 87-119.

heavily glossed prose of *Melibee*. However, the El realisation of *Thopas* and its layout is not without any problems: VII 796 ('By dale and eek by downe'), though a *b*-line, is copied in the third column directly below 'In town'. Similarly, as the manuscript is missing VII 805 the following *b*-line 'Neither wyf ne childe' is also copied in the third column.

Hg – The Hengwrt manuscript is generally considered to pre-date El: on linguistic evidence Samuels suggests it was copied between 1402 and 1404, whilst Ralph Hanna argues it may even have been compiled from '*in vita* drafts,' and therefore be from before 1400: the generally accepted date of Chaucer's death.[5] The copying process of Hg was relatively complex and protracted in comparison to that of El: the presence of catchwords at the end of most of the quires suggests that the exemplars were supplied in the form of booklets. The copy of the *Tales* is missing VIII 554-1481 and X 1180 to the end.

Thopas begins on f.213v and, as in El, its *mise-en-page* had clearly been carefully planned by Pinkhurst: the *a* and *b*-line columns are uniform and the brackets are clearly drawn and ruled. A *vigula suspensiva* is used midline in El and Hg in order to indicate a brief medial pause, but only in Hg is a paraph mark $< // >$ used to separate the first two bob lines from the preceding *b*-lines, rather than being placed in an entirely separate column as they are in El. The third and fourth bob-lines are separated from the preceding *b*-lines by a paraph mark $< \P >$ rather than $< // >$. As in El, paraphs are also used in the left-hand margin to mark stanzas.

From the thirteenth century on scribes used $< // >$ to indicate to the rubricator to insert a paraph at this point in the copy, though this symbol was often left to fulfil the role of the paraph itself. The paraph, and thus the two diagonal lines, came to indicate a division within a paragraph or section. Pinkhurst treats the lacuna at VII 805 slightly differently in Hg than in El, where he copied the following *b*-line ('neither wyf ne childe') in the third column, level with the bob-lines. In Hg he places it in the *a*-line column, though perhaps

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[5] Samuels, "The Scribe of the Hengwrt and Ellesmere Manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales*," 46; Ralph Hanna, *The Ellesmere Manuscript of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales: A Working Facsimile* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1989), 74-5.

realising his mistake he does not link the line with a bracket to VII 804 ('For in that contree was ther noon').

Dd – The Dd manuscript, though not copied as a series of booklets in the manner of Hg, also contains evidence that suggests the scribe's access to material was piecemeal. Furthermore, in some instances it appears he may have had access to multiple exemplars for certain tales. The manuscript was copied by a single hand, which Manly & Rickert suggest was that of 'a practiced writer but not a professional scribe.'[6] Though the presence of many of the glosses and aspects of marginalia found in El and Hg suggests that in making this "homemade" book the scribe had access to exemplars from the same sources as those of El and Hg.[7] Dd is commonly dated to the early first quarter of the fifteenth century; on the basis of the anglicana features and the watermarks on the paper stock Mosser dates the manuscript more specifically to between 1401 and 1416.[8] The manuscript contains a copy of the *Tales* with some losses, including the link and opening section of *Thopas*.

Textual openings are marked by two to four-line blue initials with red penwork but otherwise there is no illumination or decoration and the only running heads are those added by a later hand to a selection of tales. However, the scribe does seem to have had an interest in acquiring a detailed system of marginal and interlineal glosses, most of which are contemporaneous to the copying of the tales themselves.[9] There is variation in the marking of stanzas for the rhyme-royal tales: the *Monk's Tale* and the *Prioress's Tale* are copied with a <⸗> 'dash' mark in the left hand margin, whilst the stanzas in *Man of Law's Prologue & Tale* earlier in the manuscript are marked with <¶⸗>, with the larger paraph in red.

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[6] John M. Manly & Edith Rickert eds., *The Text of the Canterbury Tales: studied on the basis of all known manuscripts*, 8 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940), vol. 1, 101 (henceforth 'M&R [vol. no. + pg. no.]').
[7] Tschann, "The Layout of *Sir Thopas*," 5.
[8] Daniel Mosser, *A Digital Catalogue of the Pre-1500 Manuscripts and Incunables of the Canterbury Tales* (Birmingham: Scholarly Digital Editions, 2010), Dd (henceforth 'Mosser, [MS entry]').
[9] Mosser, Dd.

Due to losses the copy of *Thopas* begins at VII 745. The brackets were seemingly quickly drawn and vary greatly in size and shape. However, the scribe uses them consistently throughout the section of the tale that survives. Both *a* and *b*-lines are bracketed, and the bob-lines are linked to the appropriate *b*-line. The *a*-lines are linked by square brackets whilst the *b*-line and bob-line brackets are triangular, often with small decorative notches similar to those used by the scribe in the flourishes added to the < N > that begins the Host's interruption. There is some variation in the treatment of the bob-lines: 'In towne' is separated from the preceding *b*-line by spacing and < // >, as in Hg, but the other bob-lines occupy a separate third column. The scribe slightly adjusts the layout for the 'With mace' bob-line as he runs out of space, but generally the layout is well proportioned. Dd is one of only eight manuscripts that include VII 805, though it would appear to have been added by a later hand in the space left by the original scribe. Four of the eight manuscripts that include the line are in Group One: Dd, En¹, Ds¹ and Ch.

Gg – Though damaged and incomplete, Gg is an important manuscript as it represents an early attempt to collect Chaucer's major poetical works in one volume. Gg is generally dated slightly later than El, Hg and Dd, though handwriting evidence and the presence of the series of pilgrim miniatures suggest an upper limit of around 1430.[10] Gg is of high textual importance, representing 'the El tradition without the El editing'.[11]

Troilus & Criseyde, the *Tales*, the *Legend of Good Women* and the *Parliament of Foules* are copied consecutively, with the Chaucerian works followed by Lydgate's *Temple of Glass* and the accompanying *Supplicacio Amantis*. Though these folios have now been lost, the *Tales* was separated from *Troilus* by at least one full page illustration and either blank leaves or leaves containing additional material.[12] The other items in the manuscript are not separated in this manner, indicating the *Tales* were considered to be a single cohesive work. Within the *Tales*, each prologue and tale is marked by an illuminated border accompanying the opening initial. Furthermore, the placement of pilgrim

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[10] Mosser, Gg.
[11] M&R I.176.
[12] M.B. Parker & R. Beadle, *The Poetical Works of G. Chaucer: A Facsimile of Cambridge University Library Gg.4.27* (London: D.S. Brewer, 1980), 42.

miniatures in the position usually reserved for 'narrative picture[s]' emphasises 'the nature of the tales as major units in a narrative sequence'.[13]

Unfortunately *Thopas* is one of the tales with folios now missing, with the text ending on f.324. In what remains, the scribe divided the tale into two fitts: a diagonal line on f.324v by the scribe marks a guide to the rubricator to insert a paraph mark at that point.[14] The layout is consistent throughout and the bob-lines occupy a separate third column.

Ad³ – Ad³ also dates from the second quarter of the fifteenth century and contains a disordered copy of the *Tales* from I 154 to X 472. The elaborate glossing apparatus of Ad³ is closely related to that of El.[15] *Thopas* begins on f.166 with a two-line blue initial with red penwork. As in El there are alternating red and blue paraph marks in the left margin to mark stanzas. Generally the manuscript is alongside El and Dd in terms of the consistency of the layout: the 'In londe' bob-line bracket is slightly misshapen as the scribe runs out of space, but otherwise the layout appears carefully planned and clearly executed. The scribe used a period to separate the first bob-line from the preceding *b*-line, and to separate 'for in that contree…' from 'nethyr wyf…', which are both copied on the same line with the omission of VII 805.

Ad³ is closely linked to Ha5 - which does not utilise any form of graphic tail-rhyme - and Manly & Rickert suggest they were perhaps copied from the same exemplar.[16] It seems that this exemplar was sparse in terms of glosses, rubrics and paraphs, prompting the scribe to drawn on a secondary exemplar in which these elements were more plentiful. It was perhaps the case that this secondary exemplar included a copy of *Thopas* in graphic tail-rhyme, whereas his original source did not.

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[13] *Ibid*.

[14] *Ibid*, 43: 'Unfortunately, though clear in the manuscript itself, [the paraphs] are scarcely visible in the facsimile.'

[15] Mosser, Ad³.

[16] Steven Partridge, "Designing the page", in eds. Alexandra Gillespie & Daniel Wakelin, *The Production of Books in England 1350-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 92; M&R II 70-1.

En¹ – The dating of En¹ is unclear, Manly & Rickert suggest a date between 1430 and 1450,[17] though there is little internal evidence. Mosser tentatively dates the manuscript to the second quarter of the fifteenth century on the basis that the cursiveness of the hands suggests a date later than that of Dd, which was seemingly copied from the same exemplar.[18] It is interesting to note, in the context of the evident precariousness of this element of *Thopas*, that whilst the two scribes of En¹ seem to have dropped all marginal glosses as well as some headings they would have found in their exemplar,[19] they have taken the time and effort to include the graphic tail-rhyme layout of *Thopas*.

The manuscript contains only the *Tales*, defective from X 1084 with the missing text resupplied in the eighteenth century. The manuscript is not illuminated and there are no running titles or glosses. The only decorative features are a seven-line blue initial with red penwork at the start of the text, three-line blue initials with red penwork at the start of each tale, and two-line initials to mark some other textual divisions. In the rhyme-royal sections a short horizontal line with small flourishes in the left-hand margin is used to mark stanzas.

In *Thopas*, beginning on f.180, the *b*-lines are not linked by brackets and those that link the *a*-lines were not ruled and have been quickly drawn as the scribe copied the tale. Indeed, the bracket that links VII 715 to 716 appears to emanate from the cross of the final –t of 'gent' and connects to the final –t of 'turnament.' The bob-lines do not occupy an additional column as in El and Ad³ but, like Hg, are separated from the preceding *b*-line by a *virgula suspensiva*. Though the scribe is not consistent in this respect: 'with mace' is not separated at all from the preceding *b*-line, whilst 'Til on a day' (VII 918), though an *a*-line, is copied as though it were a bob-line. As noted above, En¹ is one of only a handful of manuscripts that includes VII 805.

Ph¹ – Ph¹ consists of only two surviving quires, containing a fragment of *The Pardoner's Tale* (VI 831-968), *The Shipman's Tale*, the *Shipman-Prioress* link (VII 435-452), *The*

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[17] M&R I.130.
[18] Mosser, En¹.
[19] Partridge, "Designing the Page," 93.

Prioress's Tale, the *Prioress-Thopas* link, *Thopas*, the *Thopas-Melibee* link, *Melibee* (with some leaves lost), a fragment of *The Parson's Tale* (X 587-1080) and the *Retraction*. Nevertheless, what remains is of high textual value: the manuscript is close to Gg, though lacks some many of the accidental variants therein.[20]

The precise dating of Ph¹ has proved problematic. Manly & Rickert suggest 1450-70, predominantly on the evidence of the language and handwriting, though Mosser suggests that the paper-stock may allow for a date in the second quarter of the fifteenth century.[21] The manuscript is relatively small, measuring approximately 27cm by 19cm, with the text of the *Tales* copied in two columns to a folio in a small neat anglicana hand. It is undecorated and does not include any illuminations or signs of a coherent process of supervision.

The *Prioress's Tale* is copied with a gap between each of the stanzas, as is the prologue to *Thopas*. The scribe begins *Thopas* around half-way down the second column of what is now f.5v, but on the following folio the original two column layout of the manuscript is altered in order to allow for the *Thopas*-layout to stretch all the way across the page. After the truncated opening few lines the scribe attempted to copy the tale in two uniform columns (comparable to Gg) but these are not as exact as in Hg and El. Ph¹, like En¹, clearly exemplifies the way in which some scribes considered the *Thopas* layout to be an important *textual* and formal feature of the tale, rather than a dispensable element of decoration or *ordinatio* like running heads or decorated initials.

Ch – Ch includes, alongside a version of the *Tales* that includes the spurious *Gamelyn* and *Ploughman's Tale,* Hoccleve's *Plowman's Prologue & Tale*, as well as Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* and *The Churl and the Bird*. The manuscript dates from sometime in the third quarter of the fifteenth century and there is evidence that the copying of the *Tales*

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[20] M&R I.416.
[21] *Ibid*, 415. Mosser, Ph¹.

was punctuated by a lengthy hiatus.[22] Ch was copied by an unidentified scribe with additions by the 'Morganus Scribe' from f.228v to 231, and f.277 to 281v.[23]

Despite its relative lateness Ch is of a good textual tradition, it was carefully copied and has been little edited. It is one of few surviving manuscripts of the *Tales* to include a title: "Incipit tractatus Galfridus Chaucer de Gestis Peregrinorum versus Cantuariam" (f.1). The manuscript was seemingly made up from a variety of exemplars including Ad³, Hg and El. Interestingly though, in a number of tales, including *Thopas* and *Melibee*, it seems to include a number of independent variants.[24]

Incipits and explicits are in red and textual divisions are marked by one to five-line initials in red without flourishing. The *Prioress's Tale* and the prologue to *Thopas* are copied with the same <⌐> stanza markers in the left margin as are seen in Bo² and Dd. *Thopas* begins at f.136. Like Dd the brackets vary in shape: those linking the *a*-lines are commonly square with small flourishes, whilst those linking the *b*-lines and the bob-lines with the appropriate *b*-line are often triangular. The bob-lines are copied in a distinct third column.

Ld¹ – Ld¹, which dates from the middle of the fifteenth century, contains a badly mutilated version of the *Tales* with the majority of the losses resupplied in the seventeenth century: on the leaf supplying l.1-66 of the *General Prologue* is the inscription 'Liber Guilielmi Laud Archiepi Cantuar et Cancellarij Universitatis Oxon 1635.' On the first folio there is also an interesting seventeenth century table comparing the contents and tale order of the manuscript to 'The order of the Printed'. In the list under 'The Order of this book manuscript' there is a bracket around numbers twenty and twenty-one: 'Of Thopas' and 'Chaucer'.

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[22] See Mosser, Ch.
[23] Linne Mooney, Simon Horobin & Estelle Stubbs eds. *Late Medieval English Scribes* (http://www.medievalscribes.com, ISBN 978-0-9557876-6-9). Accessed January 10, 2011.
[24] See M&R I.87-8.

The manuscript includes a relatively extensive system of illumination: prologues are marked with three to four line gold initials on a blue base with red fill and penwork, whilst tales are introduced by four line blue and red initials on a gold base with gold trefoils and foliage. Running titles in red with a blue paraph mark are also present throughout. In the rhyme-royal tales stanzas are marked by alternating blue and red parpahs.

Thopas begins on f.227 with a three-line decorated initial with gold and red and blue flourishes. Ld¹ is a good example of the possible variation in bracket design and placement of bob-lines, particularly in comparison to the carefully planned column divisions and ruled brackets of the likes of El and Ad³. The b-lines are not bracketed but generally the layout is well executed in regards to the limited space the scribe had to work with. '[Wt my] mace' and '[þurth þi] mawe' are placed between the *b*-lines in the right hand column, rather than in a separate third column. 'In londe' is copied on the same line as the preceding b-line but is separated from it by a double *punctus*, as in Hg (see Appendix pg. i).

Ra³ - Ra³ dates from the third quarter of the fifteenth century. The manuscript contains a mutilated copy of the *Tales.* The loss of a number of quires from the start of the manuscript suggest that at one stage something else preceded the *Tales*, with Manly and Rickert suggesting this space would have been large enough to accommodate '*Troilus*, the *Legend of Good Women*, and more than 450 line of minor poems'.[25] The hand has been identified as the 'Devonshire Scribe', the copyist of the Devonshire manuscript of the *Tales* as well as copies of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* and Gower's *Confessio Amantis*.

The manuscript is relatively large, measuring 40.5 by 25.5 centimetres, with a writing area of 24.5 by 12 centimetres. The pages have clearly been trimmed, particularly noticeably at the top, but the margins are still remarkably wide.[26] Ra³ is elaborately illuminated by two hands, the first from the beginning of the manuscript to f.183 and by a

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[25] M&R I.466.
[26] *Ibid*, 461. See Mosser, Ra³, for images, particularly that of f.142.

more accomplished second hand thereafter. Each prologue, tale and link begins with a line of capitals and there are demi-vinets and decorated initials in the two hands throughout, as well as two miniatures. The first, by the initial illuminator, represents the Friar at the beginning of his tale. The other, by the second illuminator, is before *Melibee* and probably represents Melibeus rather than Chaucer.[27]

Though the manuscript is of relatively high textual value, there seems to have been a certain amount of confusion in regards to what the tales were called.[28] Three tales are called 'Merchant's Tales'/*fabula mercatoris*: the *Merchant's Tale* itself, the *Shipman's Tale* and the *Franklin's Tale*. The *Shipman's Tale* is about a merchant, whilst it may be the case that the thematic echoes from the *Merchant's Tale* were enough for the scribe to mark the *Franklin's Tale* as such as well. Furthermore, some tales are named by narrator whilst others are marked by subject: the *Knight's Tale*, for example, is 'Theseus, Arcyte, Palamon'. Furthermore, there are some interesting textual additions and variations in the Ra³ copy of *Thopas*. The prologue is missing entirely, as is that for the *Nun's Priest's Tale*.

The brackets in *Thopas* are clearly and carefully drawn, though they are not of a uniform design and the *b*-lines are only linked by brackets in the three stanzas that maintain the bob-lines. 'In towne' (VII 793) is not differentiated from the preceding *b*-line, whilst 'In londe' (VII 887) is omitted. Also, whilst '[Through] thy mawe' (VII 823) is copied in the bob-line column the scribe does not draw in the bracket linking to its following rhyme as he does so for 'So wilde' and 'With mace'. The omission of VII 805 results in a three-pronged bracket linking lines VII 800, 801 and 804.

Strangely, the scribe continued his use of graphic tail-rhyme into the Host's interruption, though as this is in couplets the effect is somewhat confusing, with lines that do not rhyme bracketed. It therefore seems unlikely that the scribe was attempting to continue the joke of Chaucer's brackets, as in some of the Group Three manuscripts discussed

[27] *Ibid*, 464.
[28] See *Ibid*, 465.

below in which only the Chaucer-pilgrim's responses during Harry's interruption are accompanied by brackets.

Group 2 –

The differences between those manuscripts in Group One, in particular Hg and En¹, and the five manuscripts that comprise Group Two are relatively small. These manuscripts copy the tale in two columns with brackets throughout but either do not differentiate the bob-lines from the preceding *b*-line, omit some or all of the bob-lines, or, as is particularly noticeable in Ii and Ra¹, conflate the bob-lines with the preceding *b*-lines in order to maintain regular asymmetric *aab* rhyme units throughout the tale.

Cn – Cn, which alongside the *Tales* contains a "Chronicle of the Saints and Kings of England" and Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* and *The Churl and the Bird*, was likely copied by two professional scribes under close supervision.[29] The manuscript is dated around 1450, though the section of the *Tales* between f.1 and f.175v, which includes *Thopas* and *Melibee*, was likely copied sometime earlier than this, with the manuscript likely copied from the same exemplar as the common ancestor of Dd.[30]

Thopas is copied in two columns throughout with brackets linking only the *a*-lines. These have been drawn in quickly by the scribe as he copied the tale: as in En¹ the horizontal line of the bracket occasionally even appears to run on from the bar of a < t > at the end of an *a*-line. All the bob-lines are present but they not differentiated from the preceding *b*-line in any way. There are no illuminations and the only decoration is the slight flourishing of capital letters by the first scribe, who copies up to f.175v. Furthermore, small < ⫪ > marks are used only occasionally to mark stanza divisions, such as in the *Prioress's Tale*.

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[29] Mosser, Cn.
[30] Mosser, Dl; M&R I.63.

Ii – Ii dates from the second quarter of the fifteenth century, with the extensively edited copy of the *Tales* making up the majority of what remains of the manuscript, followed only by a one folio list of 'the occacions and verry causes of the grete Inco[n]venyentis and Mishyfes that falle in this land in the daies of kyng Edward the ijde kyng Richard the ijde kyng harry the vjth <and kyng Edward...xth yere of his Reigne>' and a B-text version of *The Long Charter of Christ* on f.238-40. The stanzas of the rhyme-royal tales and the *Thopas* prologue are marked by small < // > in the left margin. Running heads and glosses are in the rubric and are marked by gold or blue paraph marks. Textual divisions are marked by alternating two-line initials of red with blue penwork and gold with brown penwork.

Thopas begins on f.186 and as in the rest of the *Tales* there are numerous emissions and emendations. 'So wild' and 'In londe' are omitted, 'In town' is not differentiated from the preceding *b*-line, nor are '[Wt] mace' and 'into thy mawe.' Ii represents a particularly idiosyncratic realisation of the graphic tail-rhyme layout. The design of the brackets is unique: rather than single straight lines each bracket is instead made up of multiple small semi-circular lines. Furthermore, the *b*-lines are not bracketed and in order to avoid rubbing out half of the guideline on each folio to place the *b*-lines between the lines of the preceding couplet, the scribe simply copied each *b*-line on the same line as the second line of that couplet. Again though, it is interesting that the scribe perseveres with a two-column layout at all, having simplified the bob-line stanzas.

Mc – Mc contains a mutilated and irregularly ordered copy of the *Tales* - terminating during the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* – with losses at the beginning and end. The manuscript was copied between 1430 and 1460. In Fragment VII its manuscript affiliations are variable: in *Thopas* it is close to Ry[1], whilst *Melibee* is mainly with Sc and Tc[1].[31] The manuscript was copied by a single professional hand with few corrections or traces of supervision. Prologues and tales are marked by blue initials with red penwork. There are no running titles and the spaces left for incipits and explicits have only partially been filled by a sixteenth century hand, with 'Cawsers prolouge' before *Melibee*. Small

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[31] M&R I.357.

< ⊩ > marks are used to mark rhyme-royal stanzas and there are alternating red and blue paraphs in *Melibee*.

Thopas begins on f.73v and is copied throughout in a two-column layout with relatively carefully drawn square brackets linking the *a*-line couplets. The scribe has some difficulty with spacing, particularly on the verso folios: on f.73v VII 747 is copied underneath the preceding couplet, likewise for VII 841 at the bottom of f.74v. There are also some scribal errors: VII 732 is omitted whilst the following line is copied twice. The treatment of the bob-lines varies: 'In towne', 'So wylde' and '[Wt] mace' are copied as part of the preceding *b*-line, whilst 'Thy mawe' and 'In londe' are omitted. Interestingly, *Thopas* finishes at the end of the second fitt, though unlike in Ry¹ the scribe does not seem to have left any space for the rest of the tale.

Ra¹ - Ra¹ is textually very close to Mc and may have been copied from it. It contains a mutilated version of the *Tales*, beginning during the *Knight's Tale*. The Ra¹ scribe has supplied spurious lines where Mc has omissions.[32] Manly and Rickert date the manuscript to 1450-60, though an earlier date range of 1425 to 1450 is suggested by Stubbs, Mooney and Horobin.[33] Like Ii, the copy of *Thopas* is heavily edited, with numerous emendations. The third fitt is missing entirely, with Harry Bailey's interruption following VII 890, which in this instance reads 'To telle hit I wol founde.' The bob-line stanzas are reorganised in order to maintain an *aabaab* rhyme scheme throughout the *Tale*.

Again, though the text itself is heavily edited the scribe still organises the tale in two columns with brackets throughout. These are carefully and clearly drawn and the spacing is good, though the *b*-lines are left unlinked. In addition to the brackets, the six-line stanzas are marked by alternating red and blue initials in the left margin. These are also used to mark the rhyme-royal stanzas of the *Clerk's Tale*, the *Prioress's Tale* and the *Monk's Tale* and elsewhere to mark some textual divisions.

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[32] M&R I.451.

[33] *Ibid* & Linne Mooney, Simon Horobin & Estelle Stubbs eds. *Late Medieval English Scribes* (http://www.medievalscribes.com, ISBN 978-0-9557876-9). Accessed January 10, 2011.

Py – Py was copied between 1460 and 1480 by the Hammond scribe, a prolific mid to late fifteenth scribe who also copied much of Ry¹ and Hl², as well as other collections of works by Chaucer, Lydgate and Hoccleve. Py contains an extensively edited copy of the *Tales*, terminating at X.1062. The manuscript was likely produced later than Ry¹; the variety of textual affiliations during the copy of the *Tales* suggests that in the time between the copying of the two manuscripts a number of other *Tales* manuscripts had become available for comparison. Generally, Py seems to have been derived, through a number of intermediaries, from a manuscript akin to Hg, though at various other points it agrees with a wide range of other manuscripts, with as many as twenty variants identifiable.[34]

The manuscript begins with a four-line blue initial with red penwork and a blue and red border decoration, elsewhere there are blue initials of two to three lines to mark prologues and tales. The stanzas of the rhyme-royal tales and the *Thopas* prologue are marked by a $< // >$ in the left margin. *Thopas* begins on f.256 and is copied throughout in a two-column layout with unruled brackets linking the *a*-lines. Some of the *b*-lines on the verso folios extend perilously close to the binding, but generally the reduced layout is relatively accomplished. However, the text itself has been much edited and there are noticeable losses: VII 803 to 806 are omitted, as are lines 842 to 844 and 917. As in Ra¹ the bob-lines are incorporated into the preceding *b*-line, though 'In londe' is missing entirely.

Group 3 –

Group Three consists of four manuscripts, two of which are closely related: En³ being an earlier copy of the 'eccentric ancestor' also used, for the most part by the same scribe, in the copying of Ad¹.[35] As is discussed in the previous chapter, the copying of a graphic tail-rhyme text could cause a variety of headaches for scribes. The manuscripts in Group

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[34] M&R I.441 & II.368.
[35] M&R II.73.

Three well exemplify some of these problems, and it is telling that the scribe of En³ makes mistakes in bracketing lines even whilst copying the tale in a reduced one-column layout. However, as in the versions of *The Reeve's Tale* in which scribes add additional northernisms to extend Chaucer's linguistic joke, these manuscripts also exemplify a willingness on the part of scribes to extend the joke of Chaucer's brackets beyond the confines of *Thopas* and into the *Melibee*-link.

En³ – En³ dates from around 1470 and contains, alongside the *Tales*, a copy of Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* and a badly mutilated "The cronekelys of Sent[ys] & kyng[ys] of yngelond". The manuscript is not decorated or illuminated; a six-line space has been left for a decorated initial at the start of the *General Prologue* but this has not been executed. Though, as in Ad¹, the scribe does show a certain amount of interest in displaying stanzaic forms: the rhyme-royal tales are copied in distinct seven line stanzas, as is the prologue to *Thopas*.

Thopas begins on f.190v and is copied in a single column with faintly drawn square brackets until f.192, where, with the start of both a new folio and the third fitt, the scribe switches to a two-column layout (see Appendix pg. ii). Before this switch the scribe had made a number of errors in bracketing rhyming lines, particularly in instances where stanzas are split between two pages (e.g. f.191-191v). In the second bob-line stanza VII 805 is missing and the scribe did not leave any space for it to be added later. As such, VII 804 is followed by a faint horizontal line, with the scribe clearly quickly realising he did not have anything to connect it to (see Appendix pg. ii). Like 'So wilde,' 'With mace' and 'Thy mawe' are copied to the right of the main column and are linked by brackets to the appropriate *b*-line. 'In londe' is also copied in a separate column to the right but is not linked with a bracket to VII 890.

As the switch to the two-column layout only occurs at the start of the third fitt the scribe does not have to contend with any more bob-lines. The design of the brackets is the same in this section as it was earlier in the tale. It does not appear that *Melibee* was copied before *Thopas*, which could potentially explain the sudden switch to a two column layout

as an attempt to condense the tale into a smaller space. Rather, it seems the scribe was simply following his exemplar, which itself may have been drawn from a number of sources.

Ad¹ – Ad¹ was copied by the same scribe as En³ until f.229, from which point another hand copies until f.425v, including *Thopas* which occupies f.234 to f.237v.[36] The copy of the *Tales* is followed by Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*. The first page of the *General Prologue* (f.2) is elaborately decorated with a six-line initial on gold, with extensive border decorations. Elsewhere prologues and tales are marked by three to four-line blue initials with red penwork.

Thopas begins on f.234 and as in En³ the scribe switches to a two-column layout at the start of the third fit on f.237. The scribe of this section of Ad¹ seems somewhat more comfortable with the layout than the En³ scribe; the brackets are still unruled and relatively faintly drawn in comparison to the text, but the scribe experiments with the type of curved brackets seen in Group One manuscripts such as El and there are none of the erroneously drawn lines or unconnected brackets seen in En³. As in Ry¹, the scribe extends the bracketing joke beyond the confines of the tale: the first lines spoken by the Chaucer-pilgrim in response to Harry Bailey's interruption are bracketed. Again, it is interesting that in Ad¹ the scribe, despite seeming relatively comfortable with a single-column layout, follows his exemplar in shifting to a two-column layout at the start of the third fitt.

Ry¹ - Ry¹, dating from around 1460, contains a variety of material: a mutilated copy of the *Tales* is followed by two works by fifteenth century lawyer John Fortescue, an unattributed poem "The Balet of the Kynge" written for Edward IV's return to London in 1471, a recipe for a toothache remedy, and a copy of the "Boke of Kervyng & Nortur" by John Russell. The copy of the *Tales* was clearly drawn from a variety of sources, a fact well exemplified by the fragmented version of *Thopas*. However, the Ry¹-*Thopas* is of

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[36] These two hands are contemporary and the affiliation appears to remain unchanged, M&R I.30.

particular interest as it exemplifies, like many of the Group Four manuscripts discussed below, how the graphic tail-rhyme layout could be added later in a reduced form.

The Hammond scribe originally copied the tale in a single column until f.241 - and at the same point in the text as En³ and Ad¹ switch from a one-column to two-column layout - at which point he left half of that folio and around two-thirds of f.241v blank, the text resuming with "Here endithe the tale of sir thopas by Chaucer / and begynnythe þe prolog of melibe & prudence," followed by the Host's interruption.

A later fifteenth century hand then added both the relatively neatly drawn *a*-line brackets with flourishes and the paraph marks at the end of the *b*-lines[37] (see Appendix pg. iii), as well as the third fitt of *Thopas* for which the Hammond scribe left space for on f.241 and 241v.[38] However, this later scribe copies the third fitt in a two-column layout, leaving the two-thirds of f.241v blank. The third hand also extends the joke of the brackets as he adds them in a modified, three pronged form, to the Host's interruption.

Dl – Dl, like Ry¹, contains a wide array of material drawn from a variety of sources.[39] The *Tales* is copied alongside sections of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, the "*Speculum Misericordie*", the "Story of the adulterous Falmouth Squire", "Parthenope of Blois", "The Visions of Tundale" and fragments of "Iacob and Joseph" and "The Gast of Gy". The manuscript dates from the third quarter of the fifteenth century.

Along with Mm, Dl is one of only two manuscripts amongst the twenty-nine discussed here that utilises a coherent system of brackets to mark verse form elsewhere in the *Tales*, and generally it seems to be a manuscript in which the scribe had an interest in conveying poetic form through aspects of *mise-en-page*. The *General Prologue* is copied with thickly drawn square brackets throughout and *The Knight's Tale* continues this bracketing until I 964. The brackets then reappear from I 1683 to I 1794 but are then

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[37] Linne Mooney, Simon Horobin & Estelle Stubbs eds. *Late Medieval English Scribes* (http://www.medievalscribes.com, ISBN 978-0-9557876-6-9). Accessed January 10, 2011.
[38] See Mosser, Ry¹ for a high-resolution image of f.241.
[39] M&R I.113: 'Though the MS looks like a shop work, its contents suggest that it was made to order for a patron who chose the contents of his "library" according to his own ideas.'

absent until the *Physician's Prologue and Tale* later in the manuscript. Here too they are only used partially, ceasing at line VI 228. The copy of Gower's *Nabugodonosor* also uses overlapping brackets in order to convey the quatrain rhyme scheme. Rhyme-royal tales and prologues are copied with a gap between each stanza.

Unlike En³, Ad¹ and Ry¹, the Dl *Thopas* is initially copied in a two-column layout. However, the scribe only copies the tale in this manner for the two-thirds of a column *Thopas* occupies on f.104, switching to a partial, single column, graphic tail-rhyme layout similar to that of En³ at the start of f.104v. This layout continues until the end of the tale. However, even in this reduced form, Dl is a good example of the problems bracketing tail-rhyme stanzas could cause for scribes. The stanza beginning at VII 807 ('Til ther came a greet geaunt') is bracketed wrongly: 807 is joined to 810 rather than 808, which is joined to 811 (see Appendix iv). This leaves VII 809 and 812 linked, creating an overlapping and confusing sequence of brackets that do not map onto the rhyme schme itself.

Bob-lines 'In towne' and 'So wylde' are not differentiated from the preceding *b*-line. 'Wt mace', 'On thy mawe' and 'In londe' are differentiated by virtue of being copied to the right of the main text, but the first two are misplaced: they are copied on the same line as the following *a*-line, where they should be a line higher. The scribe clearly recongnised this error as 'In londe' is copied correctly on the same line as the preceding *b*-line. At the end of the tale the scribe accentuates the Host's interruption by drawing in the bracket that Harry will not let Geoffrey complete. This may have been intentional, as in the case of the continuation of brackets during the Host's interruption in Ad¹, though bearing in mind the errors the Dl scribe makes earlier in the tale, as well as the range of exemplars the manuscript is copied from, he may have thought there really was more to come.

Group 4 –

In those manuscripts in Groups One and Two in which *Thopas* was copied in a two column layout it is clear that the scribe accounted for the layout as the tale was copied.

However, in these manuscripts, in which the tale is copied in a single column and the use of brackets is often partial, it is more difficult to tell at what stage in the copying of the manuscript, and by whom, this reduced form of graphic tail-rhyme has been added.

Ha³ - Ha³ represents an attempt to collect a variety of 'secular literature' into a single manuscript.[40] Alongside the *Tales*, *Anelida* and some of Chaucer's shorter poems the manuscript contains selections of works by Lydgate, Hoccleve and Gower, as well as mutilated copy of a Middle English prose *Brut*. The manuscript was begun in the 1450s or 1460s and work on it continued until late in the fifteenth century. With such a protracted copying process it is no surprise the manuscript contains a range of hands, though there is disagreement as to the exact number: Manly and Rickert suggest 'six to nine or more,' whilst Daniel Mosser suggests five.[41]

The provenance of the manuscript can be traced to William Stoughton, the cellarer of a house of Austin Canons at the abbey of St. Mary de Pratis (Pré), Leicester.[42] The copy of the *Tales* has been heavily edited to reflect this initial readership: the *Pardoner's Tale* ends at VI 918 – that is, before he attempts to hawk his relics to the pilgrims – and the final scene in the garden of the *Merchant's Tale* is omitted, as is, unsurprisingly, the whole of the *Shipman's Tale*. With the large number of scribes involved in copying the manuscript there is a predictable variation in the marking of stanza divisions: the *Man of Law's Tale* is copied with alternating red and blue paraph marks in the left margin to mark the rhyme-royal stanzas, but this is not mirrored in the copying of the *Prioress's Tale*. Whilst the later *Monk's Tale* – also in rhyme-royal – includes relatively elaborate two to three-line initials to mark the start of each stanza.

Thopas begins at f.98v and is copied with brackets throughout, of a design unique in the surviving manuscripts. The *a*-lines are bracketed as is usual but the *b*-lines are linked to this preceding couplet bracket with another bracket (see Appendix pg. v). This layout is interesting in that it gives a clear graphic representation of the asymmetric *aab* blocks

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[40] M&R I.207.
[41] *Ibid*, 209. Mosser, Ha³.
[42] M&R I.214.

that make up a tail-rhyme stanza, though at the expense of a sense of the tail-rhyme verse (alternating red and blue paraphs mark stanzas in the *Man of Law's Tale* but these are absent elsewhere). It was perhaps the case that the scribe who copied *Thopas* was either working from an exemplar in which the tale was copied in graphic tail-rhyme, or was familiar with the layout himself and, in the limited space available in the manuscript's two-column layout, intended to convey a graphic impression of how the *b*-lines are linked to the preceding couplet. With this reduced layout the bob-lines do cause the scribe some problems, particularly in combination with the missing line at VII 805. Here, 'So wilde' is copied on a line of its own after VII 806 rather than VII 802, with the scribe adding a hopeful 'one' to the end of 'Neythere wyf ne chylde' in order to manufacture a rhyme with VII 804. In contrast, 'In towne' and 'With mace' are appended to the preceding *b*-line, whilst 'In londe' is omitted.

Ha4 – Ha4 is one of the earliest surviving manuscripts of the *Tales*, dating from the first quarter of the fifteenth century, and perhaps even sometime during the first decade thereof. The manuscript contains a complete copy of the *Tales* with the spurious *Gamelyn* also present. The manuscript is extensively illuminated: there is a full border on f.1 in blue, red, white and gold; prologues and links are marked by 3-line gold initials with blue and red, also often with white highlighting and black sprays with gold trefoils; tales are introduced with four to six-line initials with borders with gold and white highlighting. Other textual divisions, such as the descriptions of the pilgrims in the prologue are marked by similarly elaborate two-line initials. Kathleen Scott suggests that one of the limners involved in the production of Ha4, as well as La, was the master limner of El.[43]

Thopas begins on f.203v. The start of the third fitt is marked by a two-line decorated initial, as is the Host's interruption. The copy of *Thopas* therein includes only two brackets: one linking the first two lines of the tale and the other linking lines VII 814 and 815, with 816 copied to the right in a separate column: though this likely represent the addition of an originally erroneously omitted line rather than an attempt at a (very) partial two-column layout. It was perhaps the case that the scribe or rubricator intended to return

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[43] Kathleen L. Scott, "An Hours and Psalter by Two Ellesmere Illuminators," 87-119.

to the tale later in order to add more brackets, though the relatively complete state of the rest of the manuscript's illumination and glossing apparatus might suggest otherwise. However, the bob-lines are differentiated: though 'In towne' is copied as part of the preceding *b*-line, the other bob-lines are written to the right of the main column of text and are preceded by red or gold paraphs with blue penwork, marks that are used elsewhere in the manuscript to denote some minor textual divisions.

La – Like Ha4, La dates from early in the fifteenth century. The manuscript contains a copy of the *Tales* including *Gamelyn* and, added later to the first folio, John Bale's Latin account of 'Galfridus Chaucer'. Like Ha4, La contains a coherent system of illumination and decoration: the *Tales* begin with a ten-line historiated < W > containing a picture of Chaucer; thereafter prologues begin with two to three-line initials and tales with five to six-line initials and border decoration. Running titles and explicits and incipits are copied in red ink throughout and blue and red paraphs mark the descriptions of the pilgrims, change of speakers, and stanzas.

La represents another early manuscript that, though not copied in graphic tail-rhyme as such, does attempt to differentiate *Thopas* through a partial system of brackets. Square brackets similar to those in Gl are used to link rhyming lines between VII 718 and 731 – i.e. the second and third stanzas and the first couplet of the fourth – and then, from the first line on f.190, from VII 757 to 777. The first and last brackets in this section are unconnected, though the brackets then resume at the top of f.190v from VII 800 to 828, not least because the missing line at VII 805 seems to have thrown the scribe and he has to resort briefly to a three-column layout in order to keep the separate lines of the stanza legible (see Appendix vi). Again, the brackets resume at the start of f.191, though this time for the duration of the page, ending VII 893 ('[And] herkeneth to my spelle'). The remaining twenty-five lines of the tale on f.191v are left unbracketed.

The bob-lines are copied to the right of the main column of text, though again 'In towne' is not differentiated in any way. Furthermore, only 'In londe' is accompanied by a paraph

mark, similar to those seen in Ha4 and used elsewhere in La to mark stanzas, change of speakers and some other textual divisions.

Mm – Mm is of particular interest as it is one of few manuscripts of the *Tales* in which the bracketing of rhyming lines occurs in a number of other tales. The manuscript dates from the second quarter of the fifteenth century. Its copy of the *Tales* is unique in its ordering, its numbering of some of the tales seemingly corresponds with a Cp-type exemplar and it perhaps represents an older ordering.[44]

The *Prioress's Tale* - which in Mm is placed early in the *Tales*, beginning on f.64v between the tales of the Shipman and the Monk – provides a particularly good example of the bracketing practice in the manuscript, and how it could quickly be simplified or abandoned. The scribe begins the tale by linking the rhyming lines of each stanza with individual brackets: the two *a*-lines, three *b*-lines and the couplet are separately linked by a system of overlapping brackets. However, from VII 614 this system is reduced: the five *a* and *b* lines are linked by one bracket with nodes for each - resembling the teeth of a comb – with only the couplet maintaining its individual bracket. From VII 684 this system is reduced even further, the scribe simply draws one large bracket around the first five lines and one for the couplet. Interestingly, in the *Man of Law's Tale* the initial overlapping bracketing system is maintained throughout, whilst in the later *Clerk's Tale*, here beginning towards the end of the manuscript at f.140, the scribe moves to the opposite extreme, simply drawing one bracket around all seven lines of the stanza.

In fact, the *Clerk's Tale* marks a more general trend in the manuscript: an attrition in the complexity of the bracketing system that reaches its nadir, ironically in terms of the present discussion, with the last verse tale in the manuscript: *Thopas*. Here, the first folio containing the tale simply has one large bracket between the first and last lines of the folio. The scribe has to adjust this system for f.198v and f.199, those containing the bob-lines, but even here the brackets give no real sense of rhyme scheme other than linking

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[44] Linne Mooney, Simon Horobin & Estelle Stubbs eds. *Late Medieval English Scribes* (http://www.medievalscribes.com, ISBN 978-0-9557876-6-9). Accessed January 10, 2011.

the bob-line – here copied to the right of the main text and also marked by a paraph – to appropriate following *b*-line. Out with these sections the scribe simply returns to drawing brackets around as many lines as possible on the folio.

Mm is clearly a fine example of the fluidity of the bracketing process. Brackets could be used to mark rhyming lines, but seemingly also to simply delineate an individual stanza. Though of course in the case of *Thopas* this use becomes even more amorphous: it is difficult to tell what the scribe's intent was in drawing one large bracket around all the lines on a page. Whether this odd bracketing system was added by the scribe or by a different hand after the text was copied is unclear. Though the incipits and explicits after each prologue and tale are in red and in the scribe's hand, and there is no evidence of the presence of any other scribes.

Lc – Lc dates from the second quarter of the fifteenth century and contains a copy of the *Tales* in two hands identified as the 'Litchfield' and 'Petworth' scribes who also appear to have collaborated in the production of Takamiya MS 45, a copy of the *Gilte Legend* of which only a single leaf survives.[45] The manuscript includes a relatively coherent system of decoration: each tale begins with a four to eight line decorated initial with gold ground with pink, blue, green, white highlights, orange; smaller two-line initials of gold on blue and rose grounds with white highlights mark the beginning of prologues and other significant textual divisions. In the *Man of Law's Tale*, *Clerk's Tale* and *Prioress's Tale* each stanza begins with a small decorated flourished initial. In the *Prioress's Tale* the scribe also leaves a space between the stanzas.

F.206 is missing from the original, with the missing leaf (comprising VII 705-783) resupplied in the late sixteenth century. The scribe may have had to use multiple exemplars for *Thopas*: he begins the Host's interruption on the first line of f.208v, omitting VII 915-8, suggesting he may have already copied the interruption from a separate exemplar before he had finished copying *Thopas* itself. *Thopas* is copied in a single column but with red brackets linking rhyming lines throughout. The bob-lines are

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[45] Mosser, 'Petworth Scribe.'

copied to the right in a separate column though, unlike Ha4 and La, they are also linked to the appropriate rhyming line with a further bracket.

Gl – A scribal colophon in the margin of f.102v enables a precise dating of Gl to January 1476. Alongside a mutilated and largely idiosyncratically ordered version of the *Tales* - beginning at I 353 - Gl also contains a copy of *St. Patrick's Treatise on Purgatory*. The manuscript is interesting not just because of the precise dating and attribution to the Norwich based father and son team of Geoffrey and Thomas Spirling. It also provides evidence of the often ad hoc and piecemeal nature of manuscript production: Gl seemingly represents an attempt by the two scribes to join two sources as they copied the *Tales* initially from Mm and subsequently from an exemplar related to Ra³.

The manuscript includes numerous corrections and blank spaces throughout. Furthermore, the *Shipman's Tale* and *Prioress's Tale* are copied twice, whilst Geoffrey clearly realised after copying the *Purgatory* that the *Clerk's Tale* and *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* had been omitted, and returned to the *Retraction* in the margin of f.102v to write "Be it remembred that the tale o the Clerk o Oxenford and the tale o the Chanons yoman folwen immediatli in the next leef." A scribal rubric in Latin written below is crossed out with "This writyng is drawen for the book of Canterbury is nat yet ended and therfor these woord[es] arn writen in the xij leef folwyng by cause that ij tales arn yet folwyng immediatly" underneath in a later hand. The colophon is then rewritten on f.115v.[46]

The copy of *Thopas* begins in the second column of f.64 and includes bracketing for only part of the tale. The brackets, added by the scribe rather than a later hand, vary in shape and design and are unruled. The brackets are used only in the second column of f.64v: the column containing Chaucer's three consecutive bob-line stanzas. The bob-lines are copied to the right, with the exception of 'In towne' which is not differentiated from the preceding *b*-line and 'In londe', which is omitted. However, 'neyther wife ne childe' (806), 'dwelling in þis place' (816) and 'ffor here þu ſhalte be slawe' (826) are also all copied to the right in this second column, with 816 and 826 also underlined and linked

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[46] Mosser, Gl.

with a bracket to the preceding bob-line (see Appendix vii). Each of these lines is the last line of Chaucer's three successive bob-line stanzas, and that they rhyme with the preceding bob-line clearly lead the scribe to copy them to the right rather than in the main section of the text. The missing line VII 805 results in 804 being split over two lines, with the addition of 'ſo free' to the second half-line ('Ffor in that contree / was there none ſo free') and 'neyther wife ne childe' copied to the right of the other lines and underlined.

Gl is interesting in that the vast majority of the bracketing, and all six instances of lines being written to the right in a separate column, appear on one page and, excepting the 'So wilde' bob-line, in the second column of that page. It may have been the case that the scribe(s) intended to add the rest of the brackets later, but as it survives the extent and use of bracketing is clearly at odds with Mm, from which much of the manuscript was copied.

Sl² – Sl² was made in the last quarter of the fifteenth century, with the paper stock suggesting a date sometime in the 1480s.[47] The manuscript contains a mutilated version of the *Tales*, including *Gamelyn*, with numerous corrections throughout. Manly and Rickert classify it as a 'supervised shop MS': the paper, pigment and ink are cheap, yet the manuscript has been elaborately decorated by the scribe and a later rubricator.[48]

Blue initials of three to five lines mark the opening of prologues and tales and there are red capital strokes throughout. Stanzas are marked in the *Prioress's Tale* and *Thopas Prologue* by small, slightly flourished horizontal lines in the left-hand margin. *Thopas* begins on f.244 and is accompanied by a large running title reading 'Tale of Chaucer.' The tale is copied in a single column but brackets are used to link rhyming lines throughout. The scribe clearly had a certain amount of interest in conveying this feature of the tale: the ink of the brackets, like that of the text, is now badly faded, but the vertical line of each bracket was mirrored by a second line, comparable to the capital strokes, in red. The bob-lines themselves are copied to the right in a separate column,

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[47] Mosser, Sl²
[48] M&R I.513.

though they are not marked by paraphs as in Ha4. 'With mace' is left unconnected, but the other bob-lines are linked to the appropriate rhyming line with a bracket.

Bo¹ – Bo¹ dates from the third quarter of the fifteenth century and contains an almost complete version of the *Tales*. Like Gl, the ancestor of Bo¹ drew its copy of the *Tales* from a variety of sources. This ancestor was also used to copy Ph², which does not differentiate *Thopas* from the other tales. The scribe left space for 3-4 line initials throughout, but these have not been completed. However, the headings of most tales are rubricated and there are alternating red and blue stanza marks and textual divisions, as well as red highlighting of initials.

Thopas begins on f.294v though, as in other Group 4 manuscripts, the use of bracketing is partial and coincides with the start of a new folio at f.295. The brackets are present only on that page, though those at the top and bottom are unconnected, perhaps suggesting they should run on to the preceding and following folios but, as with the main initials, this has not been completed. The brackets themselves are in red, suggesting they may have been added by a later rubricator. Bo¹ is one of relatively few manuscripts outside of those in Group One to recognise 'In town' as a bob-line: it separated from the preceding *b*-line by a space with a small red paraph mark and is also underlined in red. '[Wt] mace' is treated similarly, whereas 'So wild' and 'In londe' are omitted entirely.

Ht – Like Bo¹, Ht dates from the third quarter of the fifteenth century, with a date sometime in the 1450s seemingly most likely.[49] The copy of the *Tales* in Ht is disordered and has been both heavily edited and carelessly copied. The manuscript is extensively decorated with red, blue and gold throughout. Each tale is marked by a demi-vinet and textual divisions are marked by 2-4 line initials. In the rhyme-royal sections stanzas are marked by alternating parpahs in blue with red penwork and gold with blue penwork.

Thopas begins on f.187 and is copied in a single column throughout. Brackets are used throughout the tale; these are clearly drawn in red. For the most part the lines are

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[49] *Ibid*, 251.

correctly bracketed, with only a small number of missing brackets. The bob-lines are either not differentiated from the preceding *b*-line or, as in many of the Group Two manuscripts, have been conflated with the previous line in order to link with an earlier *b*-line. 'Abeyn it ful sowre. /Thy mawe,' for example, becomes 'Abeyn it through þi mawe' and is bracketed with the earlier *b*-line 'Whan I have myn armoure' (VII 819) rather than 'For here thow shalt be slawe' (VII 826). The scribe leaves space for the missing line at VII 805, though this has not been completed.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

It is clear from the preceding survey that those manuscripts that utilise at least some aspects of the *Thopas*-layout archive a wide range of responses to the text. From the coherent and carefully planned realisations of El, Hg, Gg and Ch to the perplexingly non-utilitarian efforts of the Mm scribe, each manuscript well exemplifies the potential plurality of the medieval text. In addition, there are of course twenty-four further manuscripts that do not reproduce the layout in any way. These manuscripts are important not only as they are representative of a significant counter trend in how the tale was experienced in the fifteenth century, but also because it is these manuscripts, rather than their graphic tail-rhyme counterparts, that are invoked in the treatment of *Thopas* in later printed editions of the *Tales*. In Bo² (c.1425), for example, despite the text of *Thopas* being with Hg and Gg, the scribe copies the tale in a single column without brackets. Similarly, in En², also dating from the early second quarter of the fifteenth century, there are no multiple columns or brackets, though stanzas are marked by a paraph in the left margin.

The variation in the treatment of *Thopas* between manuscripts is clear, and there are instances of variation in the implementation of the layout by particular scribes: Adam Pinkhurst treats the bob-lines differently in El and Hg and the Hammond scribe varies between copying the tale in two columns (Py¹) and one (Ry¹), for example. Certain trends do emerge in the copying of the tale though: the conflation of the bob-lines with the preceding *b*-lines in the Group Two manuscripts, for example. In these instances the

scribes maintain the asymmetric three-line units throughout the tale, at the expense of some of its more intricate features. For example, the conflation of the fourth bob-line in Py to 'And yet I hope [pmafay] / That thow with this launcegay / Abeyn ſhal thurgh thi mawe / …' maintains the rhyme of 'mawe' and 'slawe' but, by shifting the modal verb to produce the conflated *b*-line/bob-line 'Abeyn ſhal thurgh thi mawe,' the scribe not only dispenses with the need to reproduce Chaucer's disjunctive three-column layout, but also dispenses with the unexpected syntactic status of 'Thy mawe.'

In his discussion of the scribe of Corpus Christi College MS 198 utilising an additional exemplar to furnish an already largely completed manuscript with additional glosses, paraphs and headings, Stephen Partridge suggests that many scribes may have had 'an interest in accumulating information about how a text could be presented, even if including it seemed somewhat to spoil the consistency and visual appeal which they had otherwise taken pains to achieve,'[50] and it is this type of impulse that seems to be behind many of the reduced versions of the *Thopas* layout in the manuscripts of Groups Three and Four. It is clear, therefore, that these manuscripts archive 'varying…layers of interpretation' in regards to the text they contain.[51]

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[50] Partridge, "Designing the Page," 89.

[51] Ardis Butterfield, "Chaucer and French Manuscript Culture," in Seth Lerer ed. *Reading From the Margins: Textual Studies, Chaucer, and Medieval Literature* (San Marino: Huntington Library Press, 1996), 56.

3.

'Emergent Regimes'

It is clear from the preceding chapter that the transmission of this element of *Thopas* was by no means uniform; in the wide range of scribal responses that we can observe it is evident that it is at once an important feature of the tale itself and an omissible aspect of the materiality of an individual manuscript. However, as Rhiannon Purdie discusses, it seems likely that the use of this layout for *Thopas* originated with Chaucer himself. As suggested in Chapter One above, Chaucer is following an established tradition in using graphic tail-rhyme, but also accentuates its diagrammatic effect, and potential for breakdown of a logical reading order, through the addition of further bob-lines.[1] Had graphic tail-rhyme had been used for *all* tail-rhyme romances, and Chaucer had not added the further 'visual-metrical' joke of the bob-lines, this aspect of *Thopas* would be of little significance. However, though an established tradition, graphic tail-rhyme is by no means common, and through its use Chaucer invokes not just the tail-rhyme romances themselves but also their particular material realisation.[2] Purdie also points to the presence of the layout in the earliest and most authoritative of the *Tales* manuscripts as evidence of its origination with Chaucer, as well as the fact that Adam Pinkhurst copied the tale in graphic tail-rhyme in both El and Hg, despite apparently using different exemplars for each.[3]

Genette's conception of the paratext engages with this sense of what, in the case of *Thopas*, I have called the 'precariousness' of such a feature: of how a paratextual element such as layout may have a distinct *textual* or formal function, yet still sit in some sense both inside and outside of the work itself, particularly delicately placed amongst those negotiations through which all works of literature emerge. Genette's discussion of layout is limited to a brief passage in which he states that 'it is hard to imagine' certain texts by Mallarmé, Apollinaire and Butor deprived of their graphic dimension.[4] Though this brief

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[1] Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, 74-7.
[2] Purdie, "Implications," 268.
[3] *Ibid*, 76 n.44.
[4] Genette, *Paratexts*, 34.

discussion is situated in the chapter on '*publisher's* peritexts,' it is clear that Genette attributes these graphic features to Mallarmé, Apollinaire and Butor themselves, emphasising that 'there are cases in which the graphic realisation is inseparable from the literary intention.'[5]

However, the author-publisher-reader triad that forms the basis of Genette's discussion does not map on to the late medieval manuscript culture that produced Chaucer's texts. As the previous chapter clearly shows, particularly in the case of the Group 4 manuscripts as well as those manuscripts in which the layout is omitted entirely, editorial and scribal responses to this aspect of *Thopas* were by no means fixed, and that to attempt to discuss it solely in terms of authorial intent would be elide a number of important considerations in terms of late medieval literary production and the negotiations between author and scribe that constituted the literary work. Furthermore, Martha D. Rust, amongst others, has examined the ways in which medieval readers generally engaged in a process of 'involved reading,' an ethics of reading that 'promotes an active involvement with written texts,' a form of reader-response that is both imaginative and personally invested, as well as distinctly spatial in its equation of 'ethical readerly engagement with an effort of getting "inside"...textual spaces.'[6] Central to this process of involved reading is what Rust calls the medieval 'codicological consciousness,' a 'bibliographic sensibility' evident in the range of medieval metaphors that suggest 'an interest in seeing the world in terms of a book.'[7]

In the Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Fairfax 16 copy of *The Book of the Duchess*, for example, Rust suggests that the Lombardic initial that begins the narrator's account of his dream represents the kind of textual-visual interdependence that structures medieval reading processes. This combination of initial and the placement of the preceding line 'Loo, thus hyt was thys was my my sweven' (290) in the place of the rubric marks the turn at which the metaphorical self-projection of the narrator into the world of Ceyx and Alcione is mirrored in the text's particular codicological realm: the narrator's falling

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[5] *Ibid.*

[6] Rust, *Imaginary Worlds*, 10-11.

[7] *Ibid*, 14.

asleep on his book and awakening inside another, his passing from 'narrative to codicological systems of representation takes place in a non-metaphorical codicological space as well: on folio 133 verso in Fairfax 16.'[8]

Rust's emphasis is on a triangulation of the actions of author, scribe and reader in a phenomenological space brought forth by the reader's gaze on the physical book.[9] Her concern is therefore not solely with authorial intent in relation to any of those features that she identifies as taking place in the 'manuscript matrix.' Rather, her model provides valuable insights into the ways in which medieval readers, scribes and authors approached the manuscript page as a dynamic interconnection of text, distinctive scribal hands, colours and illuminated initials and images, as well as glosses and commentaries, a 'cross referencing' system of representation in which each element functions as part of a system that combines text and visual signs.[10]

Therefore, in the following discussion I seek to engage with some of the recent work mentioned in my Introduction above that has sought to readdress the relationship between formal analysis and manuscript studies, in order to consider not only the ways in which Chaucer's use of this layout functions in the broader context of Fragment VII of the *Tales*, but also how many of these manuscripts can be discussed in terms that do not simply conceive of the varying treatments of this layout as some kind of lack, but rather as precisely the point of entry whereby literary meaning may be discerned. In doing so I return to some of those manuscripts in which the partiality of the realisation of the *Thopas*-layout provides an opportunity to reflect on ways in which aspects of individual codices have been elided or obscured by printing practices and the editorial and formatting choices of later editors, choices that have domesticated or erased the anomalies of manuscript textuality.

Part of this approach also engages with what Catherine Brown has recently called 'empathic codicology,' a recognition of the potential value in allowing ourselves 'to be

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[8] *Ibid*, 25.
[9] *Ibid*, 9.
[10] *Ibid*.

wounded by the aspects of our primary materials that seem at first blush to be non-meaningful, non-intellectual, non-verifiable.'[11] In the Delamere manuscript, for example, in which the scribe links the wrong lines with brackets and copies other lines in the wrong order, the recursive and recapitulative reading process the manuscript is only supposed to stage becomes a more intrinsic part of that manuscript's textual materiality: an aspect of Dl's realisation of the tale that we might otherwise designate simply as a 'mistake' in fact encodes a variety of further meanings. In some ways, therefore, the following discussion mirrors the movement of 'Chaucers Wordes unto Adam,' in which he foregrounds a stable and authoritative 'nature' for books as "my making," only to immediately let them go, reminding us that each time they are "wryten newe" any 'imaginary order' is 'vulnerable to error and susceptible to 'rape."[12]

"my making"

As is discussed in Chapter One, the notion of 'tradition' is central to the use of graphic tail-rhyme by English romance writers and their scribes during the fourteenth century. In *Thopas* its use is seemingly an attempt at comedy designed for our eyes only: Chaucer's target, Purdie argues, is the '*reading* tastes of those who enjoy Middle English romances.'[13] This is undoubtedly the case, though I feel it is a starting point from which to further examine its place in the context of the broader romance tradition as well as Fragment VII of the *Tales*. The tail-rhyme stanza, the uniquely English tail-rhyme romance and the graphic tail-rhyme layout articulate a sense of tradition that is clearly central to Chaucer's parodic use of these forms in *Thopas*. However, parody does not simply mock: appearing in periods of cultural transition it can, in these junctures, offer tools for both deconstruction and reconstruction, criticism and creativity.[14] *Thopas*, though obviously concerned with the romance genre, well exemplifies the potentially progressive nature of parody: it is certainly not simply 'a ryme' the Chaucer-pilgrim 'lerned longe agoon' (VII 709), but a tale more complex than its 'drasty' surface and

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[11] Catherine Brown, "Manuscript Thinking: Stories by hand," *postmedieval*, 351.

[12] Gillespie, "Books," 89.

[13] Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, 270.

[14] Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989), 98.

apparent generic formality would suggest. However, as in the *Troilus* narrator's frequent claims of ignorance and disavowals of his own knowledge and influence, by couching the Host's interruption in such forceful, bodily terms ('Myn eres aken of thy drasty speche' VII 923), Chaucer is undercutting any explicit mention of authorial intent, whilst all the while engaging in the acts of creative amplification and suppression that mark not only *Troilus* and the *Tales*, but all of his works.

Thus, I seek to examine in the first part of this chapter how Chaucer's use of graphic tail-rhyme adds to the complex, creative parody of *Thopas*,[15] and how in the context of the *Thopas-Melibee* section and Fragment VII of the *Tales* as a whole, its use is incorporated in the more general exploration of ideas of authorship, genre, the potentialities of the written page and the applicability of the English language to the enterprise of the 'poet.' In *Disseminal Chaucer* Peter W. Travis discusses issues of medieval authorship and reception in the context of Chaucer's 'parapoetical environment,' and his concern with how he will be read and, by extension, the very act of reading itself. As in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, the parodic elements of *Thopas*, including its layout, seem intended not simply to mock medieval ways of knowing, but - through a complex play with genre, constant undercutting of expectation and revoking of poetic imaginative continuity - to reveal, and in some senses even to revel in, the problematic nature of interpretation itself. Travis articulates the questions of audience and readership that he sees as central to Chaucer's *ars poetica*, *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, and I quote them here in full as they are questions that are central not just to *Thopas* and *Melibee* as well, but to the whole of the *Tales*:

> Who are my ideal readers? Who are my real readers? How do my readers
> read? Do they detect the differences between irony, parody, and satire? Do
> they read poetry for a message? Do they ever change because of the poetry

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[15] Alan Gaylord suggests a similar approach in his designation of *Thopas* as an 'approximation,' rather than simple imitation, of the English tail-rhyme romance. See "The Moment of *Sir Thopas*: Towards a New Look at Chaucer's Language," *The Chaucer Review* vol. 16 (1982), 311-29.

they read? Do my readers invent my authorial intent? Are my readers my own best fictions? What, in fact *is* the act of reading?[16]

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In my Introduction and Chapter One above I briefly touched-upon the apparent fluidity of medieval conceptions of genre: of how genre and generic statements represent an enabling fiction rather than a rigorous system of more or less discrete entities. In 'Genre without System' Alfred Hiatt discusses how medieval genres, and *romaunce* in particular, can be conceptualised not as linear progressions instituted by texts, but as shifting amalgams that are 'partial, contingent, or retrospective in nature to the point of antiquarianism,' too 'organic, decentred, and unpredictable' to constitute any kind of system.[17]

Hiatt goes on to invoke Derrida's seminal essay "The Law of Genre"[18] in his concept of the moment of the 'ungenre': the sudden appearance of the 'inexplicable' that in some sense destabilises the text (Hiatt's example is the sudden appearance of a 'pyk walwed in galauntyne' in Chaucer's 'To Rosemounde').[19] The use of these moments of ungenre and the invocation of nomenclature act as 'related, and strategic, boundary disturbances,' engaging with the gendered and generative connotations of the term 'genre' itself, and of how 'instead of confining parameters...nomenclature and ungenre, both enfolded, self-contained moments simultaneously inside and outside literature, unsettle expectations but also create new ones.'[20] Hiatt's approach to genre is particularly well suited to considerations of the multiple interpretative levels of *Thopas*: it may be a model of bad verse, but it is a tale Janus faced in its subtly innovative approach to certain romance tropes and narrative expectations. Of course, that *Thopas* is a parody at all is predicated on a perceived coherence of elements in its source material. However, Chaucer's awareness of how he could manipulate the interdependence of generic and formal

[16] Travis, *Disseminal Chaucer*, 14.
[17] Hiatt, "Genre Without System," 291.
[18] Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," *Critical Enquiry* vol. 7 no. 1 (1980), 55-81.
[19] Hiatt, "Genre without System," 291.
[20] *Ibid*.

expectations is clear at multiple points in and between tales - from the downward moral spirals of his successive fabliaux, to the rapid sequence at the start of *Melibee* in which he calls it 'a litel thyng in prose,' 'a moral tale vertuous,' 'a litel tretys,' and 'a murye tale' (VII 937-64) - and it is this type of impulse that structures *Thopas*.

Also implicit in Hiatt's and Derrida's discussions is a consideration formalised by Paul Strohm in his tracing of the origins and meanings of the Middle English term *romaunce*: that any discussion of genre must be concerned with the complex interplay of temporalities at work in its establishment. That is, the manner in which a generic term can precede and follow that which it describes, but also, as is more frequently the case, develop in a 'complex reciprocity' with it.[21] As such, attempts to identify the trajectory of the Middle English romance - its formal origins, as well as the types of works from which it developed and continued to interact – have resulted in a number of exasperated conclusions well exemplified by George Kane's observation that medieval romance can be characterised precisely by its 'refusal to run true to form.'[22] How medieval readers, authors, and scribes, actually conceived of such works clearly must be considered alongside what modern scholars know of both those works that constitute the genre to a greater or lesser extent, and of the development of the generic term *romaunce* in itself.[23]

Of course, all of this is not to suggest that *romaunce* somehow did not exist as a generic category in the medieval period, or that we must approach any instance of its use warily, as potentially 'exactly the opposite of its apparent intention.'[24] Rather that, as Hiatt shows, and as Melissa Furrow examines in detail in *Expectations of Romance*, generic categories cannot necessarily be established through the perceived common properties or boundaries of texts, or by examining genre-systems simply as two-dimensional venn diagrams that overlap at certain points. Instead, genres and generic-statements in the medieval period were strategic, operating 'within expectations, signs and resonances but

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[21] Paul Strohm, "The Origin and Meaning of Middle English *Romaunce*," *Genre* vol. 10 (1977), 1.

[22] George Kane, *Middle English Literature: A Critical Study of the Romances, the Religious Lyrics & Piers Plowman* (London: Methuen, 1951), 9.

[23] See Strohm "The Origin and Meaning of Middle English *Romaunce*," & "Middle English Narrative Genres," *Genre* vol. 13 (1980), 379-88.

[24] Hiatt, "Genre Without System," 291.

not codes and rules.'[25] So whilst I broadly agree with Alan Gaylord that the 'true *matière*' of *Thopas* is '"the English poet" rather than the "minstrel romances,"'[26] in order to understand fully Chaucer's approximation of the romance genre it is necessary, following Furrow, Hiatt and Cannon, to recuperate these previously much derided poems, both in terms of their often self-conscious generic instability, as well as the way in which the very term *romaunce* enfolds considerations not just of content and stylistic features but also of the presentation and materiality of these works.

In many ways it is difficult to avoid reading Middle English romance back through the parodic lens of *Thopas*, with the writer who closes the medieval era predetermining some of our expectations of that era's texts. That is, there has perhaps been a tendency by contemporary critics to reconfigure Chaucer's use of its generic and formal characteristics as a sign of romance's arrival at what Hans Robert Jauss calls a 'historical end...definable in terms of formal ossification, automatization, or a giving up or misunderstanding of 'the rules of the game."[27] However, to do so is to ignore, at least in part, the complex origins of the term as well as the range of uses to which it was put by the close of the fourteenth century. Paul Strohm traces the origins of the term to its use by Benoît and Wace during the twelfth century to designate simply that they were writing their works, on the fall of Troy and the history of Britain respectively, in the vernacular. However, both writers also use the term in a more particularised sense. Wace refers to his work being 'en romanz,' but also refers to 'cest romanz': '*this* romance.' A development that is continued by Chretien de Troyes' later linking of *romans* not just with a language or a particular body of work, but also with the *contents* of certain narratives.[28] By the thirteenth century the sense of *romans* as a work not just in French, but that was also likely to focus on the 'dedes' of a single – often Arthurian – protagonist was becomingly increasingly clear, and was also linked with an implicit recognition that the term also designated further

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[25] *Ibid*, 281.

[26] Gaylord, "The Moment of *Sir Thopas*," 312.

[27] Hans R. Jauss, "Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature," in *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 94.

[28] Strohm, "The Origin and Meaning of Middle English *Romaunce*," 2-3.

differences from the *chanson de geste* in terms of presentation (spoken rather than chanted) and form (composed in octosyllabic couplets rather than *laisses*).[29]

The development of the corresponding Middle English term *romaunce* started in the early fourteenth century, with the term used, as by Wace and Benoît, to refer to works in Old French. Though its semantic range remained broad, at times even functioning as a 'meta-literary' term to describe any kind of narrative, *romaunce* also rapidly developed associations in terms of subject matter, with the obvious association with chivalry masking a perhaps more 'fundamental affiliation' with historical narratives.[30] Even in the increasingly particularised sense in which late medieval writers used the term, the scope of *romaunce* is still clear. The catalogue of "romaunces" in the *Laud Troy Book* (c.1400), for example, includes narratives of historical, pseudo-historical and even mythical heroes, without any apparent self-consciousness on the compiler's part in terms of the spatial and temporal spans that such a heterogeneous list of both British and continental protagonists traverses.[31]

The pervasiveness and popularity of romance narratives in medieval England is also clear from some interesting non-documentary sources: ceramic tiles depicting scenes from the Tristram and Isolde narrative were used in the decorative schemes of at least two abbeys in late thirteenth-century England, a seemingly odd location in which to invoke a narrative of deception and deceit.[32] Similarly, the narrative of *Guy of Warwick* survives in both textual and visual sources: from the Anglo-Norman and Middle English variants in manuscripts and fragments (sixteen of *Gui* and five of *Guy*), as well as French and Latin prose versions, to the carved misericords dating from the mid-fourteenth century in the Cathedrals at Gloucester and Wells.[33] The narrative also survives in chronicle form and Gerard of Cornwall writes in his *Liber Monasterii de Hyda* that the axe Guy takes from Colbrand's armoury was kept in Winchester Cathedral 'in præsentem diem,' giving the

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[29] *Ibid*, 7.
[30] Hiatt, "Genre Without System," 281. See also Strohm, "The Origin and Meaning of Middle English *Romaunce*," 11-12.
[31] Hiatt, "Genre Without System," 282.
[32] Furrow, *Expectations of Romance*, 8-9.
[33] *Ibid*, 73-4.

heterogenous fictional figure of Guy a certain sense of historicity; albeit one that must be reconciled with the *Liber's* later assertion that he 'dede...bateyle / WiÞ a geaunt gret' (l. 1665-6), a moment that Chaucer perhaps wryly signals towards through his character of Sir Oliphaunt in *Thopas*.[34]

This sense of the proliferation of romance narratives, of how many survive in numerous manuscript copies and can even leave their traces in other documentary or decorative domains, clearly relates to what Christopher Cannon calls the 'spirit' of romance. Cannon argues that by the late fourteenth century the medieval romance represents a 'consolidation of a general idea of literature,' in which its form is constituted not by 'the set of words found in any particular manuscript...but rather the thought which seems to be projected – as if into the ether itself – by the aggregation of all such texts.'[35] Cannon goes on to argue that the elements of Chaucer's works that seem particularly indebted to romance are but a 'symptom of [a] larger debt,' that what he learned from romance was 'how to *de*-materialize things, how to make the solidity of any writing a kind of hologram whose materiality could create immaterialities luminescent enough to seem even more solid than things themselves.'[36] Chaucer's list of romance heroes in *Thopas*, their *names* rather than the works in which they can be read about, acknowledges the way in which romance can produce 'spirits as if they too were material,' and that this aspect of romance is of more general importance for poetic writing in English at the close of the fourteenth century. Chaucer's designation of *Troilus*, for example, as a 'litel bok' at the feet of 'Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan and Stace' (V. 1786-92) also draws upon this sense of the spirit of romance in order to 'proffer itself as an immaterial object,' a moment in which Chaucer describes such spirituality with the term 'poesye' (1790) and thereby connects it with an emerging vocabulary for 'designating the results of such de-materialization': *poete*, *poetical*, *poetrie*.[37]

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[34] *Ibid*, 75-7.
[35] Cannon, *The Grounds of English Literature*, 172 & 175.
[36] *Ibid*, 204.
[37] *Ibid*, 205-6.

The tail-rhyme romances that Chaucer invokes in *Thopas* make up only one particular part of the *romaunce* tradition: Chaucer explores the resources offered by the *romaunce* genre in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, as well as the descriptive range of the term *romaunce* itself in the *Book of the Duchess* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, of course. However, these relatively broad points on the nature of *romaunce* are important in providing a framework for discussing *Thopas* that acknowledges how the term itself indexes considerations not just of genre, but also of the materiality of those works, as well as the way in which Chaucer's sole foray into the tail-rhyme romance form engages with what Christopher Cannon identifies as an emerging 'idea' of literature at the close of the fourteenth century.

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How does *Thopas* fit (or not) with those expectations constituted by what Furrow, utilising George Lakoff's category theory, calls the 'central romances'?[38] Particularly in relation to both Alfred Hiatt's non-systemic conception of medieval genre and Christopher Cannon's designation of *Thopas* as the moment at which 'the spirit of romance...[becomes] its own raw material.'[39] Lee Patterson's "What man artow?" is perhaps the seminal article in discussions of the *Thopas-Melibee* section of the *Tales* in this respect. I am not entirely convinced by Patterson's argument that *Melibee* represents a continuation and 'enforcement' of a critique in *Thopas* of chivalry in general and the French wars in particular. As Helen Cooper argues, '[*Thopas'*] context is not any historical event to do with Flemings,' but rather 'the exploration of storytelling, poetry, language, and fiction that makes up the *Canterbury* Tales.'[40] However, Patterson's article is important in its attempts to reconcile the apparent 'badness' of *Thopas* with Chaucer's evident concern with authorial self-definition, and his attempts to 'define both the kind of writing that constitutes *The Canterbury Tales* and, more tellingly, the kind of person who wrote it.'[41]

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[38] Furrow, *Expectations of Romance*, 30.
[39] Cannon, *The Grounds of English Literature*, 206.
[40] Patterson, ""What man artow?"" 156. Helen Cooper, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 299.
[41] *Ibid*, 120.

Particularly importantly in terms of the present discussion, Patterson emphasises how, in relatively subtle ways, the narrative of *Thopas* is more innovative than it initially appears.[42] That Thopas falls in love with an 'elf-queene' he sees in a dream conflates two motifs, one native to Middle English romance and the other not so. The trope of the man led into another world by fairies is insular, with *Thomas of Ercledoune* closest to *Thopas* amongst the rhymed romances. However, it is only in *Thopas* that the 'crucial contact' occurs within the dream itself, when Thopas tells us he "dremed al thee nyght, pardee, / An elf-queene shal my lemman be / And slepe under my goore" (VII 787-9). For this trope one must turn to the French *dits* and the dream-vision *Roman de la Rose*.[43] That Chaucer should subtly invoke dream-visions here is an aspect of the tale that, out with Patterson's comments, has drawn relatively little attention from critics. Clearly this moment of *Thopas* is more subtle in its indebtedness to the *Roman de la Rose* than Chaucer's earlier dream-poems. However, in the context of Fragment VII it does act as a subtle precursor to the *Nun's Priest's* Tale later in Fragment VII, in which Chaucer stages an exploration of conflicting medieval views on the meaningfulness of dreams, a debate that he puts in the mouths of Chauntecleer and Pertelote in order to stage it at once in 'the most grandiose and most humble terms.'[44]

Sir Thopas himself is no usual romance hero. He is described as a 'popet' (VII 701), without coat of arms, sword or spurs, and armed not with a lance but a 'launcegay' (VII 752). He is distinctly child-like, and this focus on childhood, and romance protagonists as heroes of stories of 'growing up,' is invoked by each of the figures Thopas is compared to: Guy of Warwick, Perceval, Bevis and Horn Child.[45] However, *Thopas*, in important ways, does not follow its romance precursors. In the likes of *Octavian* and *Havelok* the qualities of the protagonist are manifested in youth as an indelible marker of their inherent social, physical and spiritual pre-eminence. In *Octavian*, for example, Florent is

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[42] See Ralph Hanna, *London Literature 1300-1380* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 106-16 for a discussion of the way in which the prefix of 'popular' to romance as a result of transmission studies and the apparent romance dependance on set phrases and predictable rhymes has lead to a largely inaccurate perception of *narrative* unsophistication as well.

[43] Patterson, ""What man artow?"" 127-8.

[44] Jessica Brantley, "Vision, Image, Text," in *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Middle English* ed. Paul Strohm, 332.

[45] Patterson, "What man artow?" 129.

sent by his adopted father Clement to deliver forty pounds to his brother, but instead spends the money on a 'feyre' horse as 'whyte as any mylke' (721-6), even paying ten pounds over the odds because he does not agree with the seller's valuation.[46] Upon returning home to find a horse in his hallway Clement is about to beat Florent until his wife's observation that '"Ye may see, and ye understonde, / That he had never kynde of thy blode / That he these werkys hath wroght"' (757-9). In *Havelok*, this exceptionality is marked by the youthful hero's extraordinary ability to emit light, both from his mouth as he sleeps (1248-62) and from a 'kynemark' (605) in the shape of a cross tattooed on his shoulder. Of course, in *Thopas* this sense of teleology, an imminent upturning of *Fortuna's* wheel foreshadowed by the protagonist's pre-eminence, is left uninscribed both by the tale's repetitive and anti-climactic narrative and its abrupt end just twenty-eight lines after the Chaucer-pilgrim's final, perhaps somewhat desperate, call for his fellow pilgrims to 'holde your mouth, *par charitee*' (VII 892).

As Patterson notes though, *Thopas'* child imagery is also more complex than it initially appears. Chaucer exploits the close link between children and elves in medieval thought: it is, Patterson suggests, 'entirely appropriate' that a child protagonist dreams of an 'elf-queene' (VII 790) and that 'a childlike' narrator should appear 'elvyssh' (VII 703).[47] But, significantly, elves are not the same as children, and there is perhaps a slightly sinister edge to the comparison: elves are also what some medieval writers referred to as the *longaevi*, the spectre-like 'longlivers' who reside both in the air and on Earth. Their age indeterminate, they may be generations old, or perhaps even already dead.[48] Like Bertilack in *Sir Gawain* their appearance (and disappearance) always suggest an uncanny or inexplicable manipulation of narrative time: they are always 'met' rather than encountered, their presence is never accidental.[49]

Chaucer clearly invites us to see *Thopas* as typical of the tail-rhyme romance in its surface badness: its predictable rhymes, stock vocabulary and formulaic calls for

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[46] Harriet Hudson ed. *Four English Romances: Sir Isumbras, Octavian, Sir Eglamour of Artois, Sir Tryamour* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), 73.
[47] Patterson, "What man artow?" 131.
[48] *Ibid*, 132 & C.S Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 122.
[49] C.S Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 130.

attention. However, its underlying power results from the way in which it also seeks, in Hiatt and Derrida's terms, to participate *without* belonging. Whether Chaucer's modulations of romance tropes and narrative are ostentatious enough to represent moments of 'ungenre' is debatable. However, it is certainly the case that they represent strategic moments of boundary disturbance, moments that refer to the *romaunce* genre but that are also generative, seeking to unsettle expectations or create new ones, rather than confine pre-existing parameters.[50]

As initially discussed by John Burrow, even the unfinished state of *Thopas* not only echoes the incompleteness of the *House of Fame* and the tales of the Squire and Monk, but also belies the structural *unity* of the tale: the number of stanzas in each of the three fits (eighteen, nine and four and a half) accords with the ratio 4:2:1.[51] This progressive halving represents not only the formal and narrative entropy of the tale as it seems to rapidly dissipate to nothing, but also subtly signals towards more cosmic principles. In the Middle Ages the ratio 4:2:1, known as the diapason, was the numerical expression of the mathematical proposition thought to govern the universe as a whole. As Patterson argues, its presence here not only suggests that *Thopas*, despite its incompleteness, is 'as it should be,' but also, by extension, that 'Chaucerian incompletions in general...are governed by some larger plan, that from a cosmic perspective even the ostentatiously incomplete is...perfect.'[52] This type of structural feature, like the 2525 lines in 101 stanzas of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, is 'not necessarily apparent to the listener...[and] can only be seen by the reader with a text in hand, counting lines on the page.'[53]

This diminishing ratio of stanzas does not add only surface detail to the tale though; in a typically Chaucerian frustration of narrative progress, it is only immediately before its termination by the Host, the culmination of the tale's structural entropy, that *Thopas* does in fact hint towards a genuine new beginning in the narrative. Having had his first journey cut short by Olifaunt, Thopas returns home in order to prepare for his 'fighte /

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[50] Hiatt, "Genre Without System," 291.
[51] John Burrow, "*Sir Thopas*: an Agony in Three Fits," *Review of English Studies* vol. 22 (1971), 54-8.
[52] Patterson, ""What man artow?"", 126.
[53] Elizabeth Scala, *Absent Narratives, Manuscript Textuality, and Literary Structure in Late Medieval England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 10.

With a geaunt with hevedes three' (VII 841-2). As Patterson notes, the 'second movement' of the tale really does represent a new beginning rather than a continuation of that which precedes it: Chaucer echoes the *opening* lines of *Percyvelle* in the first couplet of the final stanza – 'Hymself drank water of the well, / As dide the knyght sire Percyvell' (VII 915-6).[54]

My aim in discussing *Thopas* in these terms is to emphasise that we should clearly be careful not to let the entrenched designation of *Thopas* as a 'parody' result in a conception of *romaunce* that is somehow static. Of course, in turning from the Classical and contemporary Italian models that provided the source material for *Troilus* and the tale of the Knight, Chaucer circumscribes *Thopas.* However, the target of Chaucer's parody is, despite its clear failings, not a coherent and stable entity with rigid and obvious boundaries, but a dynamic, potentially generative collection of 'trajectories and directions' constituted by a number of texts, each of which archives a variety of textual, generic, formal and social influences.[55] Of course, the surface humour of *Thopas* results from the limited nature of its poetic language and structure – its anticlimactic rhymes and familiar motifs of the tail-rhyme romance – but its deeper significance results from the way in which it also indexes the potential for the romance to be the most 'capacious and protean' of medieval genres.[56] As such, *Thopas* does not simply repeat or rehash established tropes, but also re-presents and even subverts them in a number of subtle ways, becoming, as Cannon and Patterson suggest, a tale fundamentally about romance itself.

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How might we reconsider the *Thopas*-layout with these thoughts in mind? That is, as an aspect of a tale that at once participates in the *romaunce* genre, whilst also experimenting with many of its narrative and thematic expectations. That Chaucer projects himself into

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[54] *Ibid.*
[55] Hiatt, "Genre Without System," 292.
[56] Matthew Giancarlo, "Specualtive Genealogies," in *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Middle English* ed. Paul Strohm, 353.

the *Tales* through the character of what has come to be known as the 'Chaucer-pilgrim' is something of a quotidian fact in their reception. However, this separation of Chaucer and his pilgrim persona is particularly important in the instance of the *Thopas*-layout, as clearly the multiple levels of audience and reception that he establishes through this separation is important in establishing what Travis calls his 'parapoetical environment' and, as a result, the layout's paratextual effect. Chaucer may stage his response to the Host's question "What man artow?" on the byways to Canterbury, but the layout is obviously part of the tale that is not available to Harry Bailey or the other pilgrims. Whilst for those reading the tale itself it seems to be an element that Chaucer uses to exploit what Martha Rust calls the medieval 'codicological consciousness,' in order to keep the audience constantly aware of their navigation through the tale. As Helen Cooper writes, nowhere else in the *Tales* is 'the sense of a double text' as strong as it is in *Thopas*, with 'the fictional and real audiences [constructing] two entirely different poems out of the same words.'[57] In considering its layout I would extend Cooper's observation of the duality of *Thopas* still further: though speaking in the voice of the traditional English 'poet,' Chaucer not only deconstructs the traditional romance in the context of the more wide-ranging generic experimentation of Fragment VII, but also seems to experiment with the way the layout of the written page itself can become part of a 'co-extension' of meaning and form.[58] Chaucer is clearly exploiting what Leslie Arnovik calls the 'strained fusion' of oral traditions and an increasing level of literacy in the late medieval period: in precisely the tale that 'appears closest to the oral traditions of poetry...Chaucer's poetry is enhanced by his returning it to written form.'[59]

As Purdie suggests, in various stanzas the tale seems to invite us to read not only line-by-line but also column-by-column.[60] Recapitulation - a recurring thematic and narrative trope during throughout the *Tales*, and in *Thopas* in particular - is here manifested at the level of the page itself, as the reader attempts to reassemble the lines into a workable reading order. The sense of the lines obviously gives an idea as to what order they should

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[57] Helen Cooper, *The Canterbury Tales*, 305.
[58] Cannon, "Form," 189.
[59] Cooper, *The Canterbury Tales*, 304.
[60] Purdie, "Implications," 266-8.

be read, though the vacuity and conventionality of many of the stock phrases of romance that Chaucer uses complicates this process: reading the tale column by column, for example, certainly does not obscure the narrative to any great extent. In turn, this disruption of an imaginative submersion in the tale-telling contest itself, a fundamental violation of the 'continuity of the poetic imagination,'[61] draws attention not only to the interchangability of the worst type of tail-rhyme romance lines, but also to the reading process itself, and, by extension, an encounter with the physical page as a dynamic textual-visual surface rather than a static and unchanging receptacle of stabilised meaning. The layout is reminiscent of Greg Williamson's *Double Exposures*, the title of which refers to a form invented by Williamson in which alternating standard and bold type lines produce a space in which three poems can be read in one: the bold type, the standard type and the combination of both:

Just got these photos back. Let's have a look.
Now what the-? Tell me it's not an overprint.
I thought, you know, I'd stick 'em in a book,
But look at those warped trees, the aqua tint,
"My life in pictures." Now I'm not so sure.
Its long horizon's tipping off the page.
(from *Double Exposures I. Camera Shake with Wide-Angle Field of Snow*)[62]

Clearly *Thopas* does not interweave dual narratives in the same manner as *Camera Shake with Wide-Angle Field of Snow*. However, both works induce a sense of repeatability, of lines that manipulate the usually linear movement of the eye across and then down the page in order to draw attention to the very act of reading and interpretation itself. In both instances the reader becomes increasingly aware of the temporal and spatial dimensions to the poem: in *Camera Shake with Wide-Angle Field of Snow* the slowing down of time resulting from the ekphrastic description of the virtual image of the photograph is

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[61] Robert Jordan, *Chaucer's Poetics and the Modern Reader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 17.
[62] See Gregg Williamson, *ERRORS IN THE SCRIPT* (New York: Sewanee Writers' Series/The Overlook Press, 2001), 33.

mirrored by the poem's form; whilst in *Thopas*, the poem's potentially recapitulative form produces a reading experience that contrasts with its more straightforward rhythm and narrative.

In those stanzas in which Chaucer inserts his additional bob-lines this effect is heightened further: the diagrammatic layout appears logical enough, but in fact produces numerous reading orders and the potential for multiple combinations and recombinations of lines:[63]

Til Þ*at* ther cam a greet geaunt
his name was / sir Olifaunt   } a p*er*ilous man of dede
he seyde child / by termagaunt
But if thou prike / out of myn haunt } anon I sle thy steede   } With mace
heere is the queene of ffairye
With harpe and pipe and symphonye } dwellynge in this place
(VII 807-16)[64]

The fourth bob-line stanza (VII 817-26) goes on to exploit the potentially confusing effect of the three preceding stanzas: 'Thy mawe' (VII 823) is like the other bob-lines in that it is a two-stress line placed in the third column, but rather than concluding a syntactic unit like the other bob-lines, it is the object of the following line 'Shal I percen if I may,' producing a subtle syntactic and rhythmic jolt precisely at one of the more disquieting moments of the tale.

This type of reading clearly foregrounds a visual, readerly experience of *Thopas* in its focus on Chaucer's use of graphic tail-rhyme as an attempt to pre-empt the scribal practice of using brackets and layout to translate 'temporal audition into a visual and pictorial register.'[65] However, though I broadly agree with Cooper's interpretation of the layout as a way of returning the tail-rhyme romance to '[a] written form,' lineation and

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[63] Purdie, "Implications," 267.
[64] Transcribed from Daniel Woodward & Martin Stevens eds. *The Canterbury Tales: the new Ellesmere Chaucer Facsimile (of Huntington Library MS EL 26 C9)*, f.152r.
[65] Smith, "Medieval *Forma*," 70.

layout are also ways of structuring the temporal experience of the literary text as it is read aloud. The confusion resulting from the number of reading orders made available would also have functioned for those hearing the tale, as the reader hesitates, backtracks, and repeats him or herself, a performance 'far from anything a genuine professional minstrel would produce.'[66] Of course, it may be objected that such a reading is in danger of superimposing our modern unfamiliarity with the graphic tail-rhyme layout on medieval audiences that may in fact have been more comfortable encountering diagrammatic layouts of this nature. However, the range of variations in the text once the bob-lines are introduced, both in those manuscripts discussed in the preceding chapter, as well as many of those that do not employ any form of the layout, suggests that, even for experienced scribes accustomed to rendering diagrammatic verse layouts, Chaucer's layout caused a range of problems.

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It is here that Genette perhaps offers a helpful, transhistorical corollary to how we might read the sense of formal and narrative recapitulation that the layout produces. Genette foregrounds the reader's share in any encounter of a literary work, emphasising that any work of art or literature is irreducible to its immanent object: one never reads the same book twice, one never sees the same painting twice.[67] Of course, in some ways this is not a particularly new observation in relation to the *Tales*: as Peter Travis writes 'One reason Chaucer's poetry is so patently open to reader-response criticism is that it is highly conscious of itself as linguistic artifice and of its reader's role as conspirators in the art of making fiction.'[68] However, considering the *Thopas*-layout as a 'paratext' opens considerations as to ways in which Travis' observation can be re-embedded in a discussion of *Thopas* that, following Cannon, is comprehensive in its approach to the tale's form: a formal analysis extended to those parts of the text that 'criticism has

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[66] Purdie, "Implications," 268.

[67] Genette, *Paratexts*, xvii.

[68] Peter Travis, "Affective Criticism," in *Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers* eds. Laurie Fink & Martin Schichtman (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 205.

neglected or found confusing' or even 'made the whole of it seem confused or self-contradictory.'[69]

In the case of *Thopas*, Chaucer's use and manipulation of graphic tail-rhyme clearly places an emphasis on the very act of reading and interpretation itself, on the sense of the experiential nature of the literary work. As Timothy Morton writes, Aristotle's apparently self-evident observation that all works have a beginning, a middle and an end, is perhaps more subtle than it initially appears. Aristotle's point seems concerned precisely with this experiential nature of art and literature; that is, 'all works of art have a *feeling* of a beginning, a feeling of a middle, a feeling of ending.'[70] Morton calls the sense of uncertainty that surrounds the feeling of beginning as 'aperture,' and it is the manipulation of, or experimentation with, aperture that is central to minimalist art and music: where, for example, does Charles Bernstein's 'this poem intentionally left blank' begin (and end). Similarly, in Mallarmé's 'Un Coup de Des,' text, typographic design and layout interact as meaning is produced by the way the poem structures the page around it, reminding us that space is never 'blank,' that 'all poems are environmental, because they include the spaces in which they are written and read – blank space around and between words, silence within the sound.'[71] In many ways the manuscripts of *Thopas* enact a comparable reading experience to the likes of 'this poem intentionally left blank' and 'Un Coup de Des,' in drawing attention to the space in which the poem takes place it becomes, in Morton's sense of the term, undeniably 'environmental,' a poem interested in talking about its own 'architecture' not only at the levels of genre, narrative and imagery, but also at the levels of lineation and layout.

This is not to suggest that *Thopas* is in some way a distant pre-cursor to the likes of Mallarmé, or to concrete poetry generally, but rather that both works seem to experiment with their own perception, with the act of 'redinge' itself, and in doing so draw attention to the way in which the 'medium of communication' itself might be 'impeded or

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[69] Cannon, "Form," 189.
[70] Timothy Morton, "Escrituria Ecologica," *La Tempestad* vol. 10 no. 65 (2009), 96.
[71] *Ibid,* 95.

thickened.'[72] The sense of recapitulation that the layout produces becomes part of a mutually enforcing formal-narrative stasis that frustrates the immediate reading experience of the tale. This sense of formal-narrative reflexivity is clearly important to *Thopas* as it is encountered in the likes of El, Gg and Dd. N. Katherine Hayles defines reflexivity as 'the movement whereby that which has been used to generate a system is made, through a changed perspective, to become part of the system it generates,'[73] a definition that seems particularly apt to *Thopas* as each of its structural levels are turned in on themselves.

The assignation to himself of two tales that encode various considerations of poetic tradition, genre, form and materiality seems a particularly Chaucerian ploy, and these concerns with the creative potential in the fluid conceptions of medieval genre and in the *Thopas-Melibee* section seem particularly appropriately placed in Fragment VII of the *Tales*, the fragment in which the variated meanings of 'rede' are brought to the fore. In its wide-ranging treatment of materials and traditions, Fragment VII displays Chaucer's more general refusal to accept uncritically both traditional English forms and the material of the great classical authorities. As such, it provides not just a sampling of Chaucer's interests and influences, but a robust, often critical appraisal of the resources on offer to the poet whose writing take place against the backdrop of what Leslie Arnovik calls the 'fraught yet enabling tensions' that mark the late medieval period, the sense in which an 'anxious self-awareness' marks a 'comprehension of the challenges implicit in the oral-literate synergism.'[74]

In *Thopas*, we are, in one sense, presented with a clear view of what 'Chaucer's poetic' is not.[75] However, the tale clearly functions on a variety of levels: though speaking in the voice of the 'socially orientated' poet, Chaucer also intimates towards the way in which from precisely this authorial stance he is able to manipulate a range of generic and formal expectations. As Peter Travis discusses at length in *Disseminal Chaucer*, the *Nun's*

[72] Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, 37.
[73] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 8; cited in Rust, *Imaginary Worlds*, 26.
[74] Arnovik, *Written Reliquaries*, 176.
[75] Cooper, *The Canterbury Tales*, 308.

Priest's Tale provides something of a coda to these concerns (though that is not to say that Chaucer does not return to the issues raised in Fragment VII, not least in the *Parson's Tale* and the *Retraction*). For Travis, the *Nun's Priest's Tale* is the most effusive realisation of Seth Lerer's designation of the *Tales* as a work 'fundamentally about literature itself.'[76] However, in many ways Travis' definition of parody therein provides a concise definition of the types of impulses I have sought to suggest are also at the heart of *Thopas*: it is 'both an intertextual and self-referential genre...a prime example of a metafictional artifact whose ultimate concern is the nature and value of art – its construction, contamination, transcontextualisation, and interpretation.'[77]

"wryten newe"

In the section above I have sought to suggest ways in which it may be possible to discuss *Thopas* and its layout in terms of their place in both Fragment VII of the *Tales* and the broader romance tradition. As well as how it may be possible to theorise, with a particular focus on the intersection between issues of form and textual materiality, Laurel Amtower's observation that 'immediate audience response and reaction posed a varying and challenging matrix through which the literary artifact might reverberate, and added another level of experience to the text that was welcomed and even exploited by late medieval authors.'[78] However, though this discussion is predicated on those Group One manuscripts in which the layout is reproduced fully, it is also based on a certain amount of abstraction away from any particular manuscript. In those manuscripts commonly relied upon for their textual authoritativeness there is still a clear sense of the fluidity between the actions of author, scribe and reader in late medieval manuscript culture. It is clear that Chaucer and his contemporaries were acutely aware, like Genette, of how the production of literary meaning could not be separated from the materiality of the artifact itself, and his 'Wordes Unto Adam' is perhaps the best known instantiation of a late medieval interest in the tension between stabilised authorial meaning and the necessarily

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[76] Lerer, "The Canterbury Tales," 245.
[77] Travis, *Disseminal Chaucer*, 8.
[78] Amtower, *Engaging Words*, 38.

imperfect rendering of 'texts' in the world.[79] As such, he may intimate towards a dematerialised notion of literary making in the conclusion to *Troilus*, whilst also acknowledging, in Alison's tearing of Jankyn's book of wicked wives and the use of 'rape' in "Chaucers Wordes," a 'literally as well as metaphorically' *bodily* dimension to the ways in which books themselves stand in the place of their often unnamed, absent authors.[80] In Chaucer's works themselves books are often 'sites for disruption and disorder...objects that unravel the meaning that has been rather awkwardly assigned to them.'[81]

As Stephanie Trigg writes, though the manuscript culture that produces Chaucer's works seems 'deeply hierarchical in structure,' this hierarchy is 'never completely absolute.'[82] Though the term '*auctor*' appears regularly in the margins of the surviving fifteenth century manuscripts of the *Tales*, it is commonly used in order 'to draw attention to instances of narrational *auctoritas*,' rather than to suggest that Chaucer himself 'has become an *auctor*.'[83] The recognition of the 'emergent regimes' of authorship in Chaucer's works is, of course, necessarily retrospective; only gradually during the fifteenth century did the manuscripts and early printed editions of the *Tales* begin to 'countersign' Chaucerian works '*as* Chaucer's.'[84] Before this transition of Chaucer's texts from products of the predominantly anonymous medieval mode of literary inscription to works that more and more resemble 'the closed texts of modernity,'[85] the scribal and editorial responses to his works archive not only insights into the conditions of their production but also, in many cases, additional literary nuance.

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[79] Of course though, in the instance of 'Chaucers Wordes' we see precisely the poem's subject matter at work in its transmission: the poem survives in a single manuscript copy by John Shirley, and it was almost certainly Shirley, rather than Chaucer, who supplied its title. Even at the moment we seem to experience some kind of unmediated contact with the author, we are immediately reminded that any readerly intimacy with that figure is strictly imaginary, with only 'unruly bodies and corrupting fictions' in its absence (Gillespie, "Books," 87).
[80] *Ibid*.
[81] *Ibid*, 93.
[82] Trigg, *Congenial Souls*, 49.
[83] *Ibid*, 77.
[84] *Ibid*, 49.
[85] *Ibid*.

In the production of medieval literature the actions of author, scribe, editor and even reader are often difficult to separate; the production of literary meaning was a disaggregated and dynamic process in which meaning and intentionality are encoded not just in 'the words on the page,' but in the complex interplay of a range of textual and visual elements. In the case of *Thopas* it is clear that scribes thought discerningly and productively about the tale and how it might be realised. David Greetham offers a distinction between types of scribal 'involvement,' emphasising the difference between the sort of 'critical intervention' we see in the manuscripts of works such as *Piers*, and simple 'replication...[the] unthinking cloning of an organism.' Invoking Barthes, Greetham distinguishes between *scriptible* or "writerly" texts such as *Piers* that invite 'construction and misconstruction,' and *lisible* texts – such as Hoccleve's *De Regimine Principum* – that 'rarely offered the sort of speculative or interrogative co-authorship that *Piers* seems to have encouraged.'[86] It is clear that *Thopas*, and the *Tales* in general, offered the potential for the former. As such, the variability that marks many of these manuscripts can be precisely the point of entry into the analysis of the meaning that they produce, an opening up of a range of interpretive spaces in which form becomes open to 'the material, to the deviant, and to difference.'[87]

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

The Ra¹ and Py versions of *Thopas* provide particularly clear examples of the potential fluidity between author, scribe and reader that was characteristic of late medieval manuscript culture, of how scribal or editorial responses to a work might amount not only to commenting or re-casting but potentially also to a more fundamental 're-inscription.'[88] In both manuscripts *Thopas*, and in fact all the tales, have been heavily edited, with numerous emendations. In both manuscripts' copies of *Thopas*, Chaucer's innovative bob-lines are either omitted entirely or conflated with the preceding *b*-line, maintaining a two-column layout throughout. In Ra¹ this omission and conflation is one aspect of a more fundamental recasting of the tale's versification. Whilst Chaucer varies between *aabaab*,

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[86] David Greetham, "Phylum-Tree-Rhizome," in *Reading From the Margins* ed. Seth Lerer, 120 n.68.
[87] Smith, "Medieval *Forma*," 69.
[88] Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers*, 12.

aabccb, and the five bob-line stanzas of various format, the Ra¹ scribe rewrites the tale to rhyme *aabaab* throughout, producing, in some instances, rhymes even more vacuous than those of the Chaucer-pilgrim: 'Til there cam a great gyant / His name was cleped [sir] Olyfaunt / A perylous man of face / He seyde chyld by tunragaunt / But if thou [prike] out of myn haunt / Anon I sle thi stede [with] mace.' Furthermore, the third fitt is missing entirely, with Harry Bailey's interruption following VII 890, which in this instance reads 'To telle hit I wol founde.' The Py version of *Thopas* also contains noticeable losses: VII 803 to 806 are omitted, as are lines 842 to 844. As in Ra¹ the bob-lines are incorporated into the preceding *b*-line, though 'In londe' is missing entirely.

The 'apparently wilful revisions of "original" literary works'[89] in the likes of Py and Ra¹ is clearly at odds with the modern approach to the literary text, one need only consider the moral as well as artistic debates that surrounded the recent publication of unfinished works such as Vladimir Nabokov's *The Original of Laura* or David Foster Wallace's *The Pale King*, for example. However, in contrast to the modern focus on the singular, stable and coherent moment of literary creation, the likes of Py and Ra¹ force us to confront a mode of literary production that is equally concerned with the 'inescapably individual moment of literary *reception.*'[90] The significance of each of these 'moments' is inevitably open to debate: not all manuscripts revisions or re-writings are as obvious in their intent as the Helmingham editor's didactic re-inscription of the *Tales*, for example. However, to whatever extent their significance is recoverable, all manuscripts 'raise questions that have an immediacy that the modern reader cannot evade.'[91]

The version of *Thopas* in Ry¹ is interesting not because of any wholesale textual editing but rather because of the insight it gives into the copying process of the tale, particularly of how additional paratextual information might be accrued by later scribes and editors, even if its addition in some way compromises the original *ordinatio* or decorative scheme of the manuscript. The Hammond scribe had originally copied the tale until the end of the

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[89] *Ibid.*
[90] Lee Patterson, *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 116. My italics.
[91] *Ibid.*

second fitt in a single column, at which point he left the remaining half of the folio and the following folio blank, resuming with "Here endithe the tale of sir thopas by Chaucer / and begynnythe þe prolog of melibe & prudence," followed by the Host's interruption. A later fifteenth century hand then added both the relatively neatly drawn *a*-line brackets with flourishes and the paraph marks at the end of the *b*-lines to the lines of fitts one and two, as well as the third fitt in the space left by the Hammond scribe on f.241 and 241v. However, this later scribe copies the third fitt in graphic tail-rhyme, leaving two-thirds of f.241v blank. The third hand also extends the joke of the brackets as he adds them in a modified, three pronged form, to the Host's interruption. Of course, it is difficult to know which exemplars the two scribes worked from, though it seems the case that the second scribe acknowledged the role the layout played in the tale as he not only copies the third fitt in graphic tail-rhyme but also returns to the first and second fitts to add brackets to the couplets and < // > marks to the end of the *b*-lines.

Medieval manuscripts often seem marked by scribal approaches and practices that emphasise the often unfinished, and in some cases perhaps even unfinishable, nature of the medieval text. The Ry¹ version of *Thopas* provides a interesting example of this type of approach. The addition of layers of meaning, even in this instance changing the layout of the tale part of the way through and as a result leaving almost a whole folio blank, seems a valuable aspect of this conception of the literary text. The Gl version of *Thopas* is similar in many ways to that of Ry¹. Brackets are used only in the second column of f.64v: the column containing Chaucer's three consecutive bob-line stanzas. The bob-lines are copied to the right, with the exception of 'In towne' which is not differentiated from the preceding *b*-line and 'In londe,' which is omitted. However, 'neyther wife ne childe' (806), 'dwelling in þis place' (816) and 'ffor here þu ſhalte be slawe' (826) are also all copied to the right in this second column, with 816 and 826 also underlined and linked with a bracket to the preceding bob-line. Each of these lines is the last line of Chaucer's three successive bob-line stanzas, and that they rhyme with the preceding bob-line clearly lead the scribe to copy them to the right rather than in the main section of the text.

In the cases of Ra[1], Py, Ry[1] and Gl it is clear that *Thopas* and its layout offered the opportunity for creative engagement with the literary text, and that scribes were interested in accruing additional information on a work after it had initially been copied, even if by doing so they disrupted that manuscript's general decorative scheme. However, in the case of some of the manuscripts discussed in Chapter Two, it is equally clear that the layout caused a number of scribes significant *problems*, and that their responses to *Thopas* are indicative of a more fundamental variance in its realisation. As mentioned above, Catherine Brown's recent article 'Manuscript Thinking: stories by hand,' suggests ways in which we might approach mistakes and other unique and non-verifiable aspects of individual manuscripts as speculative entry-points into the complex reciprocity between the texts they contain and the human endeavour that produces them: a way of implicating ourselves in 'the 'flex-point' of manuscript space-time.'[92]

One of Brown's striking examples in her short essay is the inscription from the bottom of f.27 of Bodleian MS Rawl. B 847, an Irish manuscript containing a number of works and bearing the traces of many scribes. The inscription reads 'Fuil meoir Maoileachlainn so' ['Blood from the finger of Maoileachlainn']. Brown recounts her visit to see the manuscript, concluding that it looks like blood, but that even if a test for hemoglobin were run to confirm it, 'So what?' But as Brown goes on to suggest:

> we don't need test results to tell a story: Here's Maoileachlainn at work...The
> pen is bad; he stops to put a finer point upon it. His penknife slips...Blood
> wells up. Instead of blotting it on his sleeve, he dips his pen in blood and
> writes. Okay, so this is speculation, useless to cold codicology, but...the
> intractable fact remains that at some moment the phrase 'blood from the
> finger of Maoileachlainn' mattered enough to be given top billing in a book.[93]

The presence of the Dl scribe in his manuscript is less bodily, but perhaps equally human: he might not bleed on his manuscript, but in the case of *Thopas* and its layout, it clearly

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[92] Brown, "Manuscript Thinking," 351.
[93] *Ibid*, 357.

caused him some pain. As is discussed in Chapter Two, the Dl scribe started copying the tale in a two-column layout but quickly switched to a single column layout similar to that of many of the Group Four manuscripts. Even in this reduced form the layout causes the scribe a variety of problems: he brackets many lines wrongly and copies all but one of the bob-lines adjacent to the wrong line. In the discussion above I made reference to the importance of the notion of 'reflexivity' in regards to the effect of the *Thopas*-layout, and Dl is clearly a particularly interesting case of this. In this instance the recursive and recapitulative reading experience the manuscript is only supposed to *stage* becomes, by virtue of the scribe's evident unfamiliarity with the layout generally, a more fundamental part of the manuscript's individual textual materiality; the potential for the breakdown of literary meaning the layout seems to reflect upon is fossilised by the Dl version of the tale.

Of course, the Dl version of *Thopas* can be linked to its historical moment of production in a way Rawl. B 847 cannot. That is, as evidence of an increasing unfamiliarity with the graphic tail-rhyme layout and the related impression of the tail-rhyme romance as an unprestigious form by the late fifteenth century. Although works utilising a form of graphic tail-rhyme can be found as late as the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, the layout, which was never universally used to begin with, clearly represented something of an unknown quantity for many late medieval scribes and the early printers of the tales. However, Brown's essay raises important considerations as to the ways in which manuscripts such as Dl represent not only the 'now' of their writing, but are also 'proleptically articulated with an almost endlessly iterable future 'now' that's re-dated with every act of reading.'[94]

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The *Thopas*-layout and its varied manuscript realisations clearly exemplify the interface between textual form and textual function in the medieval period. As Stephen Partridge suggests in 'Designing the Page,' in an age when 'the book-length work' began to

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[94] *Ibid*, 361.

dominate literary production, it seems inevitable that authors 'sometimes thought (and probably worked) like a scribe.'[95] On the other hand, Richard and Mary Rouse, for example, critique what they see as the increasingly ambiguous use of terms such as *ordinatio*, layout and *mise-en-page* in studies of medieval literature, emphasising that 'literary creation and the physical layout of surviving manuscripts…are not the results of the same actions.'[96]

The aim of the current chapter has therefore been to integrate a discussion of an often overlooked element of the *Tales* into considerations not only of Chaucer's formal and generic experimentation, but also of how medieval manuscripts exemplify the way in which any literary work survives not simply as a holistic 'idea,' but as a result of a discursive process that 'promise[s] stability and then fail[s] to deliver it.'[97] This gap between stabilised authorial meaning and the inherent *instability* of any discursively formed knowledge clearly produced a certain amount of creative tension for those late medieval authors, like Chaucer, who recognised the way in which 'litel book[s]' (*TC* V.1789) inevitably stand in place of their authors, and that in doing so are open to having their meaning unraveled or defiled.[98] The varying treatments of the *Thopas*-layout well exemplify the way in which medieval texts survive not simply as part of 'a rarified history of literature or an intangible history of ideas,'[99] but also as inherently unstable *objects*, 'the material result[s] of inevitably imperfect human labour...further disordered by time.'[100]

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[95] Stephen Partridge, "Designing the Page," in eds. Alexandra Gillespie & Daniel Wakelin *The Production of Books in England 1350-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 102.
[96] Richard H. Rouse & Mary A. Rouse, "*Ordinatio* and *Compilatio* Revisited," in *Ad Litteram: Authoritative Texts and their Medieval Readers* eds. Mark D. Jordan & Kent Emery Jr (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1992), 124.
[97] Gillespie, "Books," 90.
[98] *Ibid*, 87.
[99] Jessica Brantley, "The Prehistory of the Book," *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* vol. 124 no. 2 (2009), 632.
[100] Alexandra Gillespie, "Books," 87.

Conclusion

My aim in the preceding discussion has been in some senses to defamiliarise *Thopas*, to think about ways in which it is possible to look again at a tale that has frequently been accounted for all to readily, to re-embed *Thopas* in both its immediate literary and codicological contexts, rather than simply designating its status as a parody as Chaucer's comment on a minstrel tradition of which he is not particularly proud, and its seemingly odd appearance in certain manuscripts as scribal 'convention.' As Ralph Hanna writes, 'the perception of Middle English romance as 'popularly' lacking in sophistication has sanctioned a long history of uninquistive and unagressive readings.'[1] Hanna's reading of *Guy of Warwick* - alongside Nicola MacDonald's *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England*, Melissa Furrow's *Expectations of Romances* and the final chapter of Christopher Cannon's *The Grounds of English Literature* - has contributed to a continuing re-assessment of Middle English romance that, building upon the work of Dieter Mehl and John Ganim, takes the argument that Middle English romance was not mere simplification or re-casting of its French models as its starting point.[2] That is, Middle English romance as a site on which traditional vernacular forms engaged in a complex dialogue with, rather than simple replication of, the 'narrative patterns inherited from an allegedly yet more sophisticated continental tradition.'[3] It is this type of dialogue that seems central to Chaucer's use of the romance genre and form in *Thopas*: its predictable rhymes and stock diction contrast with its subtly innovative narrative, imagery, structure and layout to produce a tale with multiple interpretative levels. In doing so, *Thopas*, like much of the *Tales*, enfolds a tension between a persistent invocation of *auctoritas* ('originality' not in the modern sense but rather as 'the clear documentation of textual origins') and a progressive, potentially transformative, approach to precisely that tradition.[4]

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[1] Hanna, *London Literature 1300-1380*, 107.
[2] See Dieter Mehl, *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (London: Routledge, 1969) and John Ganim, *Style and Consciousness in Medieval English Narrative* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).
[3] Hanna, *London Literature 1300-1380*, 107.
[4] Scala, *Absent Narratives*, 3.

In (re)reading *Thopas* in this context I also attempted to draw some comparisons between Chaucer's tale and the work of a small number of contemporary poets. Though necessarily brief in the current context, such comparisons can offer new ways of approaching medieval and Old English forms. As I emphasise in the previous chapter, these comparisons of *Thopas* with certain works by Gregg Williamson, Charles Bernstein and Stéphane Mallarmé are not intended as a way of imposing contemporary tastes on previous eras, or attempting to trace linear, teleological lines of progress or influence from past to present works, but rather as a way of acknowledging, rather than attempting to erase or elide, the ways in which the present 'informs our reading of medieval texts.'[5] In this respect, therefore, I share Eileen Joy's enthusiasm for a medieval studies that conceptualises its textual artifacts not as closed repositories of meaning, but rather as '*living* and open signalling system[s]...endlessly looping reel-to-reel tape feed[s]' enabling 'an endless series of aparallel relations within and across various temporal zones.'[6]

This focus on affinities between texts like *Thopas* and Gregg Williamson's *Double Exposures* may simply seem like a return to a mode of New Criticism, with its focus on formal links between literary works across potentially large periods of time. However, in line with many of the initiating arguments presented in the recent volume *The Post-Historical Middle Ages*, as well as the *postmedieval Online Forum*, these comparisons are intended not as a way of eliding a text's social or political contexts, or of collapsing the differences between past and present, but rather an attempt to '[acknowledge] that *both* sameness and difference are essential to genuinely grasping the past and its complexity.'[7] As Bettina Bildhauer suggests, a postmodern 'co-presence' of historical moments may enable us to treat those medieval people who produced texts and objects 'as still having face or identity rather than being passive objects of one-sided scrutiny.'[8]

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[5] Elizabeth Scala & Sylvia Federico, "Introduction: Getting Post-Historical," in *The Post-Historical Middle Ages*, 8. See also Carolyn Dinshaw's discussion of 'queer historicism': "Temporalities," in ed. Paul Strohm, *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: The Middle Ages*, 107-23.

[6] Eileen Joy, "You Are Here: A Manifesto," in ed. Jeffrey J. Cohen *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects* (Washington: Oliphaunt Books, 2012), 166.

[7] Maura Nolan, "Historicsim after Historicism" in Scala & Federico eds. *The Post-Historical Middle Ages*, 67.

[8] Bettina Bildhauer, "A Methodology of Postmodern Historicism?", *postmedieval Online Forum* no. 1 "Historicity without Historicism? Responses to Paul Strohm" (2010). Accessed November 15, 2011. My own thoughts on these matters, particularly the theoretical ramifications of what it might mean for

Clearly any discussion of time and temporality, of how our approaches to the past enfold considerations of both its irreducible distance and uncanny contemporaneity, involves a series of complex hermeneutic issues. The brief theoretical points above are therefore necessarily tentative. The main purpose of the preceding chapters has been to strike a careful balancing act between considerations of, on the one hand, the effect of Chaucer's use of the tail-rhyme romance and its layout in the context of the 'emergent regimes' of authorship in the late fourteenth century, and, on the other, the inherent variability of manuscript culture. This divide is admittedly artificial: though I relied upon the El, Hg, Gg and Dd versions of *Thopas* for many of my points and examples, the first section of the preceding chapter also relies upon an implicit abstraction away from any one surviving manuscript to some kind of authorial ur-text. It is important not to elide the interpretative status of this type of abstraction: like the modern critical editions through which the vast majority of contemporary readers first experience medieval literature, such an abstraction produces an undeniably '*a*historical object,' a text for which we have no identical medieval source, existing purely in a 'hypostasized historical Real.'[9]

Poetic meaning is always an emergent property of the interaction between all levels of a work: not just of its imagery, narrative and diction but also of its individual materiality. The various forms of the *Thopas*-layout well exemplify the ways in which medieval manuscript textuality is not a condition of medieval literature itself, but rather is one of its *structural* levels. As Bernard Cerquiglini writes 'l'écriture médiévale ne produit pas des variantes, elle est variance' [medieval writing does not produce variants, it is variance].[10] Clearly, therefore, the kind of textual variability that I examine in the second section of the preceding chapter should not be equated with a sense of loss or textual imperfection; it is rather, as D. Vance Smith and Elizabeth Scala argue, an aspect of medieval literary culture that should encourage us to re-draw the boundaries of literary form to include

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historical moments to be in some senses 'co-present' with others, have been heavily influenced by the writings of Bruno Latour, particularly his concept of 'sedimental time': see Chapter Five "The Historicity of Things" in *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 145-73.

[9] Scala, *Absent Narratives*, 7.

[10] Bernard Cerquiglini, *Éloge de la variance: Histoire critique de la philologie* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), 111.

each manuscript's unique materiality, in order to consider not only how manuscripts 'intersubjectively engage with [their] verbal text,' but also of how, in turn, many medieval works '"think" their own textual condition.'[11] The varied realisations of the *Thopas*-layout, not only in the manuscripts discussed in the preceding chapters but also in the printed editions of the *Tales* that elide this feature, serve to force us into history, to acknowledge that manuscripts and books never 'contain' texts, but rather exist in an uneasy and complex state of reciprocity with them, through which meaning is made, re-made, lost, and found again.

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[11] Scala, *Absent Narratives*, 11 & 38.

Appendix – Diplomatic Editions

Ld¹
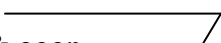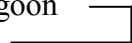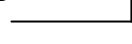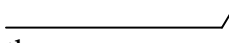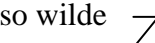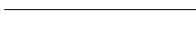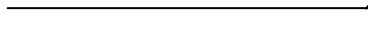
He [ſeide] / child bi termagant ⎤ Anoon I sle thy ſtede sted
But if you prike out of myn haunt ⎦
Here is the quene of fairye ⎤ Wt my mace
WiÞ harpe, lute and ſimphonye ⎦ Dwelling in Þis place

(VII 810-6)
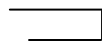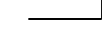
His stede was al dapil gray ⎤ Fful ſoftle and rounde : In londe
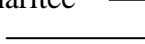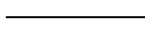It goÞ an amble in Þe way ⎦

(VII 884-7)

En³

Into his sadil / he clamb anoon
And priketh ovr ſtile and ſtoon
An elve queene for to eſpye
Til he ſo longe / ridden hath & goon
That he fonde in a p've woon
The contree of ffayrie   so wilde
Ffor in that contree was ther noon
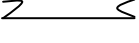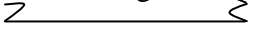Neither wyff nor childe

(VII 797-806; 805 is omitted)

Fful ſoftly and rounde   In londe
Loo lordynges / heer is a fitt
Yif ye will heer any mor of it
To telle it / wil I fonde

[page break]

Now hold your mouth for charitee   And herkynth to my ſpelle
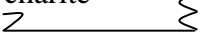Both knyght and lady free

(VII 886-93)

Ry¹

[L]   iſtenth lordynges in goode entent
        And I wol yow telle vezament
        Of myrthe and of ſolace //
        Of a knyght that was faire and gent
In bataile and in tornament
His name was [Sir] Thopas //

(VII 712 – 717)

Worthy to be my make / In towne //

(VII 792-3)

Now holde your mouth for charite
Both knyght [and] lady fre   And herkenyth to my ſpelle //

(VII 891-3)

Dl

For in that contree was ther noon
Neythr wyf ne chylde
Til ther [cam] a greet geaunt
His name was Syr Olifaunt
A perilous man of dede
He seyde chyld by Termegaunt
But if thou prike out of myn haunt
Anoon I fle thy stede
[Heere] is the quene of fayre ——— Wt mace
Wt harp and pipe and symphonye
Dwelling in thy place

(VII 804-816; 805 is omitted)

Ha³

Listeneth lordings in gode entente
   And I wolle telle yow verament
   Of myrthe and of solace
   Al of a knyght was fare [and] gent
   In bataille [and] in turnament
   His name was sir Thopas

(VII 712-17)

La

Tyll he so longe haÞe ryden [&] goone
Ffor in that contree was Þere none
Neyther wife ne childe
Til him Þer came a [great] geante
His name was cleped [Sir] Olyfaunt
A perilous man of dede
He seide childe be Termagaunt
But if Þou [wiÞe] [   ] oute of myne haunte
Anone I ſle Þu ſtede
Here is the quene of faire
WiÞ harpe [&] pipe [&] ſymphone
Dwellinge in this place

That he fonde in a pve wone
The contree of faire

So wilde

WiÞ mace

(VII 800-816; 805 is omitted)

Gl

A [perilous] man of dede
But out if þu prike [out] of myne haunte
He seide childe by Termagaunte
A noone I slee thy stede

With mace

Here is þe quene of ffayre
Wt harpe and pipe and symphonye

Dwellyng in þis place

The chile ſaide as mote I the
To morwe wole I mete wt tho

Whan I have myne armour
And yet I hope p my fay
Þat þu ſhal wt this launcagay
Abye it ful ſorwe

Þurgh thyne maw

Shal I [   ] if þt I may
Er it be fully day

Ffor here þu ſhalte be slawe

(VII 809-26)

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