Isles of systematicity in the sea of prodigality?

Non-alphabetic elements in manuscripts of

Chaucer's "Man of Law's Tale"

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Abstract

Although the tradition of English historical linguistics sanctioned the written representations of late Middle English as disorderly, confused and hardly methodical, more recent studies have demonstrated that such pronouncements are an artefact of evaluating the efficiency of medieval orthographies in terms of contemporary standards of systematicity (cf. Laing & Lass 2003; 2009). However, even attempts at overcoming this methodological anachronism by referring directly to medieval *artes grammaticae* for a terminology contemporaneous with text languages of Middle English manuscripts (cf. Laing 1999, Laing & Lass 2003; 2009, Stenroos & Mäkinen 2011) typically fall short of embracing Middle English orthographies *in toto*, by leaving out some crucial elements, like Latin-based symbols of abbreviation or word-final strokes, which are usually dismissed as palaeographic data. The present paper, focusing on a descriptive-comparative account of abbreviations and special characters in manuscripts of Chaucer's "Man of Law's Tale", argues that including such non-alphabetic elements into orthographic studies of manuscript texts is indispensable for generating comprehensive scribal profiles. It will be demonstrated that abbreviations and certain word-final characters do not so much substitute for, as alternate with alphabetic sequences.

1 THE PROBLEM OF MIDDLE ENGLISH SPELLINGS

The coming of the 'digital age' in manuscript and textual studies a couple of decades ago led to revisiting the problem of orthographic descriptions of medieval English sources. The constantly expanding corpus of electronic editions of Middle English texts and digitized images of manuscripts has demonstrated inadequacies of traditional methodologies and revealed the need for attending to those elements of scribal languages which were typically suppressed in editions of Middle English texts and, consequently, excluded from descriptions of Middle English orthography. It seems, however, that despite developments in methods and techniques of enterprises involved in 'digitizing the manuscript experience', none of such projects has gone very much beyond producing corpora of spelling forms for particular manuscripts. Even those initiatives that did try to generate comprehensive orthographic descriptions of their sources and dealt with the problem of non-alphabetic constituents of scribal languages (cf. Robinson & Solopova 1993, Stenroos 2007) remain equivocal about both the methodology and rationale of incorporating such elements into orthographic descriptions of manuscript texts.

It will be argued in this paper that, methodological problems notwithstanding, no orthographic analysis of a Middle English manuscript can be deemed exhaustive without considering linguistic import of the non-alphabetic component, i.e. the system of abbreviations and special symbols, intrinsic to scribal repertoires. The present study, based on a comparative analysis of scribal abbreviations and word-final characters in a group of manuscripts of Chaucer's "Man of Law's Tale", aims at demonstrating that a thorough assessment of the interplay between forms and functions of such non-

alphabetic constituents is a prerequisite for generating a comprehensive scribal profile of a manuscript text (cf. McIntosh 1975). This, in turn, is not only necessary for the identification of scribal hands in specific manuscript copies, but also has implications for reconstructing the history of textual transmission of particular works, inferring about the scribes' and/ or author's dialectal features, as encoded in the written medium, and contributing to the knowledge about Middle English spelling systems in general.

1.1 *The question of terminology*

As argued by McIntosh (1956, 1961, 1963), tools devised for descriptions of contemporary orthographic systems are ill-suited for handling inherently multivalent spelling systems of medieval English scribes. The graphemic-phonemic approach, which relates spelling forms (i.e. individual graphemes or combinations thereof) to unique referents in the sound system (i.e. phonemes) is not compatible with such complex types of interaction between orthographic representations and their phonic referents as are characteristic of Middle English manuscript texts. It is even less suitable for considering elements which are not included in linguistic analysis proper, i.e. letter shapes and abbreviation symbols (i.e. 'graphetic' elements), and both the 'graphemic' and 'graphetic' types of orthographic analysis require such degree of interpretative definiteness as cannot be postulated for medieval English spelling systems.

1.2 *The doctrine of the* littera

Middle English scribes were obviously not constrained by a codified system of spelling conventions, nor were they aware of anything like the graphemic theory. What they in all probability *did* know, however, was Donatus' *Ars Maior* (ca. 5th c. AD), in which the principles of the doctrine of the *littera* were laid down (Laing & Lass 2007: 9). The doctrine introduced the concept of 'letter' (*littera*) – a tri-partite entity, comprising *nomen*, *figura* and *potestas*. The three terms characterise the *littera* in terms of its properties: *nomen* is its name, *figura* – its shape, and *potestas* – 'power', i.e. the sound value of the letter (Kohrt 1985: 19). The post-classical *littera* seems best suited for descriptions of medieval English spellings, which did not obey the contemporary rigid distinction between the written and the spoken levels of representation. Notably, since the *littera* makes commitment neither to the 'emic' nor to the 'etic' side of the interpretative divide, it allows for accommodating the non-alphabetic component in descriptions of manuscript orthography. Hence, instead of referring to the 'letters' or 'graphemes' the present study will discuss the functions of *litterae* (represented in inverted commas). Likewise, rather than describing 'shapes of the letters' or 'graphetes', the term *figura* (pl. *figurae*) will be used (represented in angle brackets).

2 Abbreviations in medieval spelling systems

Manuscript production in the medieval period was largely determined by the need for economy – both in terms of time necessary for completing the copy and with respect to the covered space on the expensive vellum. This requirement was met by means of a

complex, yet readily interpretable system of abbreviations, originating in the Roman times and further developed in medieval Latin (Petti 1977: 22). Such abbreviations were also frequently resorted to by scribes writing English, who were 'adopting both [the] rules and the signs which were readily transferable' (Petti 1977: 22). Importantly, such transfer of abbreviation symbols from Latin was successful only to the extent that rules governing the original Latin system were familiar to and easily applied by the Middle English reader (Petti 1977: 22). Thus, symbols like, e.g. <p̨> (meaning 'per', 'par', 'por'), <p̨> ('pro'), <^{9}> ('us', 'os'), <$_{9}$> ('cum', 'con', 'com') or <ɣ> '('is', 'es') (Martin 1892: v–vii) were readily understood and applied in pre-determined contexts.

However, for a number of other originally Latin abbreviations Middle English scribes adopted a less than consistent approach and felt free to modify the form and/or function of a given symbol. Brown notes that

> there are signs that some abbreviations subsequently became obscure, requiring expansion or correction, that scribes were occasionally unclear where certain forms were concerned and that some abbreviations were always otiose (i.e. never intended for expansion) (Brown [1993] 2007: 5).

One of the reasons for this discrepancy between Latin originals and their Middle English renditions is the fact that whilst the fairly stable orthography of Latin allowed a straightforward interpretation of abbreviations (Roberts 2005: 10), the degree of admissible orthographic variability in Middle English prevented a definitive and all-applicable interpretation of such symbols.

This observation runs counter to the practice of modern editions of Middle English works, with their long-standing tradition of silently expanding abbreviations and assigning them specific alphabetical and (by implication) phonic values. Notably,

no justification for this kind of definiteness can be read from manuscript evidence. Benskin (1977) notes that abbreviations are iconographic rather than alphabetical, which means that they cannot be (re)interpreted on a par with other orthographic elements of a manuscript. Hence, expansion, which depends upon imposing definite alphabetic (and implied phonic) values upon such elements, is a misguided procedure. That is, one cannot claim to know 'what the scribe really meant' by applying a specific abbreviation symbol, 'for he may have been abbreviating the form of an *idea* rather than an alphabetical sequence' (Benskin 1977: 506).

Obviously, the range of possible interpretations of particular abbreviations in Middle English manuscripts is limited, but it is definitely less unequivocal than it was in Latin or than what modern editors lead the readers to believe. This failure of printed editions to 'transcend what the manuscripts actually offer us' (Edwards 2000: 78) is being gradually remedied by an increasing number of electronic editions, which offer the user an unprecedented possibility of juxtaposing the image of the actual manuscript with a transcription which is possibly inclusive in rendering both the *litterae* and *figurae* found in the original manuscript. Problems of interpretation, however, remain, as conflicting editorial practices of various enterprises clearly demonstrate (cf. The Middle English Grammar Project or *A linguistic atlas of early Middle English*). For example, compilers of the Middle English Grammar Project Corpus (MEG-C), even though on the whole conscious of the inadequacy of 'alphabeticising' abbreviation symbols, nevertheless do expand abbreviations into what they call 'conventional form'. Their somewhat confusing argumentation is that 'expansions are simply ways of indicating abbreviation marks and do not in general involve any assumptions about what these

marks "mean"' (Stenroos & Mäkinen 2011: 8). This is the usual problem facing researchers aiming at faithful representation of the graphetic layer of the manuscript.

3 CORPUS FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

The following discussion concentrates on scribal practices in rendering abbreviations and special symbols in a group of manuscripts of Geoffrey Chaucer's "Man of Law's Tale" (henceforth *MLT*), part of the *Canterbury Tales* collection. The *Canterbury Tales* are a rather special case of a polytextual work: with eighty-plus copies of the text still extant and a highly complex transmission history, they are an invaluable source of information for historical linguists. The present study is based on 10 manuscripts belonging to the so-called 'constant group-d' of the *MLT* corpus: Petworth (Pw), Phillips 8137 (Ph3), Royal 18 C.II (Ry2), Laud 739 (Ld2), Lichfield 2 (Lc), Morgan 249 (Mg) and Egerton 2863 (En2), Sloane 1685 (Sl1), Delamere (Dl) and Harley 1758 (Ha2)[1] (Manly & Rickert 1940, 2: 53–63).

The designate of a constant group entails textual uniformity of its members, which means that manuscripts included in this group were copied from a common exemplar and maintain their genetic affiliation in all fragments of the poem. On the basis of paleographical and extra-textual evidence the manuscripts in question were dated to a period between c.1430 and c.1475 and their language was recognised as displaying dialectal features of the Midlands, Kent and Essex (cf. Manly & Rickert 1940, 2).

[1] Two more d-manuscripts, Glasgow Hunterian U.1.1 (Gl) and Cambridge have not been considered in the present study: MS Mm was exemplar for the greater part of MS Gl and for the whole of the *MLT* (Manly & Rickert 1940, 1: 185).

All the examples of scribal spellings have been extracted from rich diplomatic transcriptions of facsimiles of the "Man of Law's Tale" manuscripts, performed by members of the Man of Law's Tale Project Team at the School of English, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań for the purposes of an envisaged electronic edition of the tale in question.

4 Abbreviations in *MLT* MSS

The following discussion will focus mainly on those *figurae* whose abbreviating function is not questionable. Therefore, macrons, i.e. horizontal lines placed above the letter to indicate an omitted 'm' or 'n' (Clemens & Graham 2007: 90), will not be taken into consideration, since often what in form looks exactly like a macron are just 'additional strokes which in Latin text would indicate an abbreviation, but which may or may not do so in English'[2] (Parkes 1979: xxix). On this note, Denholm-Young points out that 'in the later Middle Ages the use of abbreviations is so widespread and often so careless that their extension is a matter of great difficulty', which has been the cause of what he terms 'much inconsistency and vacillation in the transcription of manuscripts for editions of English texts' (Denholm-Young [1954] 1964: 69).

The present study focuses on two types of abbreviations (cf. Brown 2007: 5): contractions (including superscript letters) and special symbols (brevigraphs). These symbols will be considered from the perspective of their forms and functions and juxtaposed with their unabbreviated equivalents. In what follows it will be argued that,

[2] Problems with the function of strokes in Middle English begin already at the definition level. Stenroos and Mäkinen ask: 'at which point does a long end stroke become a flourish? Are cross bars over h's or double l's to be considered "flourishes" even if they occur completely regularly, or are they part of the regular letter shape (*figura*)?' (Stenroos & Mäkinen 2011: 9).

contrary to what traditional editing has persistently maintained, abbreviations do not 'stand for' a specific string of *litterae* (although this is what the Latin system of notation originally conveyed), but *alternate with* alphabetic strings. As such, both specific combinations of *litterae* and abbreviation symbols are equally valid elements of the analysis of scribal spelling systems and are a meaningful criterion in evaluating scribal prodigality, manifested in the multivalence of orthographic symbols.

4. 1 *Superscript letters*

There are four types of superscript letters in the *MLT* MSS: 'i', 'e', 'u', 'a' and 'r'. This typology of supralinear alphabetic symbols requires some qualification. Firstly, all the *litterae* except 'a' and 'r' often occur with *littera* 'þ' as variant forms of pronouns *þi*, *þe* and *þu* respectively. In this context, obviously, there can be no question of abbreviating function of the superscript characters, and the difference between *þi* and *þ*^{i}, *þe* and *þ*^{e}, *þu* and *þ*^{u} is merely formal (i.e. linear vs. supralinear orientation of the second *littera*). Secondly, superscript *litterae* denoting abbreviation should be distinguished from *litterae* inserted above the line as a result of scribal correction. Stenroos and Mäkinen (2011: 15) point out that, although the form of such superior *litterae* is often identical to those that indicate abbreviation, their functions are totally dissimilar and not infrequently the superscript *littera* as mark of scribal correction is inserted by a different hand than the one who wrote the text. Such cases have been omitted from the following discussion.

4. 1. 1 *Superscript 'i'*

Supralinear 'i' typically implies omission of a preceding 'r' in a sequence 'ri'. Thus, *c*^{i}*st* is a variant of CRIST, whereas *p*^{i}*uy* is a form of PRIVY. This does not, however, mean that *c*^{i}*st* 'means' *crist* or that *p*^{i}*uy* 'means' *priuy*, just the same as *p*^{i}*de* is not *pride*, although both are forms of the lexeme PRIDE. Seemingly, this caveat is at variance with what was stated in first sentence of this paragraph with reference to the function of superscript 'i'. However, the fact that this abbreviation appears in the context of 'r' plus 'i' is not the same as 'this abbreviation *means* "r" plus "i"'. Evidence against such interpretation of superscript 'i' can be found in the analysed corpus.

The first observation to be made is that this abbreviation is not all-applicable; that is, the very presence of a 'ri'-context does not prompt the scribe to substitute these two *litterae* with a supralinear 'i'. It appears that it is the lexical rather than orthographic context that triggers abbreviation, and in the majority of the *MLT* MSS the same lexeme types appear in abbreviated form. Thus, most frequently abbreviated words are CHRIST[3] – and its grammatical forms (MSS Pw, Lc, Ry2), and PRIVY- (MSS En2, Lc, Mg, Ry2, Ld2, Dl, and Sl1). There are also single occurrences of abbreviated PRIDE (Pw, Lc), PRINCE (Pw, Lc, Dl), TRIUMPH (Pw, En2), EMPRISE (Ph3, Ry2), as well as MS-specific: CIRCUMSTANCE, CRIED, SACRIFICES (all three in Ry2), SPRING (En2) and PILGRIMAGE (Pw). It has already been indicated that imposing definite alphabetic interpretations upon marks of abbreviation is not always well-motivated.

[3] This lexeme is also characterised by a high frequency of occurrence: there are 49 tokens of this type, including various grammatical, orthographic and lexical forms.

For example, one might question the soundness of equating *p^{i}uely* in MS Ld2 with *priuely* (even though both forms appear in the MS), if in that same MS also the spelling *pryuely* appears. Similarly, in MS Dl there is one abbreviated form *p^{i}vy*, but all remaining PRIV-forms are invariably spelt with 're', and take the forms *previly* (3 tokens), *previlye* (2 tokens) and *previtee*. The same variance occurs in Sl1, which has one *p^{i}ue* form, alongside one spelling *prively*, but otherwise that lexeme type appears as *pryvely* (3 tokens) and *pryvete*. Given that there is even variance in the spelling of unabbreviated lexemes (e.g. *pryde ~ pruyde* in Ph3; *pryde ~ pride*, *preuely ~ priuyly* in En2; *priuely ~ pryuely* in Ld2; and *prively ~ pryvely* in Sl1), it is simply wrong to claim that superscript 'i'-forms are formally the same as full forms, spelled with *litterae* 'ri'. If that were the case, it is quite difficult to explain variable spellings of full forms. Moreover, a form like *p^{i}poos* in MS Pw would have to be expanded as the nonsensical *pirpoos*,[4] where all other MSS without exception read *purpos.*

There is also a single occurrence of a *þ^{i}*-form of THY in MS Pw, but in this case the superscript *littera* does not really abbreviate anything. This is rather a case of conventional spelling of function words, often resorted to by Middle English scribes.

4. 1. 2 *Superscript 'a'*

This type of abbreviation appears in all analysed MSS except En2 and Ha2. Two distinct functions of that *littera* ought to be distinguished: supralinear 'a', 'often reduced to a serrated line', reminiscent of a spread *littera* 'u', and, the other one – a brevigraph rather than a superscript letter – almost identical in form but abbreviating

[4] Incidentally, the abbreviation superscript 'r', which normally applies in the context 'u' plus 'r' *is* part of the repertoire of the scribe of Pw (hence forms, e.g. *creat^{r}e*, *labo^{r}*, *myro^{r}*).

the sequence ‘ra’ (Petti 1977: 23). The distribution of these two *figurae*, however, does not coincide with their function. The *MLT* MSS employ this abbreviation with varying frequency. The one lexeme that in all 8 MSS is abbreviated at least once per its 11 occurrences is GRACE (*g^{a}ce*). Other contexts for abbreviating the ‘ra’ sequence are *g^{a}unted* (Pw, Lc, Ry2, Ld2, Sl1); *remembˢunce* (Ry2, Ld2); *p^{a}y*, *p^{a}yed* (Ld2, Sl1); *Soc^{a}tes* (Pw); *st^{a}unge* and *t^{a}ytourye* (both in Lc). As for the superscript ‘a’ contracting the ‘au’ sequence, the following forms have been attested: *au^{a}ntage* (Pw, Lc, Mg); *eu^{a}ngelies* (Pw, Lc, Mg, Ld2); *pen^{a}nce* (Pw, Lc, Sl1); *qu^{a}ntite* (Lc, Mg); *counten^{a}nce* (Lc); *gouern^{a}nce*, *ordyn^{a}nce/ordin^{a}nce*, *seru^{a}nte* (all in Pw); *remembˢunce* (Ry2) and *ƒu^{a}ut* (Sl1).

Similarly to superscript ‘i’, also for supralinear ‘a’ the motivation appears to be lexical rather than orthographic: it is not the presence of the sequence of *litterae* ‘ra’ or ‘au’ that triggers abbreviation, but the occurrence of specific lexeme which often appears in the contracted form in more than one MS. Notably, it is not only the twofold function of superscript ‘a’ that hinders a definite interpretation, as there are also (highly incidental, yet attested) instances of this symbol acting as ‘zero abbreviation’; thus, forms *march^{a}untz* (2 occurrences in Lc), *merch^{a}untez* (Ld2) and *qu^{a}rter* (Ph3) cannot be classified as abbreviations, as both the ‘u’ that immediately follows superior ‘a’ in the first two examples, and the ‘r’ immediately after superscript ‘a’ in the second lexeme, are preserved in those forms. In corresponding abbreviations they would have been contracted.

4. 1. 3 *Superscript 'u'*

Unlike for superscript 'i' and 'a', evidence for superscript 'u' in the *MLT* MSS is very sparse. In the entire corpus there are only two unambiguous cases of a superscript 'u', abbreviating the 'ru' sequence, and both instances occur on the same lexeme type: *Imp*^{u}*dent* in MS Ry2 and *p*^{u}*dent* in MS Lc (there is also one *prudent* form in that MS). In MSS Pw, Lc, Ry2 and Ld2, in turn, superior 'u' is more adequately termed 'pseudo-abbreviation', as it occasionally appears as a conventional spelling form of YOU and THOU: *yo*^{u}, *ȝo*^{u} and *þ*^{u} respectively. In these contexts, supralinear 'u' is 'superfluously superscript' (Denholm-Young 1964: 67). Yet again, it is not possible to assign definite alphabetical values to supralinear forms of *littera* 'u', as not only does it appear as a substitution for 'ru', but it also occurs in context where no 'r' exists. Therefore, if one were to keep to the praxis of equating abbreviated lexemes with their spelt-out counterparts, to the list of *litterae* substituting for superscript 'u' would have to be added 'ou' (in *þ*^{u} as a variant of THOU) and 'u' (in *yo*^{u} and *ȝo*^{u}).

The former has not been attested as a valid scribal practice, and as for the latter, the only context in which the sequence of *litterae* 'ou' participates in abbreviation is when it is immediately followed by 'r', as in, e.g. *honour, senatour*. In such cases, however, the abbreviation symbol represents 'r', and truncates the 'ur' sequence, whereas *littera* 'o' is left unabbreviated, hence, e.g. *hono*^{r}, *senato*^{r} (see below). The latter scenario, in turn, i.e. superscript 'u' as a variant of line-internal 'u', would present a case for 'zero abbreviation', as, in fact, no *littera* in *yo*^{u} and *ȝo*^{u} was contracted. This interpretation clearly violates the law of parsimony, generating a gratuitous entity for the purpose of salvaging a flawed principle.

4. 1. 4 *Superscript 'e'*

Similarly, to the above-discussed superscript 'u', this supralinear symbol is quite rare in the *MLT* MSS and virtually limited to conventional spellings of THE, i.e. *þ*^{e}. Such forms can be found in MSS Pw (10 occurrences), Ry2, Ld2 and Dl (2 occurrences in each of the MSS). There are only two examples of the use of superscript 'e' in an abbreviating function, i.e. the form *g*^{e}*ue* in MS Ry2, which is equivalent to *greue* in other MSS, and *c*^{e}*ance* in that same MS, spelt *creance* elsewhere. These, however, are isolated instances.

4. 1. 5 *Superscript 'r'*

Similarly to superscript 'a', superscript 'r' appears in the form of two distinct *figurae*: a diamond-shaped or a sigma-shaped 'r'. Yet again, the difference in *figurae* representing the symbol is not correlated with any functional differentiation characterizing the two superior 'r's': in all cases the symbol in question is applicable where equivalent full forms are spelt with 'our' or just 'ur'. Accordingly, among the most frequently abbreviated 'our'-lexemes are: *hono*^{r} (MSS Pw – 3 tokens, also in Ph3, Lc, Mg. In the latter 3 MSS, as well as in Ry2, there is also the form *hono*^{r}*ed*, whereas in Lc and Ry2 there is also *deshono*^{r}); *Senato*^{r} (Pw – 3 tokens; Lc – 4 tokens, Sl1; Dl has *sinato*^{r}); spelling variants of COMMANDER (*cōmando*^{r} in Lc, *cōmaundo*^{r} in Sl1, *comaunde*^{r} in Ld2, *comovnd*^{r}*ere* in Dl); *soio*^{r}*ned* (Pw, Lc, Mg); *tormento*^{r}, *traito*^{r} (Pw and Lc), *mero*^{r} (Ry2) and *myro*^{r} (Pw); *neighbo*^{r} (Pw) and *neighbo*^{r}*s* (Ha2); *labo*^{r}; *ȝo*^{r} (Pw) *o*^{r} (Pw – 2 tokens); *Emꝑo*^{r} (Ry2). At the same time, full forms appear next to their

abbreviated counterparts. Thus, in MS Pw there are spellings *traitour*, *Senatour* (6 tokens), *Senatoure* (3 tokens), *Senatours*, *honour* (2 tokens), *honoure*, *honoured*, *labour*, *our* (9 tokens), *oure* (4 tokens); in MS Dl – *senatur*, *senatur-*, *senetur-*, *sinatur-*, *sinaturis*.

The other group of abbreviations indicated by the sigma- or the diamond-shaped symbol refer to the 'ur' sequence of *litterae*, not preceded by 'o'. Hence *auent^{r}e*, *creat^{r}e* (2 tokens); *p^{r}uyaunce* (alongside *purviaunce*) (Pw); *lux^{r}ie* (Lc, Ha2); *p^{r}chace* (Lc, Ry2, Dl, Ha2), *p^{r}ueance* (Lc); *p^{r}veance* (Mg); *p^{r}pos* (Ry2); *trayt^{r}*, *t^{r}ment*, *t^{r}ne* (all in Dl). For both contexts the customary expansion of abbreviations would read 'ur'. There are, nevertheless, incidental spellings which make this interpretation somewhat less unambiguous. Namely, the sole instance of superscript 'r' in MS Ph3 appears on the lexeme *vnd^{r}*. In that same MS UNDER also appears in an unabbreviated form as *vndir*, whereas the remaining MSS invariably spell *vnder*. Adding to this nonce spelling forms *c^{r}ance*, *diu^{r}se* and *f^{r}m* from MS Ry2, one might argue that it is also for possible for superior 'r' to represent *litterae* 're' and 'er' (or at least, that such substitution is available for the scribe of MSS Ry2 and Ph3).

4. 2 *Brevigraphs*

Brevigraphs, or special symbols, are a group of abbreviations transferred directly from the Latin system of notation. Unlike superscript letters, *figurae* used in the function of brevigraphs are arbitrary in shape, and formally not reminiscent of any of the *litterae* they are supposed to represent. With respect to the use of brevigraphs in MSS of the *Canterbury Tales* Robinson and Solopova (1993: 31) state that '[i]n most cases it is

clear that the brevigraph represents an abbreviation, though precisely what is abbreviated varies both within and between manuscripts'. Six types of special symbols will be considered in the following discussion: <ꝑ> (originally abbreviating the sequences of *litterae* 'per', 'par', 'por'), <ꝓ> ('pro'), <^{9}> ('us', 'os'), <$_{9}$> ('cum', 'con', 'com'), <ꝛ> '('is', 'ys', 'es') and <^{2}> ('er', 're') (Martin 1892: v–vii), along with an examination of possible spellings in lexemes containing equivalent full forms.

4. 2. 1 *Abbreviation for 'per', 'par', 'por'*

The symbol representing a contracted sequence of *litterae* 'per', 'par' or 'por' derives from Latin *Notae Juris* (Denholm-Young 1964: 67). These *juristic signs* were often employed in legal documents (Petti 1977: 22) but they soon found their way into literary MSS. Of all the brevigraphs attested in the *MLT* MSS < > has the highest incidence. Comparably to superscript letters, this abbreviation is lexically triggered, i.e. it is not so much the availability of the combinations of *litterae* 'per', 'par' (but not 'por' in the analysed corpus), as the incidence of specific words that effects abbreviating. Thus, for instance, all d-MSS abbreviate the word EMPEROR as *Emꝑour*, albeit not all of them do so indiscriminately. Pointedly, the only orthographic variant attested for the relevant grapheme sequence in the unabbreviated forms of this lexeme is 'per' (*Emperoures* in MS Ry2). A similar case is the lexeme PERFECTION, which is abbreviated in all but one *MLT* MS (ꝑ*feccioū* in Pw, Ph3, En2, Mg and Ld2; ꝑ*fectioū* in Lc; ꝑ*feccion* in Ry2 and Sl1; ꝑ*feccioun* in Ha2). The sole instance of an unabbreviated form, occurring in MS Dl, reads *perfeccioun*. Finally, all MSS also

have at least one form *prosꝑite* (in MSS Ph3, Lc, Ld2 with double abbreviation: ꝓsꝑ*ite*), which functions unabbreviated as *prosperite(e)* (Dl, Ha2) or ꝓs*peryte* (in Sl1).

The second group of <ꝑ>-words is constituted by lexemes DEPART- and PARDE. In the abbreviated forms of these two words <ꝑ> is a substitution for 'par', rather than 'per'. As for the former lexeme, the 'par' interpretation might be suggested by forms *depart* (Ph3), *departinge* (Ph3), *departynge* (Pw, Lc, Mg, Dl, Sl1), *mysdepartebꝫ* (Pw), *mysdepartetħ* (Ph3), *mys departetħ* (Mg) or *mis departeth* (Lc). A similar example, although with only one attestation of a full form is ꝑ*de*, which appears in the abbreviated form in all MSS save Pw, where it reads *parde*.

Somewhat less unequivocal is the interpretation of <ꝑ> in PARAVENTURE ('peradventure'). The abbreviated form ꝑ*auenture* (MSS Ph3, En2, Ry2 and Sl1; ꝑ*aventure* in Dl) is counterbalanced by *perauenture* in Pw on the one hand, and, on the other, by *par auenture* in Lc and *par aventure* in Mg. Similarly, when the lexeme ꝑ*fay* (also spelt ꝑ*fey*) appears in full form, it can be either *perfay* (Pw) or *parfey*/*parfay* (Ph3, Lc, Mg, Ha2).

A separate issue are spellings *sꝑit* (Ry2 – 3 tokens; also in Dl and Ha2), whose unabbreviated variants are invariably *spirit*- (spelling variants include *spiretes* in Pw and *spiryt* in Ph3). The use of <ꝑ> in a context which normally spells 'pir', implies a possible extension of to the original set of orthographic substitutions 'per', 'par', and <ꝑ>, to include also 'pir'. At the same time, the third of the original interpretations of <ꝑ> – 'por', is not possible for any of the *MLT* MSS.

4. 2. 2 *Abbreviation for 'pro'*

Another example of *Notae Juris*, the symbol <ꝑ> was employed in medieval MSS to represent the sequence 'pro'. In the *MLT* MSS this abbreviation is limited to virtually two lexemes: PROPHET and PROSPERITY, the former of which occurs once and the latter – twice in the corpus. The form *ꝑphete* appears in MSS Pw, En2, Lc, Mg, Dl and Sl1, whereas MS Ph3 has *prophete* (in remaining MSS the relevant line is missing). The second abbreviated form, *ꝑsperyte*, appears twice in Sl1, whereas in MSS Ph3, Lc, and Ld2 this lexeme is encoded with a double abbreviation: *ꝑsꝑite*. Yet again, whenever a full form has been attested (or, full in the sense: not abbreviating the beginning of the word), it is invariably spelt with 'pro' (*prosperite* in Ha2; *prosperitee* in Dl, and *prosꝑite* in Pw, Ph3, Lc, Mg; *prosꝑitee* in Dl). There are also two nonce occurrences of the symbol <ꝑ> on items which in all remaining MSS are spelt with 'pro', i.e. *ꝑteccioū* in Mg and *apꝑchede* in Ld2.

4. 2. 3 *Abbreviation for 'is', 'ys', 'es'*

In the Latin system of abbreviation the symbol <ɣ> was applied to denote inflectional endings 'is', 'ys', 'es' (Petti 1977: 23), and with this function it was transferred to the praxis of medieval English scribes. It is noteworthy that, while the alphabetical context for <ɣ> recurs quite often in the *MLT* MSS, the abbreviation itself is rarely used and limited to but a few lexemes. In only four MSS do the scribes resort to this symbol of contraction, and out of these four MSS only in two is the usage of <ɣ> more than

incidental. Thus, MS Pw has the form *enqueringȝ*, but in no other MS does the lexeme end in any of the three possible substitutive *litterae* (there are spellings *enqueryng* in MSS Ry2, Ld2, Ha2; *enguerynge* in Ph3, En2, Lc, Sl1 and *en queryngge* in Dl). A similar case is the form *thyngȝ* in Ld2, which does not have a full-form equivalent spelt with 'es', 'is', or 'ys'; other MSS spell *þing* (Pw, En2, Lc); *thyng* (Mg, Ha2); *þinge* (Sl1) or *thynge* (Ph3).

Also in Pw, as well as in Ry2, there is *tydynggȝ* (besides *tydingges* in Pw and *tydynges* in Ry2). The two instantiations of this lexeme in other MSS are represented as follows: *tydengs*, *tidings* (Ld2); *tiding*, *tidinges* (Lc); *tithing*, *thyngis* (Ha2); *tythynge*, *tythynges* (Ph3); *tydynges*, *tythynge* (Sl1); *thing*, *tithynggis* (Dl); *tidyng*, *tidynges*. From this it can be seen that both the 'is' as well as the 'es'-endings are possible substitutions for <ȝ>.[5]

The lexeme *cristes* (Pw, En2, Lc, Ld2) and its spelling variants *crystes* (Ph3), or *cristis* (Ha2, Dl) are abbreviated as *cristȝ* in Ry2. In the same way, both *kyngȝ* forms in MS Ry2 are a variant spelling of KINGS, equivalent to *kyng*, *kingges* (Pw); *kyng*, *kynges* (En2, Lc, Ld2); *kynge*, *kynges* (Ph3); *kyng*, *kyngis* (Ha2); *kynge*, *kyngis* (Dl); *kynge*, *kyngys* (Sl1); *kyng* (Mg). Yet again, the symbol <ȝ> can be said to substitute for 'es', 'is', as well as 'ys', without clear preference for any of the three sequences of *litterae*. Furthermore, *Senatourȝ* from Ry2 is elsewhere spelt as *senatours* (Pw, Ld2, Ha2, Sl1); *Senato*^{r}*s* (Lc); *senatoures* (En2, Ph3); *sinaturis* (Dl). Finally, Dl has *schipȝ*, where other MSS have *shippes* (Pw, Lc, Mg, Ry2, Ld2); *schippes* (En2); *shyppys* (Sl1), or *schippis* (Ha2).

[5] And/or zero and 'e', if one were to adhere rigidly to the principle of functional equivalence of lexemes appearing in the same contexts. This, however, would be a naïve procedure, given the fact that scribes would often at will change not only the grammatical form but also the lexical forms from their exemplars.

Overall, the scribes of the *MLT* MSS are not in any way innovative in their use of the <ɣ>-abbreviation. Used relatively infrequently, this symbol maintained its original functions, representing the endings ‘es’, ‘is’ and ‘ys’, which practice can be inferred from juxtaposing contracted forms with their full counterparts. Accordingly, the three sequences of *litterae* and the symbol <ɣ> can be said to form a four-element set of substitutions: {‘es’, ‘is’, ‘ys’, <ɣ>} for representing the same morphological context.

4. 2. 4 *Abbreviation for ‘us’, ‘os’*

Originally, the symbol <^{9}> was employed in Latin for abbreviating two sequences of *litterae*: ‘us’ and ‘os’. The latter function was lost in the medieval period and ‘[a] mark resembling a number 9, entered above the line at the end of a word, signified the suspension of *us*’ (Clemens & Graham 2007: 90). This abbreviation is used extremely rarely in the MSS of the *MLT* (there are 9 occurrences altogether, 3 of which are in MS Sl1 and 2 in Pw and Ry2 each). It should be noted that the context particularly conducive for applying this type of contraction is constituted by Latinate personal names: PYRRHUS, IULIUS and MAURICIUS.

The first lexeme appears in its abbreviated form in three MSS: *Pirr*^{9} (Pw), *Pyrr*^{9} (Ha2) and *Purr*^{9} (Sl1), where other MSS spell *pirrrus* (En2, Lc, Ld2) and *purrus* (Ph3, Dl). *Maurici*^{9}, in turn, appears in Sl1 and Ph3, and there is the form *Iuli*^{9} in Sl1, where other MSS have *Mauricius* and *Iulius* respectively. In MS Pw there are also two occurrences of *þ*^{9} for THUS, which lexeme appears either as *thus* or *þus* in all the contexts in all other MSS. There are, nonetheless, three further examples proving that

the *MLT* scribes were not always altogether conservative in the application of that mark of contraction.

Even though the forms to be discussed below are accidental, they nevertheless point to the scribes' readiness to expand the set of *figurae*, which originally comprised 'os' (no longer available for Middle English), 'us' and <^{9}>, to include more orthographic elements. One relevant example are two forms *godd*^{9}, which appear in Ry2 in contexts where other MSS have *god(d)es* (Pw, Ph3, En2, Lc, Ld2, Sl1); *goddis* (Ha2 and Dl) or *godys* (Ph3). Moreover, in MS Ry2 there is one form *menn*^{9}, which in other MSS reads *mennes* (En2, Lc, Sl1, Mg Ph3); *mēnes* (Ph3) or *mennys* (Pw, Dl). Finally, Ph3 has *spirit*^{9} where other MSS have *spirites* (En2, Lc, Mg, Sl1), *spiriteȝ* (Ld2), *spiretes* (Pw) or *spiritis* (Ha2, Dl). The three incidental spellings demonstrate how abbreviation <^{9}> encroaches upon the functions of <ȝ> in its capacity to substitute for 'es', and 'is', 'ys', apart from the original 'us'. Thus, once more MS evidence proves that taking the implied alphabetic value of abbreviations at face value might lead to misrepresentation of the orthographic reality of a medieval text.

4. 2. 5 *Abbreviation for 'con'*

The symbol 'resembling an arabic number nine' (Clemens & Graham 2007: 89), derives from the system of Tironian symbols, 'a shorthand system used by Tiro, Cicero's secretary' (Petti 1977: 22). It appeared in interlinear, initial position, and signified the prefix 'cum', 'com', 'cog' or 'con' (Martin 1892: vi), but in the spelling praxis of Middle English scribes it would have been applied only to the sequence 'con'. This practice finds confirmation (however scanty) in the *MLT* corpus, where <$_{9}$> is used only

in Pw, on three occasions: *$_{9}$diciōn* (2 occurrences) and *$_{9}$foūded* (alongside *confound*), where all remaining MSS have ‘con’-forms.

4. 2. 6 *Abbreviation for ‘er’, ‘re’*

The ‘upper-case hook sign’ was typically used for abbreviating ‘er’ and/or ‘re’, although the *figura* representing it might be indistinguishable from otiose strokes over *litterae* ‘u’ and ‘r’ (Robinson & Solopova 1993: 31). Despite this formal likeness, however, the abbreviating function of some of the superscript hooks is unquestionable. Without doubt, the ‘er’/‘re’ abbreviation is the most common brevigraph in the *MLT* MSS. It is employed both for function words (e.g. *ou*^{2}, *þ*^{2}, *oþ*^{2}) and lexical items (e.g. *lett*^{2}, *dought*^{2}, *gen*^{2}*al*, *s*^{2}*uaunt*). Generally, the praxis of the *MLT* scribes with respect to this particular abbreviation mark is so variable that it is hardly possible to provide a structured description thereof.

Although some universal tendencies can be observed (like, e.g. the proclivity for abbreviating lexemes THERE, OTHER, OUR, EVER, NEVER, and, less often, DOUGHTER, GOVERNANCE, PRESENCE), both the frequency with which superscript hook is applied and the types of lexemes that are abbreviated with this symbol vary from one MS to another. Also, when juxtaposed with their spelt-out counterparts abbreviated forms are indicative of a possibility of the scribes’ expanding the scope of reference for the superscript hook. Relevant for this argument are the spelling variants of lexemes: AFTER, DOUGHTER, EVER/EVERY, NEVER, MERCHANT-, WONDER, YONDER.

Beginning with AFTER, although the full form is by far the most dominant spelling in the entire corpus, this lexeme can also be abbreviated as *aft*^{2} (Ph3, Sl1). Notably, apart from the dominant *after* spellings, there are occasional forms *aftir* (5 tokens in Ha2 and 2 tokens in Sl1) and *aftyr* (Sl1). DOUGHTER- is abbreviated in MSS Ph3 (3 tokens), Lc (3 tokens) and Sl1 (4 tokens) as *dought*^{2} (once as *dou3t*^{2} in Sl1). Insofar as in Ph3 and Lc full-form counterparts of the truncated lexemes are always *doughter* (10 tokens), MS Sl1 has 2 occurrences of *doughtyr*, one of *dou3tyr* and 6 of *dou3tir*. There is also one spelling *dowghttur* in Dl and one *doughtir* in Ld2.

The next lexeme, MERCHANT(S), appears once as *m*^{2}*chantes* in Sl1 and once as *m*^{2}*chaundes* in Pw. Interestingly enough, the predominant spelling of the full form of this word is not 'mer-', but 'mar-': *marchantes* (Ph3), *marchante3* (En2, Sl1, Ry2 – 5 tokens), *marchant3* (En2, Lc, Mg), *marchauntes* (Pw – 3 tokens, Sl1), *marchaunt3* (Ph3 – 5 tokens, Lc, Mg), *marchaunt3* (Sl1), *marchaundis* (En2), *marchauntis* (Dl – 2 tokens, Ha2 – 4 tokens), *marchauntys* (Dl), *Marchaūtis* (Dl – 3 tokens, Ha2 – 2 tokens), *Marchaūt3* (Sl1). Only in Pw are there two spellings *merchaunt3*, whereas Ld2 has 3 occurrences of *merchaunte3* and one of *merch*^{a}*unte3*.

Similarly variable spellings have been attested for two more lexemes: WONDER and YONDER. Admittedly, both abbreviations appear in only one MS, namely Dl (*wond*^{2}, *yond*^{2}), but the spellings of the two items in other MSS are a warning against expanding the superscript hook indiscriminately as 'er' or 're'. To exemplify, apart from *wonder* (Pw, En2, Lc, Mg, Ld2, Dl) and *yonder* (Ry2, Ld2; Sl1 – *yonder*; Pw, Lc and En2 – *3onder*), there are also *wondir* (Ph3) and *yondir* (Ha2; *3ondir* in Ph3) spellings in the *MLT* MSS. Moreover, in some MSS more than one spelling is

possible: Sl1 has *wonder*, *wondre* and *wondir*; Ha2 has *wonder* (1 token) and *wondir* (3 tokens); Ry2 has one spelling *wonder* and one *wondir*.

A similar type of alternation, albeit limited to MS Ha2, exists for yet another pair of words, namely EVER/EVERY and NEVER. These two lexical types are the most frequent choice for abbreviation with the superscript hook, although not all tokens of these types are abbreviated (MS Lc truncates all instances of EVER/EVERY and NEVER indiscriminately into *eu*^{2} and *neu*^{2} respectively). In all those cases when a contracted form of either of the two lexemes alternates with a full form in one MS, that full form always reads *euer/euery* and *neuer*. An important exception to this pattern is MS Ha2, which has two possible *litteral* substitutions for the symbol <^{2}>, i.e. 'er' and 'yr'. Thus, apart from abbreviated forms like *eu*^{2}*y-*, *neu*^{2}, there are also *euery* (10 tokens) and *euerich-* (5 tokens), as well as *neuere* (2 tokens).

Remarkably, the lexeme EVER is not abbreviated in Ha2 and there are two possible spellings of it: *euere* (3 tokens) or *euyr* (9 tokens). On the basis of this distribution it might be argued that for these particular lexemes MS Ha2 applies <^{2}> in its original function (i.e. abbreviating 'er', 're'), since the word EVER, whose full form is spelt both with 'er' and 'yr' is never abbreviated. On the other hand, though, an alternative spelling for *neu*^{2} and *neuere* is *neuyr* (5 tokens), which is clearly the same lexeme as the other two, so the claim that superscript hook actually might be said to substitute also for 'yr' finds support in MS evidence.

The above-summarised distribution of alphabetic alternations for the superscript hook points to two general conclusions. First, although for a considerable part of the analysed material the *litteral* equivalent of <^{2}> could indeed be identified as 'er' or 're', the scribes of the *MLT* just as often substitute for that abbreviation mark with other

sequences of *litterae*: ‘ir’, ‘yr’, or ‘ar’. Secondly, these unorthodox alphabetic substitutions are position-bound. That is, although ‘er’ appears in both word-medial and word-final contexts, this is not possible for any of the other three sequences of *litterae* alternating with <^{2}>. Accordingly, ‘ar’ can only appear word-medially in the lexeme MERCHANT, but this spelling is never available for any other <^{2}>-abbreviated item, both in word-internal and word-final position. By the same token, ‘yr’ and ‘ir’ are not mutually substitutive with the superscript hook in word-internal position but they occur exclusively at word ends.

4. 3 *Figurae of potential linguistic value*

Apart from marks of abbreviation, in the *MLT* MSS there are also certain non-alphabetical elements, which can be hypothesised to encode linguistic meaning. These are characters occurring at word ends, which are interpretatively the most problematic graphic elements in all MSS (cf. Robinson & Solopova 1993: 33). Typically, linguistic analyses of scribal output, but even studies focusing specifically on MS orthography, write off strokes appearing, e.g. at word-final *litterae* ‘f’, ‘s’, ‘k’, ‘g’, or ‘t’, as flourishes, devoid of any function save decorative.[6] Similar practice concerns strokes on ‘h’, ‘ll’ and ‘d’, even though the contexts for these three characters are often suggestive of their potential linguistic function.

The problem with interpreting strokes on word-final *litterae* in Middle English MSS, as opposed to similar strokes in a Latin text, is related to the properties of medieval English spellings on the one hand and to the praxis of Middle English scribes

[6] Interestingly enough, the latter three *figurae* are actually differentiated in transcriptions of the Middle English Grammar Project (cf. Stenroos & Mäkinen 2011: 9).

on the other. Parkes (1979: xxix) remarks that English spelling of the ends of words, particularly when inflection was involved, was by far less stable than it was true of Latin. Consequently, 'it is easier to tell in Latin whether or not a word is complete'. Furthermore, the scribes in 15th century England would often use strokes 'as a feature of calligraphic decoration', which might look 'very much like marks of abbreviation' (Parkes 1979: xxix). In concurrence with Parkes' argument that 'it is not safe either to ignore [such strokes], or to treat them as marks of abbreviation' (Parkes 1979: xxx), the following discussion will focus on three recurrent *figurae*, whose distribution, however inconsistent, is indicative of a potential linguistic function: <ħ>, <łł> and <ď>.

4. 3. 1 <*ħ*>

Discussing the function of *figura* <ħ> in MSS of the *Canterbury Tales*, Robinson and Solopova (1993: 34) state that '[i]n the majority of manuscripts this character is employed in one or both of [the following] contexts: as a final letter of a word or in a combination with <t>'. At the same time, they point to the inconsistency of scribal praxis with respect of this *figura*, which 'freely alternates with the ordinary <h>'. Indeed, it is often the case that the so-called 'barred <h>' substitutes for plain <h>, particularly in the contexts 'th' and 'gh'.

It also happens, though (however infrequently), that word-final *figura* <ħ> alternates with the spelling '-he'. For instance, the form *englissħ* in MSS Pw, Lc (*englyssħ* in Ld2) appears as *englisshe* in MSS En2, Ry2 and *englysse* in Sl1. Also, *wassħ* and *wessħ* in Pw are always '-sshe' in other MSS: *wasshe*, *wysshe* in En2; *wasshe*, *wisshe* in Ry2; *wasshe*, *wosshe* in Lc and Mg; *wasshe*, *wesshe* in Ld2 and Sl1;

and *wassche, wessche* in Dl. The same correlation does not seem to hold when *figura* <ħ> precedes *littera* ‘g’ or ‘t’; rather, in these two contexts it appears to be just a scribe’s way of finishing the word and an <ħ>-form often alternates with an ‘h’-spelling (see above). Nonetheless, a few instances of <ħ>-spellings in rhymes point to a possible linguistic significance of this *figura*:

(1) (a) <L 538>For but if C[sup]i[/sup]ste open þe miracle **kitħ**
<L 539>Wiþ owten gilt þou shalt be slayn as **swiþe** (Pw)
(b) <L 1056>Weping for tendernesse in hert **blitħ**
<L 1057>She herieþ God an C . thousand **siþe** (Pw)
(c) <L 429>That she forgate hir mynd be hir **troutħ**
<L 430>The constable of hir hath grete pyte
<L 431>And eke his wyf that they wepeñ for **routhe** .
<L 432>She was so diligent with outeñ **slouthe** (Ld2)
(d) <L 834>How may this wikked wōmañ hañ the **strengtħ**
<L 835>Hir to defende agayne this renegat
<L 836>O golias vn mensurable oñ **lenghe** (Ld2)

The fact that <ħ> can appear in rhyme with words ending in ‘-e’ would support the tentative hypothesis that this *figura* might be employed as a mark of abbreviation for word-final ‘e’. At the same time, however, evidence for such interpretation is too inconclusive and scribal practice too inconsistent to allow for anything more than speculation.

4. 3. 2 <*ɬ*>

This *figura*, frequently recurring in word-final position in the *MLT* MSS, often alternates with single ‘l’ (Robinson & Solopova 1993: 34, Stenroos & Mäkinen 2011: 9). Petti (1977: 23) interprets crossed double ‘l’ as abbreviation for *–lle*, but evidence found in the *MLT* MSS is less than conclusive. Nonetheless, yet again, the context of rhymes might throw some light on the potential linguistic function of <ɬ>:

(2) (a) <L 622>So longe is goon wiþ childꞇ til þat **stille**

<L 623>She halt her chambere abiding c^{i}stes **wiłł** (Pw)

(b) <L 11>And seist yow hast to liteł and he hath **alle**.

<L 12>Þfey seist yow som tyme he rekeñ **shałł**. (Ld2)

(c) <L 1016>Who cañ the pytous Ioy telleñ **alle**

<L 1017>Bytwyx hem thre syn thei beñ thus ymette

<L 1018>But of my tale make an ende I **shałł** . (Ld2)

(d) <L 1021>In Ioy and blesse at mete I lete hem **dweł**

<L 1022>A þousand folde wele more þan I can **telle** (Sl1)

As follows from the above-cited MS lines, <ɬ> can appear in rhyming context with ‘-lle’, which might suggest that *figura* <ɬ> ought to be treated as abbreviation mark, encoding word-final ‘e’. On the other hand, though, <ɬ> can also occur in rhyme with ‘l’, e.g. MSS Ld2 and En2 have *wałɬ ~ hanybal*; Ph3 *al ~ schałɬ*. Also in mid-line position, <ɬ>-form from one MS often appears as ‘l’-form in another, e.g. *reveɬɬ* from MSS Ld2 and Dl (*reueɬɬ* in Pw, Ha2), is *reuel* in Ph3, En2, Lc and *revel* in Mg. Only in

Sl1 does the spelling *reuelle* appear. Mg's and Dl's *lyteɬɬ* is *litel* in all MSS (Ry2 has *litil*, Ph3 – *lytel*) except Sl1, which reads *lytelle*. Similarly, *blisfuɬɬ* from Ld2, Sl1, Lc and Dl (*blesfuɬɬ* in Ha2), is *blisful* in Pw, En2, and Mg, and *blysful* in Ph3. At the same time, *faɬɬ* in Ha2 and Sl1 in all other MSS is *falle*. Likewise, where Sl1 reads *heɬɬ*, all remaining MSS spell *helle*. Alternations like the latter two, however, are relatively rare, particularly in the non-rhyming position. Even at the ends of lines, however, a more usual scenario is for one MS to have two or three <ɬɬ>-words rhyme with one another, or, alternatively to have two or three '-lle'-words in rhyming position.

(3) (a) <L 190>[orncp]I[/orncp] trowe at Troye whan Pirr[9] brak þe **waɬɬ**

<L 191>Or ylyon þat brent Thebes þat Cite

<L 192>Nor Rome for þe harme þorgh **Hanybaɬɬ** (Pw, Ha2)

(b) <L 312>And þus in merþe and Ioie I lete hē **dweɬɬ**

<L 313>Þe froyte of þis matere þat I **teɬɬ** (Pw)

(c) <L 622>So longe ys gone w[t] Childe tiɬɬ þat **stiɬɬ**

<L 623>Scho halt hir Chambre abydynge at Cristys **wiɬɬ** (Sl1)

Consulting the readings of other MSS in the corpus is often of little help, too. Thus, the rhyme *waɬɬ ~ hanybaɬɬ* from MSS Pw and Ha2 (*waɬɬ ~ kanybaɬɬ* in Dl), in En2 and Ld2 appears as *waɬɬ ~ hanybal*; in Ph3 – *walle ~ hanybal*; whereas in Lc and Mg it is *wal ~ hanybal*. The example *aɬɬ ~ schaɬɬ* from Dl (and Ha2) is *aɬɬ ~ shal* in En2; *alle ~ shaɬɬ* in Ld2; *al ~ shal* in Ph3, Lc and Ry2; *alle ~ shall* in Pw. The spelling in Sl1, however – *alle ~ shalle* – might suggest that <ɬɬ> can indeed substitute for 'lle'. Stronger evidence to this effect is provided by the equivalent forms of *fulfiɬɬ ~ spiɬɬ* from Ha2. This pair

appears in three spelling variants, but always '-lle'-final: *fulfille ~ spille* in En2, Lc, Pw, Mg; *fulfylle ~ spille* in Ld2 and Sl1; *fulfulle ~ spylle* in Ph3 and *fulfelle ~ spille* in Dl. On a similar note, *stiłł ~ wiłł* from Sl1 are *stille ~ wille* in Ha2, Lc, Mg, Dl and Ry2; *stille ~ wiłł* in Pw and *stylle ~ wylle* in Ph3. Finally, *dwełł ~ tełł* from Pw is *dwelle ~ telle* in all MSS except Dl (*dwełł~ telle*) (in Ry2 the relevant line is missing).

4. 3. 3 <*d*̛>

In their analysis of the MSS of "The Wife of Bath's tale", Robinson and Solopova note '[a] special case of use of a downward stroke after a final letter of a word', commonly occurring after 'd' (Robinson & Solopova 1993: 36). Although <d̛> is not listed in Martin's (1892) record of Latin abbreviations used in English MSS, it can be found in Petti's (1977: 23) list of brevigraphs, as symbol for 'de'. Robinson and Solopova (1993: 36) also suggest this interpretation of the *figura* in question, noting that it often rhymes with '-de'. So it does in some MSS of the *MLT*:

(4) (a) <L 454>But it were wiþ þilk yen of his **mynde**
<L 455>With whicħ men seen after þat þei bene **blynd̛** (Pw)
(b) <L 1052>And fyndeþ her frende hool and **sound̛**
<L 1053>Now is she scaped ałł hi&i;re auenture
<L 1054>And whan she her fadere haþ **yfounde** (Pw)
(c) <L 478>Of whiche I speke / there he Custance **fonde**
<L 479>But kept it strongly / many wynter space
<L 480>Vnder Alla kyng of al **Northumbirland̛**

<L 481>That was ful wys / and worthy of **hand'** (Mg)

A more frequent scenario, however, is for words ending in *figura* <ď> to rhyme with one another, in which case it is not possible to determine what (if any) *potestatic* interpretation of the *figura* in question might be ventured:

(5) (a) <L 781>The Constable gan about his hert **cold'**

<L 782>And pleynly al þe manere he hȳ **told'** (Pw)

(b) <L 701>[orncp]B[/orncp]ut in þe same ship as he hir **fond'**

<L 702>Hir and hir ȝonge sone and al hir gere

<L 703>He sholde putte and croude fro þe **lond'** (Lc)

On the other hand, one might hypothesise about <ď> as a substitution for 'de' on the basis of comparison with the spelling of these 'in-rhyme' words with their counterparts in MSS in which *figura* <ď> has not been attested. Thus, the first rhyme *cold'* ~ *told'* appears as *colde* ~ *tolde* all the other MSS. Likewise, *shuld'* ~ *nold'* in other MSS is *shulde* ~ *nolde* or *s(c)holde* ~ *nolde*; *word'* ~ *bord'* from Lc is *worde* ~ *borde* (except for MSS Lc, Mg and Ry2, which read *word* ~ *bord*); *fond'* ~ *lond'* from that same MS is *fonde* ~ *londe* elsewhere (except En2, which has *fond* ~ *lond*). Finally, *hond'* ~ *fond'* in Mg appears as *honde* ~ *fonde* (except Ry2's *hond* ~ *fond*).

A similar relationship holds, albeit likewise not exceptionlessly, for <ď> occurring in mid-line position. Thus, e.g. *child'* in MS Pw appears as *childe/chylde* in MSS Ph3, Ld2, Ha2, Sl1; *husbond'* from that same MS is *h(o)usbonde* in MSS En2, Lc, Dl, Sl1, Ha2; *world'* in Lc is *worlde* in Ld2, Ha2 and Sl1, whereas *Ermyngild'* from Lc

and Mg (*Hermengild*' in Pw) is spelt *Ermyngilde/Ermengilde* in Ph3, Ld2, Dl, Ha2 and Sl1.

5 Conclusion

The above-presented analysis concerned the non-alphabetic elements of scribal spelling systems, i.e. marks of abbreviation and *figurae* with potential linguistic value. The principle adopted in the study was that abbreviations and special symbols are features in a sense equal (but not always equivalent) to their orthographic counterparts. This assumption allowed to analyse both types of symbols as entering into interactions with alphabetic symbols (as equal variants of strings of *litterae*, rather than as substitutions for these strings), which, in turn, revealed a number of innovations introduced by the scribes of the *MLT* onto a system of contractions and suspensions, adopted from the Latin system of abbreviation.

As has been demonstrated, once abbreviation marks are approached without the presumption that they 'stand for' something alphabetically definite, it is possible to see how the broader context of their use (and juxtaposition with equivalent full forms) determines their function, quite irrespective of the *figura* these symbols adopt. Thus, it has been shown how the scope of reference of original Latin abbreviation symbols is liable to expansion (and sometimes overlap) in the praxis of the *MLT* scribes. Results of this part of analysis are a warning against putting an equals mark between alphabetical and ideographic realities; a practice which has enjoyed a well-acclaimed position in traditional editing.

Also, the analysis of the distribution and possible functions of the three *figurae*: <ħ>, <ɬ> and <ɗ>, although on the whole rather inconclusive, yet it arguably provides some arguments questioning the total *désintéressement* of researchers in those sub-alphabetic characters. As Parkes put it, ‘it is not safe either to ignore them, or to treat them as marks of abbreviation’ (Parkes 1979: xxx). The least that can be done, therefore, is to acknowledge their presence, and readdress the issue of their possible linguistic function, should more conclusive evidence be provided by a more extensive study of similar non-alphabetic marks.

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