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👉 **A socio-historical study of the treatment and reception of**  
**John Lydgate**  
**in Early Modern print culture.** 👈

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in English Language

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## Abstract

This project aims to explore the ways in which the works of late medieval poet John Lydgate are treated and received in their early printed forms. The study will chart the history and evolution of a selection of Lydgate texts through the late medieval and Reformation period, considering the texts and their reception in relation to the contemporary social, political and religious backdrop. The project will make special reference to the work of John Lydgate and evaluate his contemporary status as a high profile poet and his subsequent decline in popularity from the mid-sixteenth century. In order to provide a focus for the analysis of these texts, the punctuation practices employed by the various printers and editors will be studied in-depth in four of Lydgate's texts; *The Siege of Thebes*, *Troy Book*, *The Churl and the Bird* and *The Temple of Glas*. This data will demonstrate the development of punctuation techniques in print from the late medieval to early modern period and determine how these techniques were applied to the chosen texts. The analysis of this data will further illustrate the changing requirements and expectations of the contemporary readership and the impact this had on the treatment and reception of Lydgate's medieval texts.

Despite his successful literary career during the fifteenth century, modern criticism has been harsh and Lydgate has long been considered a marginal figure in the canon of English literature. Scanlon and Simpson argue that this "was as much a matter of careful aesthetic discrimination as it was of historical reconstruction"; in other words, John Lydgate did not fit the literary and artistic ideals of the nineteenth century and was subsequently relegated to the margins of literary history (Scanlon & Simpson 2006: 2). More recently scholarship has aimed to take a fresh look at the life and work of John Lydgate and the influence he had on later writers and English literature as a whole. Attempting to sweep away the entrenched negative perceptions of his work as dull and didactic, scholars have begun to analyse Lydgate from a fifteenth-century perspective and to evaluate the role his work played in the lives and reading habits of late medieval England. As a definitively Catholic writer whose popularity spans the Reformation, it is Lydgate's unique position which can provide insights into the contradictions and complexities of fifteenth century reading culture. His work is steeped in the medieval

Catholic literary tradition, while also tackling contemporary political issues of kingship and national identity associated with the intellectual pursuits of the Renaissance.

It is for this reason that Lydgate has been described as both a definitive embodiment of the middle ages (Pearsall 1970: 2) and as a “transition poet” (Renoir 1967: 31). Regardless of labelling, Lydgate was undoubtedly a central figure in fifteenth-century literary culture, and the treatment and reception of his texts can illustrate the ways in which sixteenth- and seventeenth-century editors, printers and publishers approached and dealt with late medieval texts while attempting to target a Renaissance audience amidst growing Protestant literature and propaganda. This project will determine how wider attitudinal changes and social shifts impacted the presentation of texts and the editing process, with particular reference to punctuation practices. Sixteenth-century England experienced significant social, religious and intellectual upheavals and this is clearly reflected in the reading habits and publishing trends of a rapidly expanding book industry. However, the central hypothesis of this dissertation argues that certain aspects of the editing process were less dramatic in their development. Punctuation practices in particular display a more gradual move towards modern conventions and represent the contradictions and complexities of a reading culture very much in transition.

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# Chapter One

## *1.1 A Backdrop of Change*

Cultural events and shifting attitudes are able to determine the popularity, dissemination and reception of a text at any given point. Yet as the social, political and religious background of any society is in constant flux, so too is the life of a text placed within it. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in England were a period of dramatic change, witnessing the rise of the printing press as a major technological and social advancement, the far-reaching impact of major religious reform and a tumultuous political landscape. This in turn is framed by the intellectual and cultural revolution of the Renaissance which presented early modern culture with a world view evoking Classical intellectual pursuits and combining it with increasing scientific discovery and exploration. Medieval texts printed in the sixteenth century therefore occupy a fascinating space in the expanding canon of English literature, able to tell us much about the tastes and preoccupations of the contemporary readership as well as granting an insight into the production and editing techniques of the early printers. The explosive rise of print culture coincides with significant social change and upheaval, and the complex relationships between the press and literature, language and textual history will be examined in detail in the following chapters of the dissertation.

The sixteenth century certainly brought its own concerns and attitudes to bear on contemporary literature and learning. However, many modern scholars are cautious of adopting generalised descriptions of the period, such as ‘early modern’, and argue that the Renaissance was in fact a more haphazard and irregular series of events and cultural shifts which interacted throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Hadfield 1994 & Spearing 1985). The Renaissance has often been seen as a sharp shift away from medieval culture and irreconcilable from the preceding ‘dark ages’. This divide between medieval and early modern society can be seen as originating in the Renaissance era itself as scholars, intellectuals and polemicists attempted to forge a new English cultural and religious identity in the aftermath of the split from Rome. The impact of the break with Catholicism was not “purely doctrinal” and had a significant impact on English language, literature and national attitudes (Shrank 2004: 8). If the perception of an unenlightened and

Catholic medieval past was problematical for Renaissance thinkers, so too was the creation of a new early modern, Protestant tradition. Andrew Hadfield argues that the “problem” of national identity arose in the sixteenth century across Europe, driving the need to establish a native history and legitimise the vernacular. English literature itself was seen as a “form of ideological cement” used to reinforce the notion of national cohesion (Hadfield 1994: 9). Some care has to be taken when discussing the theme of ‘nationalism’ and its perceived rise in the sixteenth century. Cathy Shrank asserts that while our modern perception of nationalism is indeed distinct from the sixteenth century view, there was still a strong and growing sense of “national identity” pervading the post-Reformation era (Shrank 2004: 2). As many scholars have noted, the sixteenth century did witness a desire to create an English cultural identity distinct from Rome, and Shrank argues that the mid-sixteenth century was the “crucial” period in the forming of this identity. She points to the political and cultural events which served to reinforce this feeling of distinct Englishness; the consolidation of foreign trade, a growing naval strength and the rise of the vernacular (Shrank 2004: 7).

Scanlon and Simpson argue that from the 1530s onwards, Protestant thinkers and historians became increasingly aware of the inextricable relationship between ecclesiastical history and medieval literature. While Renaissance writers and scholars were keen to establish a native literary history stretching back through time, they were also faced with the difficulty of integrating a medieval, Catholic literary tradition into a post-Reformation society. Not all medieval literature was rejected outright and a few authors were chosen as early “heralds” of the Reformation (Scanlon & Simpson 2006: 2). Chaucer was celebrated for his satirical critiques of the church while Langland’s *Piers Plowman* becomes strongly associated with the failed early reform movement, Lollardy. John Lydgate’s position was not so easily defined or manipulated into the post-Reformation society and he may be considered as the very embodiment of the contradiction and dilemma for Renaissance thinkers. Furthermore, the initial rumblings of Reformation on the continent did not, according to Andrew Pettegree, have a significant impact in England and there is little evidence to suggest that Lutheran attacks on the Church were given a “favourable reception” (Pettegree 2010: 126). He further describes the Reformation’s impact on the European book market as “patchy” (Pettegree 2010: 107), providing an interesting and

complex context in which to view the publishing of medieval literature during the sixteenth century.

The end of the fifteenth century also witnessed the deterioration of scribal culture and the advent of print; a technological advancement which had far-reaching consequences for literature, learning and religious practice. Once again Lydgate is found at the centre of these profound changes, becoming one of the first authors to be put into print by William Caxton in 1477. The vernacular was achieving a higher status, encouraged by more English publications on a wide range of topics and the use of the vernacular by the monarchy and government. Lydgate's decision to compose solely in the vernacular was, however, still significant during this period. Contemporaries such as Gower chose to write in Latin, French and English, while high society and government still retained Latin and French for most administrative and legal purposes. Lydgate's close patronage ties with the monarchy and aristocracy have also come under scrutiny, with many critics viewing the poet as a Lancastrian propagandist. Lydgate was undoubtedly a poet of contemporary concerns, yet his favoured status as an early court poet and the perceived nationalistic themes of his texts have encouraged many scholars to link Lydgate inextricably with Lancastrian politics. Although there is considerable debate concerning the extent to which this relationship defines or overshadows Lydgate's work, the subject of nationalism has to be tackled when assessing the impact that these new and changing attitudes may have had on an existing medieval literary tradition.

Literacy levels were on the increase, particularly among the rising merchant classes and this naturally led to a much greater demand for vernacular reading materials. Eamon Duffy argues that the fifteenth-century pre-Reformation period witnessed the biggest growth of lay literacy and engagement with and understanding of religious doctrine (Duffy 1992: 68). Demand for reading materials was not for purely secular entertainment, as lay society required more and increasingly complex works of religious instruction and contemplation. Furthermore, the texts were demanded in English, a move seen to coincide with the rise of national feeling and the attempt by the reformers in the sixteenth century to create an English cultural identity. Although Duffy maintains that the demand for access to religious works was not inherently Protestant, the viewpoint highlights the issue of the



Catholic church and its attitude towards lay literacy and the printing press (Duffy 1992: 4). This remains a controversial issue among scholars, yet is a question which has a significant impact on our modern interpretation of medieval culture and the role of literature within.

## **1.2 Literature, Print and the Church**

Eamon Duffy's seminal publication *The Stripping of the Altars* is a reevaluation of the literary culture of the medieval period, and strongly argues that the Catholic church was neither staid nor repressive in its approach to religious expression among the laity. He assertively contests the notion that increasing literacy levels and doctrinal sophistication among the laity were discouraged by the Catholic church. Duffy maintains that the church was a strong and diverse institution up until the Reformation and played a central role in the lives and learning of the medieval laity (Duffy 1992: 4-7). He also points to the early fifteenth century as the period which witnessed the biggest growth of lay literacy and understanding of religious doctrine, a process which was aided and encouraged by the church. This is evidenced in the collections of texts spreading among the middle classes in the late fifteenth century which show a demand for religious instruction, sermons and saints' lives alongside secular romance (Duffy 1992: 68-70). Duffy highlights the popularity and importance of the medieval miracle plays as a means by which the laity accessed and understood doctrine. These plays routinely combined images from the Bible and orthodox church practice with comedy and entertainment in order to provide illiterate laymen with a visual representation of their faith. In Duffy's view, therefore, the Protestant suppression of these plays from the middle of the sixteenth century had a "disastrous effect" on the laity's understanding of church doctrine (Duffy 1992: 68). James Simpson similarly expresses the view that the sixteenth century witnessed a "simplification and centralization" of institutional power, which in turn narrowed the scope of literature and cultural output more generally (Simpson 2007: 1). The diversity which had characterised medieval literary culture was eradicated by an aggressive ideological policy and replaced by a centralised cultural output.

In reference to the advent of the printing press and the church's relationship with print culture, Duffy points to the vast amount and variety of liturgical material produced in

the first few years of the press's existence in England. Far from being flooded with reformist propaganda, the press produced "a vast range of devotional and didactic tracts, designed to promote traditional piety and a better knowledge of the faith and practice of Catholicism" (Duffy 1992: 77). The printers who dominated the initial years of the trade, notably Caxton, de Worde and Pynson were all, in Duffy's view, "religiously conservative" in their tastes and choices (Duffy 1992: 78). As an example, *Piers Plowman* was not published until 1550 by reformist printer Robert Crowley, due to the text's perceived associations with Lollardy. King raises the similar point that Caxton was a businessman and printer tailoring primarily to the tastes of the late fifteenth century aristocracy. William Caxton's translation of *The Golden Legend* is an attempt to provide the laity with sophisticated scriptural teachings without engaging in direct Bible translation, and proved to be a very popular text at the turn of the fifteenth century (King 1982: 36-37). Early printing illustrates a diverse and vibrant reading culture already in existence. Furthermore, the readership did not immediately abandon the pre-existing literary culture focused on church sanctioned texts of personal devotion and liturgical material which had previously served the demand among the laity.

Duffy's perspective certainly challenges traditional views of a repressive institution whose unrelenting attitude towards the freedom of the press resulted in the reformers being able to exploit the new technology where the church failed, or was unwilling, to recognise its potential. Certainly, the literary culture of the medieval period was lively and diverse, and literature played a central role in the laity's involvement with and understanding of church doctrine. The fifteenth and early sixteenth century saw a "proliferation" of devotional material in English aimed at the laity, including prayers and meditations. Lydgate's translations of sections from the Latin primers, along with poems contemplating the Passion and the Virgin Mary, were read and used extensively by the laity to complement and enhance their understanding of doctrine. While Duffy acknowledges that these texts were initially intended for the upper classes, MS evidence shows these texts, and others similar, were found in all levels of society (Duffy 1992: 223). Lydgate's aristocratic patrons were undoubtedly his primary readership, yet his widespread popularity across classes demonstrates a growing demand for material and a significant shift in the reading culture. However, Duffy's claims concerning the existing Catholic

literary culture go one step further, viewing the Reformation itself as a “disruption” of late medieval religion (Duffy 1992: 4), rather than a series of events and cultural changes precipitated by the contemporary mood and preoccupations of late medieval society. The suppression of elements of medieval religious expression, such as the miracle plays and artwork, was in reality detrimental to the laity’s relationship with and understanding of church doctrine and teachings (Duffy 1992: 68).

While writing in the first millennium had remained within the sphere of the church and monastic scriptorium, Finkelstein and McCleery assert that the further progression to print culture “affected a process of cultural change that threatened privileges and areas under elitist control” (Finkelstein & McCleery 2008: 42). This elitist resistance towards the power of the press is not limited to the Catholic church and they were not the only authority group whose relationship with the printing press had important repercussions for the publishing of certain works and the reception they received. Monarchical reform in the sixteenth century was turbulent to say the least, and many conflicting censorship acts were aimed towards the press under a series of monarchs. Despite his marital dramas being the catalyst for England’s break from Rome, Henry VIII was religiously conservative and Reformist literature was restricted during his reign; as a result, much English Protestant literature was printed abroad (Pettegree 2010: 126). Only under Edward VI was the press allowed the freedom to print Reformist material without threat of retribution; this was subsequently, and violently, curtailed with the accession of Mary in 1553. It is true to say that the relationship between the advent of print and the Reformation and Renaissance movements is no longer considered to be simple cause and effect. There were many political and social factors at play, and scholars still differ regarding the emphasis to be placed on these factors when evaluating the social backdrop of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England. The press’s potential for propaganda use was quickly recognised and it has been observed that the Protestant reformers were swift to exploit it for such purposes.

Elizabeth Eisenstein takes a rather different view of the cultural and religious changes encouraged or exploited by the printing press, claiming that the “forces released by print” automatically encouraged “more democratic and national forms of worship”. In

other words, the potential of print would have given rise to religious reform regardless of whether the Protestant movement had succeeded (Eisenstein 2000: 159). Finkelstein and McCleery survey the early German print industry, commenting that the 1520's saw a tenfold increase in the production of books in vernacular German. In their view, Germany had already established a solid and efficient printing industry and the Reformation essentially provided "the material and motive to use it" (Finkelstein & McCleery 2008: 52-53). In reaction to this Protestant opportunism, Catholic reform became more organised with regards to the printing press and acknowledged its importance as a method of communication, accounting for Duffy's "proliferation" of Catholic devotional literature at the start of the sixteenth century. We begin to see the complexities of late medieval literary culture emerging and the dangers involved in viewing this period from a definitively post-Reformation perspective. The laity's relationship with church doctrine and contemporary literature creates a picture of a diverse culture which may appear from a modern perspective to be contradictory. Exactly like modern culture, however, popular tastes and attitudes in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries cannot be accounted for by broad generalisations.

### **1.3 Publishing, Readership and the Author**

Change was not only triggered in the thematic nature of the texts being produced; the role of the author and the changing nature of the patronage system during the Renaissance had a significant effect on the publishing industry and the way in which texts were received by the contemporary readership. Medieval definitions of the author as a commentator or organiser gave way to a more “creative” view of the profession during the Renaissance (Finkelstein and McCleery 2008: 66). Authors themselves became an important selling point, their reputation and persona able to influence the reception of their texts. John Lydgate presents a complex illustration of authorship during his own lifetime which merges aspects of medieval literary tradition and early modern perceptions of the creative craft. This raises the argument of which era Lydgate most accurately represents - is he “impreguably medieval” in his methods and preoccupations (Pearsall 1970: 299) or is he rather a “transition poet” (Renoir 1967: 31) who bridges the middle ages and the Renaissance? In thematic terms, critics have debated certain aspects of early modernism which are perceived in his later texts, notably the Renaissance notions of the individual (Renoir 1967: 94) and his focus on the creation of an English history distinct from Rome. Lydgate was also the first poet to receive money purely for his poetry (Meyer-Lee 2008: 36) from several wealthy patrons including the future king Henry V, and he enjoyed contemporary success and recognition for his work. Scholars have also pointed to the examples of “self-aggrandisement” which appear in his texts and represent a sharp departure from traditional medieval anonymity and humility, which Meyer-Lee attributes to Lydgate’s conspicuous relationship with the Lancastrians (Meyer-Lee 2008: 44). From this perspective, Lydgate certainly illustrates a move towards the early modern definitions and expectations of authorship.

Where the medieval author may have been restricted by the demands and tastes of their patrons, the expansion of print in the sixteenth century saw the role of patron usurped by the publishers, who now had the power to decide which texts to publish on the basis of financial viability (Finkelstein & McCleery 2008: 73). Printing was primarily a business and indeed a lucrative one, if public tastes could be catered for and attracted. Scholars have long since noted the impact and repercussions of commercial book production, moving

from monastic scriptorium to paid scribe in the first instance, followed by the shift to large scale print production at the end of the fifteenth century. In N.F. Blake's view, William Caxton and his contemporaries must be primarily regarded as "merchants" who catered to the tastes and fashions of contemporary society (Blake 1991: 18). The shift of the book trade to a large-scale business with potentially lucrative financial benefits changed not only the way books were produced, but also how they were viewed and consumed. The "collectable commodity" of the manuscript book quickly became the "tradable commodity" of the print book (Finkelstein & McCleery 2008: 5), signalling the start of the modern publishing industry. Combined with rising literacy levels, increased demand among the merchant classes themselves and the the role of print in the turbulent political and religious scene, literary culture in the sixteenth century was becoming increasingly distanced from the traditions and preoccupations of the medieval past.

This overview may, however, present a picture of a reading culture neatly divided, with the advent of print signalling the immediate decline of medieval tastes and scribal practices. As Lydgate's continued popularity and the contemporary mix of devotional and secular literature prove, the tastes of the laity were diverse. Despite Elizabeth Eisenstein's conviction that the arrival of the printing press heralded a major cultural revolution, she concedes that the initial impact of the shift was likely to be small and focused, given the spread of rural communities and dialectal divides. Urban areas, on the other hand, were likely to experience a more immediate shift and, as the population was socially diverse, print was not exclusive to the upper classes (Eisenstein 2000: 32). The printing industry also did not neatly overtake scribal culture on the very day William Caxton set up his press and there remained a significant period of overlap between scribal and print culture at the end of the fifteenth century. It has been observed that printing required a "coming together" of pre-existing skills and tradesmen who could adapt to the new technology, rather than an ousting of the old (Finkelstein & McCleery 2008: 50). Alexandra Gillespie describes Caxton and the early printers as "meddling" and attempting to come to grips with an existing, thriving scribal culture (Gillespie 2006: 29). Manuscript books had been integral to European society for centuries and in order for print to succeed, it would have to "match up to demanding standards" set by scribal culture (Pettegree 2010: 4).

The arrival of the press experienced resistance and suspicion from many quarters, and not simply for religious or political reasons. While reaction to the press and vernacular translation comes to underpin the views of opposing Catholic and Protestant camps during the Reformation, hostility also came from those anxious about the longevity and ‘authorised’ nature of print. Concerns were raised regarding the permanence of print compared to the laborious handcrafting of scribes, as well as anxieties surrounding the potential for unauthorised and corrupt versions of the original text (Bennett 1965: 5). From a modern perspective this may sound absurd, considering the level of variation and intervention we find in medieval texts. Furthermore, language historians look to the press as an agent of standardisation which put an end to the unruly medieval spelling systems and sharp dialectal divides, although it did not result in immediate fixity, and significant variation continued beyond the Renaissance. From a fifteenth-century perspective, however, such concerns are not illogical. Scribal culture represented the use and display of a unique skill set, with the act of writing traditionally considered by the monastic community to be a work for God. Books were a luxury commodity available only to a small section of society, yet could be as much about displaying individual wealth and accomplishments as the texts themselves.

In 1951, J.W. Saunders investigated the attitudes towards print from the perspective of contemporary Tudor poets, and claimed that printing in the Tudor era was still considered by the court poets to be a “somewhat discreditable aspect of authorship” (Saunders 1951: 139). Saunders asserts there was a definite distinction between the upper class court poets who intended to circulate their works among a small like-minded circle, and the growing number of professional poets who relied on the press for economic reasons (Saunders 1951: 141). He claims that the insignificance of the early print readership from the perspective of the court poets is proven by the “time-lag” between the composition and printing of a large portion of Tudor poetry (Saunders 1951: 139). It is also an insight into the overlapping relationship between manuscript and print culture at the beginning of the sixteenth century and the still complex, and perhaps residually medieval, attitudes towards authorship that pervaded early modern literary culture. There can be no doubt, however, that printing heralded a disruption of a long-established culture and dramatically changed the ways in which people consumed and

interacted with texts. In the same way that many modern bibliophiles are agitated by the introduction of the digital e-book and are concerned by the use and potential abuse of texts and authorial rights on the internet, fifteenth-century thinkers were similarly apprehensive about the effect of the printed word on human consciousness and learning. Memory did not play the same role in scholarship; texts were more freely available, easier to consult and learning by rote was no longer necessary.

The physical manifestations of this innovation can be seen clearly in the development of early printed books. While during the initial years of the press printers attempted to imitate aspects of scribal practice such as the typeface and layout, new methods of presentation were quickly introduced. Front-pieces, colophons and title pages became increasingly popular with Caxton's close successors, de Worde and Pynson. As Gillespie notes, paratextual devices fulfilled "both a practical and promotional function" (Gillespie 2000: 65) within a text and the first generations of printers were quick to acknowledge the importance of presentation and the benefits of courting the readership in order to promote their texts. Lydgate's reputation remains at its peak throughout the fifteenth century, making him an obvious and viable choice for the early printers. In her survey of the Lydgate canon in print between 1476 and 1534, Gillespie points out that Lydgate's works were often chosen for the more elaborate print productions well into the sixteenth century (Gillespie 2000: 69). Early print editions of Lydgate illustrate how these innovations were introduced and the impact this had on the perception of the texts in question. The printers producing increasingly elaborate editions experimented with a wealth of paratextual material and were often keen to use visual representations of the author to promote and enhance the text. This had the dual function in Lydgate's case of utilising the reputation of the author, while also reaffirming his role as a Benedictine monk and linking him inextricably with monasticism and Catholicism. While these links may have proved beneficial in the pre-Reformation era, such strong association with Catholic orthodoxy ultimately proved difficult for a post-Reformation reading culture to absorb, and may account in part for Lydgate's rapid decline towards the second half of the sixteenth century (Gillespie 2000: 69).



Walter Ong's fascinating study concerning the impact of writing in human society claims that command of the written word has essentially "transformed human consciousness" with this move from orality to literacy seen as an innovation which reorganised society's communication structures (Ong, cited in Finkelstein & McCleery 2008: 31). In M.B Parkes's comprehensive survey of the history of punctuation in the West, he specifically explores the effect of grammatical innovations on the way readers engaged with the text at hand. The establishment of written conventions such as line divisions, word separations and punctuation was a means by which structure and semantic distinctions could be made (Parkes 1992: 1). Punctuation itself developed in stages which matched "the changing patterns of literacy" (Parkes 1992: 2). The advent of print was another stage in this changing pattern and, like the initial move towards literacy, can be seen to herald a significant innovation and transformation of communication structures. While we can describe and investigate the physical aspects of book production and the changes it brought to bear on individual texts in terms of editing and layout, it is far more difficult to assess the impact these innovations had on the thought patterns and perceptions of the readership. It is an issue Elizabeth Eisenstein grapples with in her publication *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, commenting on the difficulty involved in attempting to "reconstruct past forms of consciousness" (Eisenstein 2000: 5). While she claims that changes in the physical structure and appearance of books "may well lead to changes in thought patterns", exactly what these changes are remain untold, perhaps considered to involve too much conjecture and abstract hypotheses (Eisenstein 2000: 64).

The innovations introduced by the printers, the expanding role of the publishing industry and changing perceptions of the author will form a key line of enquiry throughout this dissertation. The ways in which the physical structure and presentation of Lydgate's texts affected the transmission of his work and shaped the reactions of his readership will be returned to in more detail in the following chapters of the dissertation. The project also aims to investigate in a wider sense the notion of the text as part of society's communication structure and how this manifested in the literary culture of the sixteenth century. While it may be impossible to propose how the advent of print and the developments in book format shaped the neurological behaviour of the early modern readership, analysis of the ways in which texts were transmitted and consumed can tell us

much about the concerns and preoccupations of Renaissance culture. It can furthermore provide insights into the history of ‘the book’ and the role it played in shaping sixteenth-century English society and beyond.

#### **1.4 What is ‘Book History’?**

*“It is an invigorating move to understand textual production as part of human communication structures”*

(Finkelstein & McCleery 2008: 4)

The study and definition of book history have been reshaped and redefined from a variety of perspectives. An awareness of previous approaches and modern trends involving interdisciplinary methods is of particular relevance to the current project. Book history and its scholarship provide important insights into the ways in which textual transmission was viewed in the past, and moves towards new approaches which aim to establish the place of the book and its narrative within the wider framework of social communication structures. In their publication *An Introduction to Book History*, Finkelstein and McCleery provide a comprehensive overview of the history of book scholarship and pose some interesting questions regarding the future of the discipline. In their view, book history should incorporate the literary, social and physical production of a text while bearing in mind the importance of the readership in bringing the text into the “circuit of human communication” (Finkelstein & McCleery 2008: 43).

Attempting a definition, Finkelstein and McCleery describe books as being “important vehicles for ideas that often challenge established norms and authorities” (Finkelstein & McCleery 2008: 2). Books are cultural productions which interact with and influence the society in which they exist. The sixteenth century certainly witnessed the rapid expansion of literacy and textual transmission was revolutionised by the advent of the press. The thematic content of the texts being produced also moved from primarily literary and devotional subject matter to incorporate aspects of social commentary and propaganda. Elizabeth Eisenstein has strongly advocated the view of printing technology as a social revolution and has famously promoted the notion of the

press as an “agent of change” (Eisenstein 2000). At the beginning of the twentieth century, scholars began to ask more detailed questions concerning the nature of early book production. In particular, scholars involved in the ‘New Bibliography’ approach to book history and manuscript study charged themselves with identifying the most authoritative version of the text. Authority was determined according to the varying levels of scribal influence or ‘corruption’ which could be identified and potentially eliminated from the text in order to produce the closest possible version of an authorial original. As a result, versions of a text may be discarded as corrupt or unreliable, limiting the potential number of texts which could be used as evidence for, among other things, textual transmission.

In the 1960s Don McKenzie’s research proved that early print production was far from consistent; practices were haphazard and texts themselves were constructed by a series of “interpretative acts” in terms of both production and consumption (McKenzie, cited in Finkelstein & McCleery 2008: 9-10). His research in the 1980s furthered the notion of the text as a product of collaboration and asserts that study of the text must take into account the physical production and “sociology of the text” in addition to the content (McKenzie 1981, cited in Finkelstein & McCleery 2008). While this was a decisive move towards regarding book history and textual production as part of the wider structure of human communication, Robert Darnton in the 1980s highlighted the chaotic nature of interdisciplinary methods and focus applied to book history scholarship. He asserts that the purpose of book history is to “understand how ideas were transmitted through print and how exposure to the printed word affected the thought and behaviour of mankind during the last five hundred years” (Darnton, cited in Finkelstein & McCleery 2003: 9). This relates to Walter Ong’s theory of writing as a revolution which reshaped human thought, adapting the notion for the advent of print. Yet this also reinforces the concept of the book as a cultural production, a vehicle for ideas which constantly interacts with and adapts to the society which produced it.

In his study of Lydgate’s *Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund*, Stephen Reimer argues for a restoration of context when considering and editing medieval texts. Printed text editions strip away all other paratextual material and focus solely on the linguistic aspect. This tendency to “isolate the textual” has important repercussions for how we

perceive and understand the medieval texts and the culture which produced it (Reimer 2004: 171). In other words, modern readers encountering medieval texts in editions which exclude any paratextual material have a limited reading experience. Applying this argument specifically to Lydgate, Reimer asserts that his poetry and motives cannot be fully understood outwith the original context. It is the context which provides insight into the circumstances of production and the regard in which his work was held (Reimer 2004: 172). Reimer uses the British Library's MS Harley 2278 *The Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund* to exemplify the importance of considering contextual and paratextual details of medieval texts. The highly illuminated and expensive manuscript reminds us that Lydgate was a respected poet who could command such lavish productions. The illustration depicting Henry VI also reinforces the patronage ties and places Lydgate at the centre of contemporary politics and high society. Through this study, Reimer is advocating the digitisation of medieval texts by claiming that it can restore some of the context lost by straightforward print editions (Reimer 2004: 171). Against the backdrop of a digital revolution, it is the task of book history scholarship to consider all aspects of production, presentation and motivation when attempting to understand the literary culture of the past.

On the whole, these issues relate to the changes brought about by printing and the effect on society and literary culture on the wider scale. However, it is also possible to track and analyse these changes on a more microcosmic level by looking at book history in terms of individual texts, authors and readers. The present study is concerned with such themes: the punctuation and presentation of Lydgate's texts during the late medieval to early modern period. By analysing punctuation practices in particular, we can determine much about the printers, their practices and the way they approached and dealt with Lydgate's texts. Punctuation, like all aspects of book production and literary culture, was affected by the advent of the printing press and the changing social backdrop. The press provided a further catalyst for standardisation of spelling and punctuation practices and the religious upheaval changed the nature of the texts being produced. The expanding readership was also exerting new demands on the texts being printed. The forms and methods of punctuation employed by a selection of printers spanning a 200-year period illustrates various and often contradictory approaches to Lydgate's texts. It can be considered contradictory in two ways; firstly, the prints moving through the early modern

period contain a mixture of influences and often retain elements of medieval punctuation practices alongside modern conventions. Secondly, the developments are not as dramatic as one might expect and the shift from medieval methods to early modern practices was a more gradual process than the rapid expansion of the print industry itself.

While aspects of book production were revolutionised and the publishing industry was shaping itself into a form we recognise today, elements of scribal culture remained; printers did not abolish scribal culture, it was appropriated and developed. As such, the texts chosen for analysis display a gradual shift towards modern punctuation practices and the majority of printers were sensitive to the structure of Lydgate's poetry and the links with the oral tradition contained in his verse. Modern punctuation practices utilised in text editions of Lydgate's poetry may not be as sensitive to the medieval origins, applying methods which are unsuited to his verse and the literary culture in which it was produced. The medievalist scholar Phillipa Hardman furthers this argument by stating that modern punctuation is an "intrusion" in Lydgate's flow of ideas and any frustrations which arise when approaching Lydgate's text are a result of insensitive editing imposed during the nineteenth century (Hardman 2006: 16). The key issue of Lydgate's print history becomes then a lack of *consistent* editing which would have modernised and re-interpreted his work at various stages. Chaucer's work, life and role in medieval literary culture have been almost constantly re-evaluated since his death, changing to fit with contemporary perceptions and interests over the course. As a result, our perceptions of Chaucer as a lively and forward thinking medieval poet is in sharp contrast to our notion of Lydgate as a dull and didactic monk.

The theories and aims of book history are therefore central to this current project. It is important to view Lydgate and his texts in relation to the contemporary medieval literary culture and take into account the social and cultural shifts which affected his post-Reformation reputation. Viewing the book as a cultural production and as a means of communication gives us much wider scope when interpreting medieval texts and the processes of textual transmission. However, it is also important to recognise how modern trends in historiography and medieval scholarship are still likely to shape our perceptions of medieval texts and literary culture. If it is the charge of book historians to "understand

what place books and reading had in the lives of people and society in the past, in the present, and even in the future” (Finkelstein & McCleery 2008: 4), it is essential to remember that the book and its place are constantly changing.

## Chapter Two

### 2.1 *Lydgate: The Rise, Fall and Rediscovery*

Modern criticism has been harsh about the work of John Lydgate, medieval monk of Bury and celebrated national poet of the fifteenth century. While Lydgate's contemporaries regarded him as a poet of the highest order, including him in the expanding canon of English vernacular literature alongside Chaucer and Gower, modern criticism has retained the view of Lydgate as no more than a dull Chaucerian imitator unworthy of genuine critical attention. Generations of scholars have lambasted Lydgate for his tediousness, verbosity and penchant for self-aggrandisement, while mocking his attempt to emulate a poet of genuine skill and brilliance. The elevation of Chaucer as the foremost poet of the medieval period and the creation of his proto-Protestant persona subsequently left his medieval contemporaries in the dark. As Simpson has claimed, "Lydgate is doomed to imitate Chaucer, but equally doomed to fail in the attempt" (Simpson 2007: 43). In stylistic terms, modern readers are frustrated by Lydgate's long and roving sentences, unpunctuated and peppered with obscure aureate vocabulary. While we praise the earthy liveliness of Chaucer's poetry and attempt to discern his own motivations and personality which are woven through the text, Lydgate's works remain inaccessible by contrast. A medieval monk composing long didactic tracts on the responsibilities of the monarchy and moralising saints' lives cannot perhaps compete with Chaucer the metropolitan spy, who can turn his pen to both classical translation and bawdy tales, and do both with finesse and wit. However, it is not only Lydgate who has received such negative criticism; the traditional view of literary scholars dismisses fifteenth-century poetry in general as dull and verbose. Late medieval poetry in particular is accused of being the worst example of this flowery and unoriginal style, with C.S. Lewis famously describing the fifteenth century as "a history of decay" (cited in Cooney 2001: 9).

Yet this picture of Lydgate and the critical views of his work were certainly not held by his contemporaries. His claim to fame may now rest primarily on his verbosity and sheer volume of work, yet he was undoubtedly the most popular and important writer of

the fifteenth century, evidenced in the continuing high-profile patronage he received throughout his career and the number of extant manuscripts showing this large corpus of work. Lydgate was also one of the first to be put into print in the late fifteenth century; Caxton, Pynson and de Worde all produced runs of Lydgate texts, and editions were still being put to press up until the Reformation. While his popularity was somewhat more disjointed and complex during this turbulent period, a selection of his texts remained on the literary radar and experienced a re-surge in popularity during the Marian and Elizabethan eras. As Renoir points out, the printers' trade relied on mass production in order to be financially viable; Lydgate was therefore still in demand (Renoir 1967: 2-3). Neither Lydgate's contemporaries nor later Renaissance readers were perturbed by his apparent long-windedness or his now infamous failure to produce a main verb in the rolling verses. On the contrary, Lydgate's aureate style and his contributions to English literature and language were highly praised. Renoir argues that this admiration for Lydgate as an important contributor to the elaboration of the English language and as a skilled poet on par with Chaucer and Gower lasts well into the eighteenth century, with literary critic and poet laureate himself, Thomas Warton, celebrating Lydgate's "perpiscuity" and the "additions" he made to the English language (cited in Renoir 1967: 5).

Lydgate's obvious popularity and influence during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries subsequently raise the issue of his rapid decline in literary popularity and reputation. From a print history perspective, Lydgate does seem to fall out of favour from the middle of the sixteenth century, notwithstanding the "short-lived Marian and Elizabethan revivals of interest" (Gillespie 2000: 63). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a modest revival of Lydgate texts and a more definitive interest in medieval texts as a whole occurs. Renoir asserts that it was not until the beginning of the nineteenth century that Lydgate ultimately loses his high standing in the canon of English literature. He attributes this primarily to the scathing review of Lydgate published by Joseph Ritson in his influential 1802 publication *Bibliographica Poetica*. This became the automatic and unchallenged response of critics up until the late twentieth century (Renoir 1967: 6). Indeed, Scanlon and Simpson argue that Middle English literature in its contemporary form is a result of Victorian editing practices and attitudes towards organising and categorising the haphazard medieval manuscript fragments, and a further drive to impose



authorship (Scanlon & Simpson 2006: 1). It is the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' insensitivity to the traditions of medieval literature and the tastes of the contemporary readership which has resulted in the dismissal of fifteenth-century literary culture.

Derek Pearsall meanwhile places Lydgate's drop in popularity much earlier at the end of the sixteenth century. This coincides with a general decline in the popularity of medieval literature precipitated by the increasing linguistic gap (Pearsall 1970: 3). Print editions from this period certainly prove that the linguistic divide was becoming an issue for the early modern readership and glossaries begin to appear alongside medieval texts as standard. Islip's 1598 print of *The Siege of Thebes*, for example, contains a comprehensive glossary covering the entire Chaucerian anthology and Lydgate's text. Gillespie points towards Berthelet's 1527 edition of *The Temple of Glass* as an example of the changing linguistic backdrop and the demands of his contemporary readership; the printer considered it necessary even at this early stage to "modernise the linguistic forms, vocabulary and orthography" of an earlier edition of the text (Gillespie 2000: 67). Amongst the texts chosen for analysis, Purfoot's edition of *Troy Book* dating from 1614 displays a radical approach to editing which alters the vocabulary, syntax and punctuation and produces a version which is far removed from earlier editions. Chaucer's verse also required some clarification and use of additional paratextual material aimed at helping the reader engage with the medieval texts increases throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Yet Lydgate's dense aureate diction may have proved to be even more of a challenge for both the early modern readership and for the editors attempting to tackle these lengthy texts. In contrast to the highly stylised and obscure verse favoured by Lydgate the early modern period demanded clarity and pithiness in line with the intellectual pursuits of the Renaissance. The works of John Lydgate monk of Bury were no longer reflective of public taste in terms of both his poetic style and his clear links with Catholicism.

However, the attitudes towards Lydgate and medieval literature as a whole during this period was far from clear cut, with sixteenth-century readers and scholars still able to integrate certain medieval texts and authors into Renaissance culture. Certain texts may be 'justified' in this way by their perceived forward-thinking and Protestant undertones. Thus

Chaucer is considered as an early herald of Reformation in his satirical depictions of the church and clergy in *The Canterbury Tales*. Pseudo-Chaucerian texts, *The Plowman's Tale* and *The Pilgrim's Tale*, appear in later prints and are used to bolster Chaucer's apparent reformist sympathies. William Langland's mighty *Piers Plowman* is deliberately associated with Lollardy, the failed medieval reformation attempt and it is a notion still ingrained in the study of the text (King 1982: 4). These medieval Catholic writers were therefore appropriated by the reformers and presented as Renaissance thinkers or "crypto-Protestants" (King 1982: 50) unfortunately fixed in the dark medieval past. Lydgate's position as monk and his many saints' lives and didactic tracts may have proved rather more difficult to justify or manipulate into Reformation propaganda. However, his associations with the 'reformist' Chaucer are clear, and he deliberately chose to write in and elaborate the vernacular during a period when this was still not the literary norm. His large corpus of secular work dealing with issues of English kingship and history might also recommend him to an early modern culture concerned with such nationalistic matters. As Scanlon and Simpson point out, John Lydgate "presents the challenge of being marginal and central at once" (Scanlon & Simpson 2006: 1) and it is this unique position which allows for an investigation of the complexity of early modern attitudes towards literature during a transitional and turbulent period in English history. While Pearsall describes Lydgate as "himself a comprehensive definition of the middle ages" (Pearsall 1970: 4), other scholars have presented him as a "transition poet" who spans the medieval and renaissance eras (Renoir 1967: 31). Renoir does highlight the dangers of oversimplification involved in defining and labelling these periods, but maintains that analysis of Lydgate's work shows a move towards Renaissance attitudes in his later career. This is primarily evidenced in his use and reaction to the classics which influence his work throughout his career (Renoir 1967: 51). Pearsall admits that Lydgate's attitude towards the classics is indeed more open in the 1431 *Fall of Princes* than in the 1412 *Troy Book*, but attributes this to the differences in source material rather than a change in Lydgate's own outlook (Pearsall 1970: 15).

While Chaucer wrote with a small circle of readers in mind, Lydgate was aiming towards a larger audience with themes and concerns which were very much in the public interest. Pearsall writes "For him [Lydgate], poetry is a public art, its existence conditioned

and determined by outer needs and pressures, not by inner ones” (Pearsall 1970: 5). While his overwhelming prolificacy produced an estimated 145,000 lines of verse, this is a quality not admired by a modern readership. Pearsall admits our modern perceptions of poetry in the post-Romantic era rely on the notion of intensity and conciseness of verse (Pearsall 1970: 4-9). As this was not true of the late medieval period, we must adjust our definitions of poetry towards Lydgate and his contemporary readership. Verse was used as a medium for a vast range of discourse subjects and did not suffer from, Pearsall argues, the limitations of modern “poetic theory” (Pearsall 1970:9). While Pearsall describes Lydgate as “incurably didactic” he admits that the poet was in harmony with the appetites and preoccupations of his contemporary audience who were hungry for moral instruction (Pearsall 1970: 11-12). The reading materials demanded contained both secular work and religious instruction, often within the same MS, and give an insight into the tastes of the late medieval reading public (Duffy 1992: 69). Maura Nolan argues that Lydgate’s style and subject matter illustrate the tastes of the aristocracy from whom he received the majority of his patronage, but his wide popularity also demonstrates the appetite for this type and style of literature outwith court circles (Nolan 2005: 16).

The main criticism brought against Lydgate and his poetic style is his tendency to let his sentences rove without any attempt to produce a main verb. Both Pearsall and Hardman rise to Lydgate’s defence, claiming his syntactic structure, or lack thereof, is a product of the medieval oral tradition (Pearsall 1970:9 & Hardman 2006: 30). Phillipa Hardman furthers the notion that modern punctuation practices are an “intrusion” in Lydgate’s flow of ideas, a concept modern readers find hard to grasp. The frustration of modern readers with Lydgate’s poetry stems particularly from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century attempts to impose contemporary notions of authorship, organisation and editorial practice on haphazard medieval manuscripts (Hardman 2006:16-17). Furthermore, Hardman points out that Chaucer has received considerably more editorial attention throughout the centuries, and this can account for the way in which modern readers approach Chaucer and Lydgate in markedly different ways. In other words, Chaucer has been updated in an almost continual editing process; Lydgate has not and his texts are perceived to be far more obscure and inaccessible as a result (Hardman 2006: 26). This is a particularly relevant issue when analysing the punctuation practices applied to Lydgate’s

texts. The analysis aims to describe the methods used, compare the practices of a selection of printers and illustrate the ways in which the punctuation can reflect the needs and expectations of the contemporary readership. The decisions made by the editors and printers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries shaped the perceptions of Lydgate and his work during this period, but have also had a lasting influence on our modern interpretations and judgements.

The view of fifteenth-century poetry as distasteful and lacking in genuine substance is undeniably shaped by our modern concept of poetry and its role in society. Helen Cooney highlights the irony of modern scholarship successfully “rescuing” Anglo-Saxon and Chaucerian literature and elevating its status, while leaving the fifteenth-century in the dark (Cooney 2001: 9). Fifteenth-century poetry does have a distinct style and there are similar themes and concerns which run through the texts. John Lydgate is the central literary figure of the period and his work reflects the contemporary trends and preoccupations of a society in political turmoil. Much of Lydgate’s work both religious and secular contains reactions to the political and social landscape and he is an astute social commentator. Cooney considers fifteenth-century literature to be “acutely responsive to political and historical - as well as personal- circumstances” which contradicts Romantic and post-Romantic notions of poetic aesthetics (Cooney 2001: 10). Far from being dull and pointless, viewed in relation to the dramatic political events, fifteenth-century literature can provide a meaningful insight into the anxieties and concerns of the contemporary population.

## **2.2 Lydgate the Lancastrian**

It is not possible to assess Lydgate’s work and role as a popular national poet without commenting on his well-known relationship with the Lancastrian monarchy. Through a variety of patronage links Lydgate was very much engaged with contemporary politics and has subsequently been branded as a Lancastrian propagandist. *Troy Book* was commissioned in 1412 by the Prince of Wales, later to become Henry V, and in 1431 the Duke of Gloucester commissioned a translation of Boccaccio which would become the

*Fall of Princes*. Both large and complex works concerned with the duties and pitfalls of kingship outlived Lydgate in popularity and continued to be printed well into the sixteenth century. Several other high profile patronage links have been speculated upon, including the *Temple of Glas* as an earlier poem commissioned to celebrate the marriage of Henry IV and Joanna of Navarre (Bianco 2001: 107). Lydgate also wrote other secular works for specific high profile events throughout his career, such as the *Ballade at the Departing of Thomas Chaucer* between 1414 and 1417 and *On Gloucester's Approaching Marriage*, written around 1422 (Ebin 1985). With this in mind the perception of Lydgate as a Lancastrian sympathiser making shrewd political decisions which would guarantee his career seems reasonable. However, this would be choosing to ignore the even larger number of religious and devotional texts he produced with no patron. Saints' lives were a Lydgate speciality, yet most of these religious works do not survive in print beyond the start of the sixteenth century and many are not printed at all. *The Siege of Thebes* also provides an interesting case which could challenge the notion of Lydgate working primarily as a Lancastrian propagandist. Produced without a patron and as an obvious dedication to his literary master Chaucer, the work is perceivably more conservative about the benefits of taking a nation to war and rather more critical of over ambitious rulership. Lydgate may have been in the paid service of Lancastrian aristocrats throughout his career but his work was also a personal vocation.

Historians have long since agreed on Henry V's drive for national cohesion in the face of continuing war with France, and his push to promote the use of English as a state language. By employing Lydgate to produce an authoritative translation of *Troy*, Henry was attempting to reinforce a sense of English history and acknowledge English as a language fit for literary purpose. While Chaucer undoubtedly established English as a language fit for literary purpose in the fourteenth century, French and Latin were still used in all areas of clerical, political and private life in England. Furthermore, composing in English was still viewed with a certain suspicion as a result of the associations with Wycliffite propaganda (Pearsall 1970: 49-50). Pearsall goes on to argue that Lydgate's "fixing" of English as a literary language cannot be trivialised as he essentially reinforced the process that Chaucer had begun (Pearsall 1970: 50). However, Pearsall seems to resist the notion that the rise of the vernacular as a social and political tool had a direct impact on

the literary scene in general. He asserts that while cultural change may indeed account for the regeneration of the English language in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, “the pressure is all from below and does not necessarily affect the language of literary culture”. Lydgate’s choice to write in English is primarily an ode to the poetic skill of his master Chaucer, rather than a political or cultural statement (Pearsall 1970: 49-50).

The linguistic situation in England during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was indeed diverse and complex; Henry V’s own business and personal correspondence was still conducted in French, despite his continuing war with France (Pearsall 1970: 49). This raises the question of Henry’s own rather ambiguous relationship with English national identity during his reign. While he promoted the use of English in the Chancery and on the literary scene via Lydgate, he was also attempting to unite England and France under a dual monarchy. A sense of English nationalism could be inspired so long as there was opposition and war with France; when Henry became the next in line to the French throne after the Treaty of Troyes was established, the waters became rather muddied. Furthermore, our modern concept of ‘nationalism’ cannot be applied to the medieval period in the same way and debate is ongoing amongst scholars concerning the birth of nationalist ideology in England. Derek Pearsall admits there were “surges” in national sentiment at various points throughout the medieval period, but it was not until the translation of the Bible in the 1520s and the subsequent Henrician Reformation that the need for a separate English identity became pressing. The principles of modern nationalist ideology did not fully develop until the eighteenth century amid the Napoleonic Wars and burgeoning national sentiment across Europe (Pearsall 2001: 15-16).

Henry V’s success and national euphoria did not last long and his death in 1422 saw England plunge into political turmoil once more. Left with a child on the throne, confidence was replaced with anxiety and power struggles. Lydgate continues to write throughout the instability and many have looked towards his poetry from this period for signs of tension and attempts to justify the minority reign. Maura Nolan in her study entitled ‘*John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture*’ raises an interesting point relating to Lydgate’s stylistic choices when writing about such crucial and pertinent social issues. She asserts “we must ask why, at a moment of historical crisis, Lydgate turned to

complex forms of literary discourse rather than to purely functional modes such as consolation, exhortation or exaltation” (Nolan 2005: 3). In Nolan’s view, Lydgate is deliberately manipulating the “forms of public culture” (Nolan 2005: 3) that were available in the fifteenth century, and reshaping them in a way which calls into question our presumptions about propaganda and its role during this time.

Nolan suggests that Lydgate’s works produced specifically after 1422 were “designed to bolster and support the authority of the child on the throne” (Nolan 2005:1), but argues that it is not simply extravagant propaganda concerned with its own place on the literary scene. Rather, Lydgate’s work should be read in “topical” terms, against the backdrop of monarchical instability and other cultural changes affecting fifteenth-century English culture (Nolan 2005: 2). Scott Morgan-Straker also takes a rather dim view of Lydgate as a straightforward Lancastrian propagandist. In his essay entitled ‘Propaganda, Intentionality and the Lancastrian Lydgate’, Straker insists that scholars should openly question the notion that Lydgate’s primary motivation was as a composer of propaganda. In the first place, our modern concept of propaganda is based on the use of mass communication tools incorporating a range of different media. This was obviously not the case in the fifteenth century and again we must adjust our perceptions to align with Lydgate and his contemporaries (Straker 2006: 98-101). Viewing Lydgate primarily as a propagandist and ignoring his large corpus of work and complex attitudes towards the political background overshadow his importance as a contemporary political writer and observer.

John Lydgate’s vast volume of work presents a wealth of material, both religious and secular, commissioned and personally motivated. The next chapter aims to describe and analyse the editorial decisions made by a selection of printers with special reference to the punctuation methods employed. This will illustrate how the printers approached Lydgate’s texts and presented them to the contemporary readership in line with their demands and expectations. Spanning two centuries, the texts chosen for analysis will also offer an insight into the publishing history and the circumstances under which Lydgate’s work was put to print.

# Chapter Three

## 3.1 *The Significance of Punctuation*

Parkes begins his comprehensive and example-led survey of the history of Western punctuation by stating that punctuation is a “phenomenon of the written language” (Parkes 1992: 1). This is a deceptively simple statement on the surface, yet it underpins the development history and practice of punctuation in Western literary culture. It serves to remind that the phenomenon of punctuation cannot be considered in isolation; rather it is inextricably bound with the development of writing systems and the “changing patterns of literacy” (Parkes 1992: 2). Over the course of Parkes’ survey, the forms and functions of punctuation are shown to have changed significantly from Antiquity to the forms and conventions we recognise as modern readers today. From this perspective, the history and development of punctuation are able to reflect the wider changes in reading practices and tell us much about the demands and focus of the reading culture at different points in time. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were witness to significant changes in the size, tastes and demands of the reading culture. The advent and rapid rise of the printing press and its role in the religious and intellectual upheavals of the Renaissance had a further impact on the perceptions of the author and the role of literature in society. The growth of the reading culture and the shift from script to print imposed new demands and ideals on the reading material available. These changes can be seen in the layout and design of the text, increasing use of paratextual materials, issues of authorial control and the ways in which texts are promoted and disseminated.

The late medieval period was also moving further away from the oral culture of the past and towards a culture of individual, silent reading. The growth of literacy beyond the church and upper classes produced a new generation of readers who imposed new demands on a wide range of texts. Punctuation was a means to aid less experienced readers through a text, yet developments in the system itself also allowed scribes, editors and printers to signal more subtle rhetorical or semantic distinctions within a given text. The printing



press brought its own changes to bear on the systems of punctuation, providing a level of standardisation to the form and spreading new innovations far more quickly than manuscript dissemination had allowed (Parkes 1992: 56). This chapter of the dissertation will provide a survey of the history of punctuation, with specific reference to the developments occurring during the late medieval and early modern periods. The theory will be applied to a selection of Lydgate texts from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, analysing and comparing the systems of punctuation which were applied. The data will be used to show how Lydgate's medieval texts were treated and punctuated by a selection of printers, and will consider the ways in which this treatment may have affected the perceptions and understanding of his work. The aim of this analysis is to further investigate how the developments in punctuation practices both reflected and affected the reading practices of the late medieval and early modern readership.

In her essay entitled, 'Lydgate's Uneasy Syntax', Phillipa Hardman argues the case for Lydgate's syntactic style. The harsh criticism that Lydgate has received from scholars over the course invariably compares Lydgate to his master, Chaucer. As a result, Lydgate's verse is not considered on its own merit, but held up against Chaucer's effortless composition and sardonic wit. Hardman asserts that not only are such comparisons unfair in the first instance, but that these critical impressions of his work are largely a result of the lack of modern editing that Lydgate's texts have received. Had Lydgate's work received the same level of editorial attention as Chaucer, Hardman argues, his texts would naturally appear more "refined" in accordance with our modern expectations (Hardman 2006: 26). She further proposes the idea that punctuation is in fact an "intrusion" in Lydgate's flow of ideas (Hardman 2006: 16). In other words, the modern readership's frustration with the seeming inaccessibility of Lydgate's texts derives primarily from modern editorial opinions and decisions which are insensitive to the author's own literary techniques and purpose. The practice of applying modern punctuation to medieval texts "sets up false expectations of regular syntax" and develops from nineteenth- and twentieth-century attempts to impose modern hypotactic punctuation on texts which were generally paratactic in their structure (Hardman 2006: 17).

The perception of Chaucer's texts as appealing and accessible derives from the continuous editorial attention he has received over the centuries. Yet, as Hardman points out, the experience of reading Chaucer in manuscript and early printed form is very different from later printed editions. Manuscripts and early prints traditionally mark mid-line pauses but leave the rest of the verse to flow freely, with a rare stop being used to mark the end of a large section or the work as a whole (Hardman 2006: 16). This practice can be seen in many of the earlier print editions of Lydgate which are used for analysis. Comparing the end of the General Prologue in the *Riverside Chaucer* edition with the Ellesmere MS, Hardman notes that most of the principal syntactical divisions which are marked by indentations in the *Riverside* also appear marked in Ellesmere by capitals. However, all of the other forms of punctuation applied in the modern edition is a matter of modern interpretation. The freedom of syntax allowed by minimal punctuation represents an entirely different style of writing and reading experience. Hardman asserts that reading both Chaucer and Lydgate in their manuscript form gives "a greater impression of the fluency and connectedness" of the writing, an experience that is lost with the addition of modern editing and punctuation practices (Hardman 2006: 26). Not only is it an "intrusion" in the physical sense, but it also misrepresents the syntactic style of medieval verse. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century attempts to apply modern punctuation techniques and theories to medieval texts resulted in the editor's frustration and criticism of these seemingly impossible and tiresome texts. An awareness of the role of literature in medieval culture and the links with the oral tradition in both vernacular texts and the liturgy is required to understand the literary style and purpose of the medieval authors and their contemporary reception.

### **3.2 Punctuation from Script to Print**

Parkes asserts that the interpretation of punctuation must focus on the function of a given symbol in relation to others in the surrounding context, rather than a perceived "absolute value" for that symbol (Parkes 1992: 2). When interpreting historical punctuation practices in particular, it is important to take into consideration the level of variation which can occur between scribes and the distinct practices applied to different types of text. Parkes notes for example that Irish scribes adopted very different approaches when punctuating

Latin scripture compared with their native Irish texts. Latin was more heavily punctuated and abbreviated, with more overall emphasis on the visual characteristics of the text. As such, Latin texts copied by the Irish scribes from the early ninth century illustrate many innovations in use and the punctuation becomes an integral part of the layout and decorative aspect of the text (Parkes 1992: 24-25). As well as the distinct practices and preferences of scribal communities, individual scribes were also copying with varying levels of accuracy and ability. It cannot be assumed, therefore, that every scribe was familiar with or even understood the text he was copying. Printed punctuation also raises pertinent issues of interpretation, given that the forms printed may reflect the practices of the author, editor, compositor, or indeed all three. While these conditions may be considered as complications which obscure the original text, Parkes argues that the very combination is a reflection of usage patterns (Parkes 1992: 5). In other words, the layers of intervention and any practice we may perceive as error can only contribute to our understanding of the constantly developing systems of punctuation and their role in the text.

The earliest forms of punctuation were constrained by the practice of copying Latin texts in *scriptio continua* fashion and punctuation was essentially slotted in where required. By the twelfth century, the basic conventions of word separation had been established, and later forms became subject to different styles and hands (Parkes 1992: 2). Further developments to the form of punctuation took place with the invention of the press. While early typefaces reflected the trends and conventions of manuscript culture, the process of type-cutting was eventually outsourced to specifically trained artisans. This led to the preferred use of certain typefaces in different parts of the continent, but also allowed for a level of standardisation to be achieved when the punctuation marks were cut with the rest of the type (Parkes 1992: 51). The development of the physical form of punctuation marks is clearly linked to certain trends and innovations which affected book making and later printing processes. However, form and function are not mutually exclusive and grammatical practices are ultimately shaped by the changing patterns of literacy and the demands of the reading community. As Smith asserts, intralinguistic changes “cannot be meaningfully accounted for without reference to the extralinguistic contexts (historical, geographical, sociological) in which these phenomena are situated” (Smith 1996: 2). The

extralinguistic conditions affecting the development of both the form and function of punctuation over the centuries will be considered at each stage of the analysis.

Education and culture in Antiquity were dominated by the ideals of rhetoric and the importance of eloquent speech. Punctuation was viewed primarily as a teaching method to prepare students for successful public speaking; the focus of the text and the punctuation practices employed was towards producing “an aural response to the written word” (Parkes 1992: 9). The practice of *scriptio continua* presented the reader with an essentially neutral text and required a significant level of preparation before it could be read aloud. In Parkes’ view, this neutral presentation allowed the individual reader to engage more fully with the text and the process of interpretation (Parkes 1992: 11). The legacy of the classical rhetoricians can still be detected in modern theories and applications of punctuation. Many people still place a comma where they would ‘take a breath’ in speech, reinforcing the relationship between writing and spoken discourse. The distinction between rhetorical and grammatical analysis has formed the central line of debate among grammar theorists and scholars over the centuries. While rhetoricians focus on the relationship between the spoken and written word, the grammarians’ approach is primarily concerned with the use of punctuation as a means of distinguishing sentences and the grammatical units within. Although there are clear distinctions between the application of rhetorical and grammatical punctuation practices, Parkes notes that there is usually general agreement between the two factions as to what constitutes “incomplete and completed sense” (Parkes 1992: 4). Indeed, the approaches are not entirely incompatible and several of the texts used for analysis simultaneously display both rhetorical and grammatical punctuation tendencies. As the role of punctuation developed and was no longer limited to the basic function of clarification or disambiguation, scribes were able to signal more subtle, pragmatic aspects in the text. Punctuation was able to highlight or modify a particular interpretation and scribes utilised the grammatical system which was most suited to the purpose (Parkes 1992: 72).

The fourth century saw the rise of the Christian text and, as Christianity was a “religion of the book”, the exploitation of grammatical knowledge was central to the study and understanding of biblical texts (Parkes 1992: 14). The concern for accurate punctuation of the Bible was drawn from the the dangers of misinterpretation and the need

for all members of the congregation to understand the message being read from the page (Parkes 1992: 15). At the end of the fifth century Christian theologian Jerome presented a new innovation in the layout of certain problematical biblical texts. By taking a new line for each section of the period, Jerome had established the convention of writing *per cola et commata*, a practice which eventually extended to the copying of all biblical texts from the fifth to the ninth centuries (Parkes 1992: 15-16). The rise of monasticism in the West created a special community of “elite” readers who were capable of reading and interpreting a text without the need for punctuation techniques. For less experienced readers outside of these monasteries and for the increasing administrative requirements of government, punctuating texts to aid and hasten the reading process was still an important undertaking (Parkes 1992: 18). Evidence suggests that the practice of inserting the necessary pauses was done after the text was copied and often by the readers themselves. As such, the punctuation added was a reflection of the reader’s own needs and perceptions of the text and systems varied greatly (Parkes 1992: 19). The development of the monastic systems had an impact on punctuation as a whole, given that monastic scribes frequently copied and corrected a wide range of secular texts, including those which were not primarily intended for oral delivery (Parkes 1992: 40). It is clear that from the early medieval period, punctuation techniques were subject to a variety of influences and extralinguistic considerations.

The advent of the printing press was a significant extralinguistic force which shaped the development of the book industry, reading habits and arguably provided a major catalyst for the further standardisation of the spelling system. The press also standardised the use of type-faces which resulted in more uniformity among printers (Parkes 1992: 54). Early type-faces reflected handwriting trends and the punctuation marks were therefore also similar to those found in manuscripts. However, as type-faces for print developed independently and type-cutting became a specialised craft, punctuation marks were cut with the type and this led to a further level of standardisation (Parkes 1992: 51). Parkes notes that although new punctuation marks were available, not all printers adopted them immediately; English printers did not begin to replace the virgule with the semi-circular comma until the 1520s, for example (Parkes 1992: 51). The analysis of the texts demonstrate this was the case and many later editions still utilise the virgule as the mid-

line mark, and functionally it is considered interchangeable with the punctus and comma. Lydgate's printers frequently retained the punctuation forms and techniques which mark the medieval origins and very rarely is the text dramatically edited to fit with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century notions of acceptable syntax and punctuation. New conventions did, however, spread far more quickly with the invention of the press and Parkes asserts that by the end of the sixteenth century, the written word and the printed word had become interchangeable in the minds of the readership. The conventions and trends of written language had become inextricably linked with those utilised in printed texts (Parkes 1992: 56).

The legacy of the various systems and approaches to punctuation can be clearly found in the texts chosen for analysis which display a tendency for gradual adoption of new conventions. Many prints which would be categorised as definitively early modern in their presentation and detail retain elements of the original medieval punctuation methods, and are often interwoven with new developments. As the sixteenth century progressed, the links to the oral traditions of the medieval past were weakening and a new culture of individual and more extensive reading developed. The changing attitudes towards the written word as a "medium in its own right" (Parkes 1992: 20) and the requirements of an expanding readership affected the form and function of punctuation. Medieval texts presented early modern editors with a quandary; how should modern grammatical conventions be applied to older texts with links to the oral tradition? The analysis in the following chapter reveals that some printers chose to edit the given text to fit with contemporary notions of syntax, spelling and punctuation, providing a version which was far more accessible but which loses much of the original medieval character of Lydgate's poems. However, the majority of editors are more subtle in their handling of the texts, providing minimal additional punctuation and leaving the syntactical structure of the verse intact. The original mid-line rhetorical marks survive in many sixteenth- and seventeenth-century prints and are gradually eliminated by the introduction of grammatical practices which are more representative of the needs and expectations of the reading culture.

### 3.3 *Commentary and Analysis*

#### 3.3.1 *Troy Book*

Running at nearly 30,000 lines of verse, *Troy Book* is Lydgate's greatest epic. The poem is thought to have been written between 1412 and 1420 and was commissioned by prince Henry, the future king. *Troy Book* and Lydgate's other historical epic, *The Siege of Thebes*, have been linked in terms of subject matter and the moral lessons advanced in the texts. Lois Ebin describes both works as definitively "public poems" relating to affairs of state (Ebin 1985: 39). According to Renoir, the poem is "obviously nationalistic" (Renoir 1967: 96) and the poem has indeed been considered by many scholars as a clear example of Lydgate's pro-Lancastrian sympathies and focus. While Chaucer and other contemporary versions of Troy focus on the love story aspect of Troilus and Criseyde, Lydgate retains the historical emphasis throughout (Ebin 1985: 41). Henry V is likened in Lydgate's prologue to the chivalric hero Hector; it is both the character of Hector and theme of chivalric duty which Purfoot's seventeenth century edition chooses to emphasise.

Lydgate also stresses the importance and significance of undertaking the work in English in his numerous digressions throughout the poem (Ebin 1985: 51). The act of translating and elevating the language was as important to the text and perhaps to Lydgate's patron as the content itself. However, while Schirmer agrees that *Troy Book* must be analysed in view of Henry's patronage and his own chivalric ideals, he asserts that propaganda was simply not required during his reign (Schirmer 1961: 51). It is a view shared by Maura Nolan who suggests that it is the works after Henry's unexpected death in 1422 which were "designed to bolster and support the authority of the child on the throne" (Nolan 2005: 1).

The precise motivations behind the production of *Troy Book* are still debated in terms of Lydgate's political affiliations and the role of the text as a propaganda tool or representation of Henry's own heightened sense of chivalric duty. The ways in which later printers and editors treat the text indicates how the perception and popularity of the text

shift across the centuries. The texts chosen for analysis range from an early sixteenth-century print by Richard Pynson to Marshe's mid-century contribution and Purfoot's much later and heavily edited print from 1614.

A. Printer: **Richard Pynson**

Date: **1513**

i. *Commentary:*

Richard Pynson was a printer working in London at the start of the sixteenth century during Henry VII and Henry VIII's reigns. He was the second printer to be officially appointed as 'King's printer', a post created by Henry VII in 1504 and primarily concerned with the issuing of royal and parliamentary statutes and proclamations (Neville-Sington 2004). Pynson focused his printing activities towards legal texts, a shrewd business decision which consolidated his printing success. Pynson was also involved with publishing a selection of reforming texts linked to humanist church figures (Neville-Sington 2004).

Pynson's edition from the early sixteenth century presents the text in the conventional two-column layout with the type-face entirely in Black Letter. There is no title page and it begins with a prayer followed by a *Tabula*, or contents page. This splits the text into chapters or 'books' and gives a content summary of each. An introduction to the *Troy Book* text precedes the prologue with basic details of the author and printer, including names, dates and place of publication. The following section is entitled *Prologue of the Translatoure* and contains a half-page woodcut depicting Lydgate presenting the finished text to his patron, Henry V. The text as a whole contains 39 illustrative woodcuts which correspond with the content of the text. The woodcuts vary in size between half pages and smaller inserts in the text. The last page has a dedication to Henry V and Pynson's printing mark, along with Lydgate's own dedication to his "lytell boke".



This edition was put to press during the early reign of Henry VIII, before Luther published his *Theses* and before the 1534 Act of Supremacy. The extensive collection of the *Early English Books Online* displays an interesting pattern of publication with regards to Lydgate's texts. Between the mid-1530s and the accession of Mary in 1553, Lydgate appears to fall out of favour and prints are few and far between. Lydgate's popularity experienced a revival during Mary's reign and his texts are printed consistently, though not extensively, during the Elizabethan era and into the seventeenth century.

ii. *Analysis:*

The text utilises the capital letter, virgule, punctus and paraph mark. Spacing is also used to divide the text within the designated 'books'. Medial pauses within each verse line are marked by a virgule and the punctus is used to mark the end of a narrative section where the text is moving forwards. Where the punctus remains within the body of the text, a paraph mark follows as another visual aid designating a new narrative section or, as in many cases, authorial digression. To mark a more definite narrative break, spacing is used. This displays a hierarchical division of the text in which the virgule marks a medial pause, the punctus and paraph mark indicate a change in narrative direction within the section and the punctus followed by a stanza break designates a more definitive sense break within the narrative. Where there is a division in the text, the punctus does not always end the preceding text. However, given that the stanza division marks a deliberate sense break in the text and the appearance of the punctus is far more regular than not, it seems sensible to assume that the irregular omissions are inconsequential printing errors. The stanza division may be followed by an enlarged initial, an enlarged decorated initial, a paraph mark or a small initial outset from the text.

Although the semi-circular comma was available to printers at this time, Parkes notes that English printers did not replace the virgule until the 1520s (Parkes

1992: 51). The virgule, or *virgula suspensiva*, was adopted into the repository of commonly used punctuation marks in the Middle Ages for a number of reasons, appearing almost as frequently as the punctus. Like the punctus, the virgule was a simple mark to form and was “distinctive” within the text. In addition, the virgule could be easily inserted after the text had been copied and it was indeed customary for readers to punctuate their own texts accordingly. Finally, Parkes observes that the *virgula suspensiva* was linked to the rise of cursive scripts which came to dominate and, if doubled, the mark could be used to represent a paraph mark (Parkes 1992: 46). In Pynson’s edition, the virgule is used extensively to mark each verse line with a medial pause, while the punctus is scarce in the main body of the text. Although extensive, the virgule is relatively unobtrusive and the punctuation in the text as a whole is minimal. Lydgate’s verse is left to flow freely while the reader is aided by appropriate spacing and woodcut images which correspond with key events in the text.

The placing of the punctuation supports a rhetorical reading of the text in which the virgules denote a medial pause for the speaker\reader and mark the metre of the verse line. The consistent and uniform placing of the marks, however, presents a relatively neutral version of the text, a method Parkes describes as *equiparative* punctuation (Parkes 1992: 70). This is the practice of using more extensive pointing to create a neutral interpretation by attributing equal value to each sense unit within the text. Nevertheless, close analysis also demonstrates that the placing of the virgules is able to support a grammatical interpretation in many lines, whereby the virgules are dissecting the verse line into sense units as well as marking a rhetorical pause.

There was a kynge/ callyd Pelleus  
Wyse and discrete/ and also vertuous  
The whiche as Guydo/ lyste to specyfye  
Helde the lordshyp/ and the regalye (lines 3-6)

Despite the differing attitudes towards the function of punctuation between grammarians and rhetoricians over the centuries, Parkes notes that there is usually basic agreement between the two camps as to what constitutes “incomplete and completed sense” (Parkes 1992: 4). From this perspective, the punctuation methods within a text are likely to represent a certain “compromise” between both approaches. The divergence between them relates to the subtle variation of emphasis and communicative intent within a text, rather than to a set of distinct rules governing each approach (Parkes 1992: 92). The punctuation choices applied in Pynson’s edition do not guide the reader towards a particular interpretation and it is the neutrality and lack of punctuation marking which strikes the modern reader. Pynson’s contemporary reader was aided by the conventional verse layout, spacing and capitals, illustrations and the conventional use of the virgules. The subtlety of meaning within the text is left to the reader to interpret and analyse with a level of flexibility and scope not available to a modern readers accustomed to strict punctuation conventions.

Pynson’s edition appears distinctly medieval in its presentation and methods; the type-face, layout and punctuation marks combine to present the reader with a text which has more in common with a manuscript edition than a later printed copy. Despite subtle overlaps which may be detected between punctuation codes of practice, the edition presents an ultimately neutral version of the text. The use and placing of the virgules as mid-line pauses and the absence of regular stanza division and punctuation marks at the end of each verse line reinforces the link with the text’s medieval origins and the oral tradition.

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B. Printer: **Thomas Marshe**

Date: **1555**

i. *Commentary:*

Marshe's edition of 'Troy Book' dating from 1555 presents the text in a similar fashion to Pynson's print, displaying a dense, two-column text in Black Letter. Printed during Mary I's reign, this period witnessed a revival of interest in Lydgate's work. The edition places the contents page at the back of the text and retains the dedication to Henry V, along with Lydgate's stanza to his "litell boke". Unlike Pynson's edition, this print contains an illustrated title page depicting Henry VIII's family tree, at the top of which his figure presides. Then follows an *Epistle to the Reader* written by Robert Braham and it is interesting to note that this preface emphasises the historical nature of the text over the literary aspect. There are no woodcuts and slightly less spacing overall than Pynson's edition, creating the impression of a less expensive and less reader-friendly production. The lack of illustrations combined with the focus on the historical merits of the text set out in the preface of this edition focuses the reader away from the literary aspect and creates a more serious and scholarly impression of the work. Such a shift in the presentation and perception of the text may reflect how Lydgate came to be portrayed to the early modern readership. From the evidence of Lydgate's surviving print history, the texts most frequently printed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are *Troy Book*, *Fall of Princes* and *The Siege of Thebes*; texts of a historical, moralising but ultimately Classically secular nature.

ii. *Analysis:*

Although Marshe's edition resembles Pynson's earlier print in terms of page layout and type-face, the forms and method of punctuation vary significantly. The 1555

print adds new marks to the repertoire, utilising the comma and colon in addition to the punctus, capital letter, paraph mark and spacing. Marshe dispenses entirely with the virgule and mid-line pauses are not marked, producing a rather different appearance and reading experience. Punctuation appears at the end of most verse lines in the form of a comma, colon or punctus reflecting modern expectations of verse punctuation. By this point in the development of punctuation marks, the punctus elevatus had evolved into the modern colon, the form found in Marshe's print. Within the system of *positurae* introduced from the second half of the eighth century the punctus elevatus had represented a major medial pause contained in the sentence (Parkes 1992: 36). The colon performs this same function in Marshe's edition, being placed in terms of pause hierarchy between the minor pause denoted by the comma and the definite sentence end denoted by the punctus. Paraph marks indicating a change in narrative are used in a similar fashion to that of Pynson's edition. Where a change or digression occurs within a block section of text, the paraph is used as a marker. It also appears before the brief narrative summaries which precede a new chapter within a 'book', helping the reader to navigate and digest an otherwise large and dense piece of text.

The omission of the mid-line virgules in Marshe's edition is not only a significant aesthetic change, it also alters the way the text is read in terms of metre and rhythm. While Pynson's edition focuses the reader, speaker or audience's attention towards pausing consistently mid-line, the punctuation in Marshe's edition is primarily grammatical in practice. The punctuation mark at the end of each verse line guides the reader to pause, with the form of the mark denoting the length.

For they of yre without more offence,  
With swerde and with the stroke of pestilence,  
On this yle whilom toke vengeaunce:  
Like as it is put in remembraunce. (lines 17-20)

The above example demonstrates the hierarchy of marks used throughout the edition, with the semi-circular comma being the most common sign overall. However, ‘pause’ is not meant in the primarily rhetorical sense in this case. The marks are used to distinguish grammatical sense breaks, with the punctuation indicating differing levels of emphasis. By utilising the repertoire of marks to emphasise certain units or aspects of the text, Marshe’s edition provides the reader with a level and angle of interpretation from the outset. Unlike Pynson’s neutrally pointed version of the text, Marshe has opted to introduce new punctuation practices to a text which was never conceived with this in mind. The reader benefits from the extended array of marks which clarify the structure of the text and work to highlight the most important verse lines through typographical means. Given Lydgate’s preference for roving and densely-packed verse, such punctuation choices can create a version of the text which is more accessible to a sixteenth-century readership without altering the author’s verse and communicative purpose. Indeed, Marshe’s level of intervention in the text is relatively subtle in comparison to the choices of later Lydgate editors and printers.

Marshe’s decision to adapt the punctuation for his mid-sixteenth century audience is a reflection of the needs and expectations of the reading culture. In terms of the impact of these editing decisions on the perception and understanding of Lydgate’s work, it could be argued that Marshe’s version updates the text to comply with the demands of his contemporary readership without modifying the structure and meaning of the original text. Nevertheless, the choices made do present a slightly different view of the text and its purpose. The framing of the text primarily as a historical narrative presents Lydgate as a scholar before poet. There is also a decisive move away from a rhetorical presentation of the work and towards a grammatical interpretation which reflects the growing silent readership and distance from the oral culture of the past.

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C. Printer: **Thomas Purfoot**

Date: **1614**

i. *Commentary:*

Purfoot's early seventeenth-century edition produced during the reign of James I differs significantly from the Pynson and Marshe prints of the text in terms of both layout and editing techniques. Purfoot's edition does not appear medieval; the familiar Black Letter font has been replaced with a Roman type and the spacing is far more generous. The title of the text has been changed from *Troy Book* to *The Life and Death of Hector* and is presented with a determined focus on the wise and valiant prince. The title page also depicts the female personifications of 'wisdom' and 'science' overlooking the text and garbed in classical robes. However, the title page retains the description of the author as 'Iohn Lidgate Monke of Berry' and the dedication to the contemporary patron of the text, Henry V. At the bottom of the page a figure sits at a desk writing in studious contemplation, and is perhaps intended to represent Lydgate himself. Even in the seventeenth century, Lydgate is still referred to as 'the monk of Bury', a convention which has survived from MS and early print. The continual reinforcement of Lydgate's status as a medieval monk, however, overshadows his role as poet and creator of the text. Perhaps Lydgate's long time omission from the canon of English literature is in part due to the early modern readership failing to recognise his central role as *poet* in the fifteenth century.

The edition also retains the dedication to Henry V and Lydgate's own *Lenvoy* to his 'little book'. A preface to the reader is provided which is edited from Lydgate's own 'Prologue of the Translatoure', and works to frame the following narrative as a tale of princely valour and chivalry. While Marshe's edition aims to focus the reader towards a solid historical interpretation of the text, Purfoot is keen to portray the text as a tale of monarchical strength, duty and princely qualities. There are no illustrations in the text but each book is introduced by a small border

illustration and spacious title lettering. The text is presented in two-columns and in regular six-line stanzas with the last couplet inset. Proper nouns in the text are italicised and important nouns such as ‘Prince’ and ‘Poet’ are capitalised; this has been replicated in the transcription.

ii. *Analysis:*

The first thing that strikes the reader familiar with Lydgate’s *Troy Book* is the level to which the text has been edited in Purfoot’s edition to fit with regular six-line stanzas. In essence, Purfoot’s edition follows the narrative thread of the original *Troy Book*, retaining a high level of the original vocabulary and many phrases. However, the syntax is altered significantly to fit with the contemporary poetic conventions, producing a text which looks and reads very differently from the sixteenth-century examples. The experience of reading Purfoot’s edition with modernised layout, spelling and remodelled syntax undoubtedly proves far more accessible to the modern reader and could be described as more succinct and streamlined than Lydgate’s verse. Indeed, much of Lydgate’s infamous rambling digressions and extensive framing are deleted in the editing process. Purfoot’s edition reads as a Renaissance text, appealing to the tastes and focus of the contemporary readership. The residual medievalism is found not in the language or sentiment of the text, but in the paratextual material detailing the ‘monke’ Lydgate as author and the dedication to Henry V.

The inventory of punctuation marks available to Purfoot in the early seventeenth century has further expanded and the edition makes frequent use of the semi-colon, dash, apostrophe and brackets to supplement the punctus, comma and colon used by Marshe. The method of punctuation adopted displays a distinctly grammatical approach and the text is extensively punctuated compared to both previous editions from the sixteenth century. The text utilises the marks [ , ; : . ] in hierarchical order and the apostrophe to indicate contractions, such as “consum’d” in line 9 of the transcribed text. The edition makes frequent use of brackets



throughout to enclose additional information or signal a digression. It is interesting to note that the *hedera*, or ivy-leaf symbol, appears in Purfoot's edition to introduce a new section and the short summary that precedes it. Parkes asserts that the *hedera* can be considered as the oldest punctuation mark in the West, having been first documented in the second century BC. Manuscript evidence suggests that by the twelfth century the *hedera*'s punctuating function was no longer understood by scribes and later printers used the symbol for primarily decorative purposes; it could also be used in place of a paraph mark or pointing hand to highlight key parts or sentiments within the text (Parkes 1992: 61). Its use within Purfoot's edition to introduce a new section closely reflects its original function of signifying the beginning and end of a text.

The punctuation in Purfoot's print is used solely to mark grammatical units and clauses and does not retain any of the rhetorical aspects of the verse. In addition, Purfoot has adapted the very rhyme scheme of Lydgate's poem from AABBC to a stanza based ABABCC rhyme pattern. The last couplet of each verse is inset to further emphasise the rhyme scheme and act as a visual aid to the reader. During the Middle Ages, medieval scribes made increasing use of rhyming patterns and layout to present texts to readers and "evoke in them the responses required by a poetic text" (Parkes 1992: 101). The recognition of the poetic conventions aided readers encountering a new text and past experience and knowledge shaped interpretation (Parkes 1992:102). In Purfoot's edition, seventeenth-century readers would have quickly recognised the contemporary verse layout and rhyme scheme, prompting the appropriate responses to the poetic text. However, the layout and syntactic editing differs so significantly from Lydgate's original text that seventeenth-century readers are responding to and interpreting a rather different text from earlier medieval readers.

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## Overview of *Troy Book*

With 100 years between the earliest and latest editions chosen for analysis, the texts display a variety of punctuation techniques and methods of presentation. Pynson's edition utilises minimal punctuation and paratextual material. The large woodcut depicting Lydgate presenting the text to Henry V retains the close association between the poet and the Lancastrian monarchy while also displaying Lydgate's importance and status in fifteenth-century culture. The dense layout of text, use of the Black Letter font and the mid-line virgules combine to produce a text which closely follows the traditions of manuscript practice. The use of the virgule is both a medieval form and used in a way which reflects rhetorical punctuation methods and links to the oral culture of the past. Marshe's edition dispenses entirely with the mid-line pauses and moves the punctuation to the end of each verse line, a convention modern readers are familiar with. The text looks different on the page and the omission of these pauses alters the way the text is read; prominence is placed on the hierarchy of marks at the end of each line and steers the reader away from a rhetorical interpretation. Marshe's 1555 print is very much an intermediate example in terms of the development of this text, retaining elements of medieval presentation in layout and font, but moving towards grammatical practices and the presentation of *Troy Book* as a scholarly work which is perhaps less reader-friendly than Pynson's edition.

Purfoot's print moves away from medieval presentation and punctuation techniques entirely to produce a text which is dramatically different in both respects. Purfoot edits a Renaissance text with the emphasis on the princely qualities of Hector, retaining hints of the text's medieval origins only in brief allusions in the paratextual material. While Purfoot produces a version of *Troy Book* which is accessible and reflects the expectations of the seventeenth century readership, it is far removed from Lydgate's original vision of the text. Not only does Purfoot impose a system of punctuation which is insensitive to the rhetorical essence of Lydgate's text, the syntax itself is altered and large sections of the original are removed from the narrative. The text no longer retains the association with Lancastrian politics and Henry V's ideals of high medieval chivalry, and it is no longer perceived and used as a "public poem" (Ebin 1985: 39) reflecting contemporary political and social

concerns. The text of *Troy Book* has therefore undergone a decisive shift in both its presentation and the perceptions of the readership. The absence of these insights into the literary culture of the fifteenth century and Lydgate's role as poet catering to the tastes and preoccupations of his readership has perhaps informed opinions about both the quality of his work and his role within the canon of English literature.

### 3.3.2 The Siege Of Thebes

Totalling a mere 4,716 lines, *The Siege of Thebes* can be considered brief by Lydgate's usual standards (Ebin 1985: 52). Written as an addition to *The Canterbury Tales*, the text of *Thebes* appears far more frequently in anthologies of Chaucer than as a single text. Like *Troy Book*, Lydgate uses the poem to describe and moralise about a major historical event, although Schirmer describes the poem as "less an epic than a historical account" (Schirmer 1961: 63). *Thebes* also differs from *Troy Book* in terms of the motives for production. Thought to have been written soon after *Troy*, *Thebes* was composed without the request of a patron, a detail which has a significant impact on the perceived content and purpose of the text. Unpatronised, Lydgate "speaks his own mind" (Schirmer 1961: 64) focusing on the moral issues of war and the relationship between a ruler and his people (Schirmer 1961: 64). *Thebes* is considered to be more conservatively critical of Henry's campaigns in France and the poem is a "king's mirror" (Ebin 1985: 57) to the responsibilities of rulership. Unfettered by patronage ties, Lydgate becomes a representative of public opinion about the war with France (Schirmer 1961: 65).

*Thebes* continues to be printed well into the seventeenth century attached to editions of Chaucer's *Workes*. The catalogue of *Early English Books Online* contains only one edition of *Thebes* as an individual text printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1497/1500; all other editions of the text appear as appendages to Chaucer's *Workes*. It is interesting to note that the text is not included with the *Tales*, but always appears as the last text in the book. However, each edition retains the separate acknowledgement of the poem as the work of John Lydgate, Monk of Bury.

A. Printer: **de Worde**

Date: **1497/1500**

i. *Commentary:*

De Worde's edition dating from the turn of the fifteenth century is the only single text edition of *The Siege of Thebes* catalogued in the EEBO database and chosen for analysis. This early print presents the text in a style particularly reminiscent of manuscript trends, with a single column of text and bold Black Letter font. The first page of the text contains a woodcut of a knight on horseback followed by a poorer quality woodcut depicting the city of Thebes. The Prologue begins immediately with no paratextual material, thereby producing an edition which is markedly different in appearance and reading experience than the later editions of Chaucer's *Workes* in which *Thebes* features. As a text produced without the commission of a patron, there is no need to add elaborate dedications or justifications. Chapters are introduced by 3-line high enlarged initials and the narrative summaries appear in the margins of the text. The summaries provide a brief running commentary on the progress of the poem, and are also used to signal the appearance of Chaucer, his pilgrims and the voice of Lydgate himself within the text.

There are no further woodcuts in de Worde's edition and decoration is minimal. However, the text is neat and well spaced throughout. The surviving copy is in almost perfect condition giving a close impression of what the book would have looked like to contemporary readers. The text ends with an 'Amen' and de Worde's signature impression. This edition was printed while Lydgate's reputation and significant role as poet was still recognised and before any anti-Catholic sentiment may have affected the popularity or understanding of his work.

ii. *Analysis:*

The text is minimal in terms of both decoration and punctuation, with de Worde only utilising the punctus and capital throughout. Each line begins with a capital and all proper nouns are capitalised along with important nouns for added emphasis, such as “Floure of Poetes” in line 40. Each of the subsequent editions retain Lydgate’s original system of capitalisation. There are a few conventional abbreviations used throughout the text, mainly signalling the omissions of ‘m’ or the thorn-shaped abbreviation for ‘the’; these abbreviations are more frequent in the marginalia. However, use of manuscript abbreviation practices steadily declines and the later texts chosen for analysis do not retain this convention. There is no end-line punctuation and the mid-line pause is marked by the punctus. Other texts chosen for analysis dating from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries which observe the marking of rhetorical mid-line pauses use either the virgule or the semi-circular comma within the verse line and the punctus for signifying more definite pauses at the end of a chapter or narrative section. De Worde’s choice to use only the punctus produces a continuous flow of text broken only by the chapter headings. As a result it is a very neutral text which focuses the reader fully on the text at hand, rather than on any elaborate paratextual material or additional markings.

De Worde’s choice to use the punctus as a mid-line marker is also interesting in terms of the history of the mark itself. In this edition, the punctus lies consistently on the base line, but earlier methods used the height of the punctus as a marker of pause length and function. By the start of the Middle Ages, the punctus was the most commonly used punctuation mark and was fit for many purposes within a text; separating numerals, marking abbreviations and highlighting names (Parkes 1992: 42). The system of height distinction, or *distinctiones*, was developed in Antiquity and graded the height of the punctus and sentence division in hierarchical order, with the low point indicating a minor medial pause and the high punctus signifying a final pause and the end of the sententia. However, such frequent use of the punctus for a variety of purposes led to “a lack of

discrimination” and potential for confusion (Parkes 1992: 42). As a result, the punctus was used in combination with other symbols, such as the *punctus versus*, *interrogativus* and *elevatus*, which becomes the modern colon. This combination, however, meant that the height system was no longer necessary. As de Worde opts to use the virgule as mid-line markers in editions of other Lydgate texts, it is perhaps most likely that the choice to use the punctus was related to the exemplar copy of the text he was using to create his edition.

The consistent mid-line marks support a rhetorical interpretation of de Worde’s edition which is closely styled on manuscript practices and conventions. The punctus is placed roughly mid-line, following the first four, sometimes five, syllables of the verse line.

Worde by worde. with euery circumstaunce  
Echone I wryte. and put in remembraunce  
By him that was. yf I shall not fayne  
Floure of Poetes. through out all of Bretayne (lines 37-40)

This consistency of metre enhances the rhetorical essence of the text and encourages the reader to follow the rhythmical pattern throughout the poem. In terms of reading experience, de Worde’s edition presents a text which is neutrally punctuated, giving the reader only basic prosodic marks and no paratextual material beyond the initial generic woodcuts. Its status as a stand-alone text also creates a rather different view of the poem to the later editions in which *Thebes* is placed at the very end of Chaucer’s *Workes*. De Worde’s print of *The Siege of Thebes* as a single text recognises the poem as a work in its own right rather than an addition to a text of higher rank. The printing of the text as an individual poem was based on financial viability, proving the demand and popularity of the piece.

B. Printer: **Kyngston**

Date: **1561**

i. *Commentary:*

This mid-sixteenth century edition of Chaucer's works containing *The Siege of Thebes* was printed by John Kyngston in the first few years of Queen Elizabeth I's reign. In terms of presentation and paratextual material, Kyngston's edition can be seen to represent a transition stage between late medieval styles and conventions, and the trends and preoccupations of the early modern readership. Printed in dense Black Letter font throughout with bold woodcut portraits of Chaucer's pilgrims, the book retains a sense of its medieval origins. However, this is combined with a Classically styled title page and four subsequent pages of paratextual material, including a visual representation of Chaucer's 'Progenie'. It is interesting to note that the full page portrait of Chaucer and his family tree depicts the poet clutching rosary beads and reappears in both Islip's 1598 edition and the reprint of Speght's anthology dating from 1687. A lengthy dedication to Henry VIII is followed by a detailed contents page which also contains *A balade of good counsaile, made by Jhon Lidgate*. The pseudo-Chaucerian work, *The Plowman's Tale*, also makes an appearance in this post-Reformation edition of Chaucer's anthology. Later texts chosen for analysis display a more deliberate attempt to appropriate Chaucer for the early modern readership in terms of additional texts and the more detailed paratextual material.

*Thebes* is grouped together with texts by Chaucer which Kyngston claims have never before been printed. The *hedera* appears once again as a decorative mark to signal the end of the contents page. The *manicule* also makes an appearance twice in the contents page, seemingly interchangeable with the paraph mark. The *hedera* crops up a handful of times throughout the book as a whole, used

to introduce a title or signal the end of a text. Only in Chaucer's *House of Fame* does the *manicule* enthusiastically reappear in the margins. *The Siege of Thebes* is the final text in the edition, introduced with a simple title and decorated first initial. The text is presented in two-columns with the narrative summaries slightly indented in the main text; each chapter is introduced with a decorated initial. The text as a whole is dense and there is far less white space than in de Worde's edition; however, spacing is consistent and helps to break up the large block of Black Letter more regularly. Lydgate is not mentioned again in the title or the explicit and the text ends abruptly followed by brief printing details.

ii. *Analysis:*

As well as representing a transition stage in terms of presentation and layout, Kyngston's edition is also intermediary in terms of the punctuation methods he employs. While retaining the mid-line rhetorical punctuation structure throughout the poem, Kyngston's edition also shows evidence of grammatical practices appearing alongside the traditional punctuation markings. Line 24 of the transcribed section of the prologue adds another comma, marking parenthesis in the verse line.

And some also, in soth, of ribaudrie  
To make laughter, in the companie (lines 24-25)

However, the text as a whole is almost identical to de Worde's edition in terms of the consistent placing of the mid-line marks. However, the medial pauses are marked by a semi-circular comma in contrast to de Worde's punctus, and Kyngston utilises the punctus as a more definite pause at the end of sections and chapters. The placing of the mid-line mark after four beats in every verse line in both de Worde and Kyngston's editions may be regarded as Parke's *equiparative* punctuation method, whereby more extensive and consistent marking produces a neutral and



equally valued interpretation of the text (Parkes 1992: 70). However, punctuation practices vary within the book as a whole, and different choices are made regarding Chaucer's texts. Comparing *The Siege of Thebes* with the *Tales* in particular demonstrates a rather different approach to the editing process; Chaucer's texts do not employ a system of rhetorical mid-line punctuation and the comma is used consistently to mark grammatical units. In contrast to the *equiparative* method imposed on *The Siege of Thebes*, the Chaucerian texts are edited in a more *deictic* style, whereby less extensive marking is used to assign varying levels of emphasis to parts of the verse (Parkes 1992: 70). Furthermore, additional punctuation marks are employed in the Chaucerian texts. *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, for example, contains a colon which is used to introduce the direct speech of the host. The punctuation evidence suggests that rather different editing practices were applied to Lydgatian texts from the early Renaissance period.

The spelling practices of this mid-century edition are not vastly different to the earlier print; Kyngston replaces de Worde's /y/ with /i/, but all other spellings and the syntax remain intact. Despite Kyngston introducing the comma and brackets to the repertoire of marks, the approach is relatively innocuous and the text remains close to the earlier print. The significant distinction between earlier prints of *The Siege of Thebes* and later editions dating from the mid-sixteenth century onwards lies in the convention of placing Lydgate's text within a Chaucerian anthology. While Lydgate undoubtedly composed the work as an ode to his literary master and may have intended the piece to be added to the *Canterbury Tales*, the effect on the reader and perceptions of the work are altogether different. Early modern prints do not treat the text as an equal addition to the highly prized *Tales*, and choose to consistently place it at the end of the book without the grandiose introduction and illustrations which often accompany the other *Tales*. The effect is to present *Thebes* as only a partially successful imitation of Chaucerian style or worthy example of medieval literature. Like the traditional acknowledgement to 'John Lydgate, monk of Bury', the preservation of *The Siege of Thebes* within Chaucerian anthologies appears to be as much a result of literary convention than a reflection of Lydgate's contemporary popularity.

C. Printer: **Islip**

Date: **1598**

i. *Commentary:*

Islip's edition printed during the last few years of Elizabeth's reign at the turn of the century is a text laden with lengthy and complex paratextual material. As an anthology of Chaucer's *Workes* there are many pages devoted to the literary and biographical details of his life and family, an amount which easily overreaches Kyngston's edition. There are also several dedications introducing the text devoted to a variety of patrons and monarchs. Thomas Speght, the Chaucerian editor who produces a highly respected version of *Workes* shortly after this publication, both writes and receives a dedication at the start of the book. The title page is framed by two Classical figures and claims that the current impression has several additions made to the text, including a glossary and two 'new' texts which have never been put to print. The addition of the glossary to explain 'old and obscure words' is an indication of further changes in the expectations of the readership since Kyngston's edition. The need to provide readers with a lengthy glossary to aid in the translation of middle English vocabulary illustrates the increasing distance between early modern readers and their medieval counterparts.

Islip retains the use of the Black Letter font for the main texts, but any paratextual material appears in a Roman type face. This is an important stylistic distinction as Roman fonts were becoming increasingly popular for a variety of texts and the use of Black Letter would have been limited to specific genres and eras. The use of Black Letter survives for quite some time in this limited capacity, appearing in the reprint of Speght's edition nearly a century later. Lydgate is not acknowledged in the title page of Islip's edition, but the edition contains his *Balad of good consail* amongst Chaucer's other works and *The Siege of Thebes* is given a

full page title depicting Henry VIII's family tree. The text is presented in condensed, two-column Black Letter with well-spaced chapter headings and narrative summaries introduced by the hedera. Following the text is a comprehensive list of works by John Lydgate, most of which do not survive in print form.

ii. *Analysis:*

Despite the differences in paratextual details between Kyngston and Islip, this later edition of *The Siege of Thebes* appears on first glance to employ similar punctuation practices. Islip uses only the capital, comma and punctus throughout the text and there is no end-line punctuation; the mid-line pauses are also marked by the comma and the syntactical structure remains intact. However, the pauses are not consistent and the text is punctuated less frequently than both de Worde and Kyngston's editions. On closer inspection, the punctuation methods employed by Islip are rather different and the text contains a mixture of influences. Preserving the rhetorical mid-line breaks in a high percentage of the verse lines is likely to be a result of the copy text used and the conventional way of presenting the text in earlier editions. However, there is a definite move towards a grammatical method which is interspersed throughout the text and competes with the residual rhetorical markings. Often the distinction is understated as the following excerpt from the transcribed section of the text displays.

And Saturne old, with his frostie face  
In Virgine, taken had his place  
Melancolike and slow of motions  
And was also in thopposicion  
Of Lucina the Moone, moist and pale  
That many shoure, for heauen make availe (lines 4-8)

The omission of the mid-line comma in lines 6 and 7 applies a subtly different reading of the poem in which the punctuation markings are also involved with signalling sense-unit divisions. While the syntax remains the same as earlier editions, the metrical pattern of the verse is altered, no longer adhering to the consistent four beat rhythm at the start of each verse line.

Parkes asserts that by the 1580s there is evidence that compositors also had a hand in punctuating the texts they were preparing for print (Parkes 1992: 52). It is possible that the combination of punctuation practices found in this edition is a result of several contributors applying their own practices and interpretations on the text as it passed through the various stages of preparation. Parkes argues that although it may not be possible to separate the punctuation preferences of the various contributors, the combination must reflect the contemporary usage patterns (Parkes 1992: 6). From this perspective, Islip's edition from the end of the sixteenth century illustrates the ways in which these punctuating techniques interacted within a single text and how these complex practices were applied to medieval texts in particular.

Once again comparing the punctuation of Lydgate's *Thebes* with the Chaucerian texts in the same book reveals that a different approach was taken when editing each author. No rhetorical mid-line punctuation appears in Chaucer but Islip adopts end-line punctuation occasionally, in contrast with the approach to Lydgate's text. Like Kyngston's edition, additional punctuation marks are added to the repertoire, with the colon being used frequently as an intermediate pause between the comma and punctus. There is a widely held view among scholars that the lack of editorial attention paid to Lydgate over the centuries has reinforced the perceptions of the author as difficult and obscure and can be considered as the primary cause of his decline in popularity; if this is indeed the case, the evidence from the prints appears to show that divergence between the two medieval authors was already underway from the middle of the sixteenth century.

D. Printer: **Speght**

Date: **1687**

i. *Commentary:*

This particular edition of Chaucer's anthology which includes *The Siege of Thebes* is a 1687 reprint of Speght's earlier publications. Speght was responsible for editing his first edition of Chaucer in 1598 at the same time as Islip issued his own print. A redraft was published in 1602 which added the pseudo-Chaucerian text *Jack Upland* to the anthology, and this is the text which provides the basis for the seventeenth-century reprint. The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* cites Speght as the source of the story that Chaucer was fined for assaulting a friar in Fleet Street, a detail which Speght apparently uncovered himself from old documentation. In addition to attributing *Jack Upland* as a Chaucerian original, Speght's 1602 print reinforced the perception of the author as a Wycliffite and helped to construct his persona in a post-Reformation society. Lydgate receives no such reinvention and his other works have already fallen out of favour and out of print at the time of this issue.

The book begins with the now-familiar image of Chaucer and his 'progenie' followed by a title page which acknowledges John Lydgate as the author of the 'adjoyn'd' work of *Thebes*. Chaucer is elaborately described as the "Ancient, Learned and Excellent English Poet"; Lydgate receives his conventional appraisal of "Monk of Bury". Speght provides the reader with comprehensive biographical details and an extensive glossary all of which is presented in Roman type-face. The layering of paratextual material in this edition provides enough subject matter for separate analysis; a mixture of editorial influences, contributors and patrons were involved with the publication of this text which provides a detailed insight into the working politics of the early modern book trade. *The Siege of Thebes* is introduced

by a simple enlarged title with no decoration or illustration. It is, however, a very neat and spacious example of the text. All of the main texts are printed in two-column Black Letter.

ii. *Analysis:*

In terms of the punctuation, Speght's edition moves further away from the previous editions chosen for analysis. The repertoire of marks applied to Lydgate's text is extended and includes the capital, comma, punctus, colon, bracket and punctus-interrogativus. Unlike Kyngston and Islip's editions, this is the same repertoire which is applied to Chaucer's *Workes*. On the surface at least it appears that Lydgate's text has received a renewed attempt at editing by Speght. The pauses are employed in hierarchical order with the colon being frequently used as a medial pause at the end of the verse line. Speght employs consistent end-line punctuation and demonstrates a clear grammatical approach throughout. The mid-line rhetorical pauses are eliminated completely and punctuation within the line is used to divide the verse into sentence units. With no indication of the text's earlier rhetorical marking, Speght's edition provides an entirely different reading experience in comparison to de Worde and Kyngston's prints. This is a text produced in a silent reading culture and the requirements of the contemporary readership are reflected in the editorial choices. The paratextual material becomes an increasingly important aspect of the book and the punctuation shifts from reflecting the residual oral traditions of late medieval society towards the literary culture of the early modern era.

The asterisk is also used frequently throughout the text to mark authorial digressions, particularly when the author is speaking directly to the reader. This practice of marking Lydgate's own digressions from the main narrative is not replicated in any of the earlier editions and can be interpreted as an additional means to help the reader dissect and negotiate the dense and complex text. The

form of interrogativus, or question mark, utilised in this edition is consistent with the Black Letter type-face of the main text and dates back to the *positurae* system introduced in the second half of the eighth century (Parkes 1992: 36). To the late seventeenth-century readership, this form would have no doubt seemed rather archaic and, like the type-face, a visual representation of the texts' medieval origins.

Although Speght has edited and updated Lydgate's text with more thoroughness than earlier editors had chosen to do, it can still be considered a relatively restrained approach. In comparison to the radical editing choices of Purfoot's early seventeenth-century edition of *Troy Book*, Speght leaves the text intact. The choices point the reader towards a grammatical interpretation, obscuring the link to the residual orality of the text, but the structure and length of the text remain unscathed. Particularly for the late seventeenth-century publishers choosing to re-issue Speght's highly respected anthology, the temptation to radically overhaul the dense medieval text must have been strong. However, not only would this have proved to be a significant challenge, but perhaps it was not a challenge deemed worthwhile. Neither Lydgate nor his text was considered as a core addition to the Chaucerian anthology and his inclusion in seventeenth-century editions has become conventionalised.

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### **Overview of *The Siege of Thebes***

The choice of prints chosen for analysis spans 200 years of publishing history and shows Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* treated both as an individual poem, and as an additional text in later Chaucerian anthologies. Thematically, *Thebes* raises challenging questions about the author's motivations and intentions for the text. Lydgate's only major work to be completed without a commission confronts the notion of the poet as a definitive Lancastrian propagandist. By proving to be far more conservative and carefully critical of military campaigns, the work considers the effects of military ambition on society as a

whole. If Lydgate's other texts can be interpreted as works of national theme and propagandist motivations, the freely written *Siege of Thebes* suggests that if Lydgate harboured Lancastrian sympathies, his real attitudes were perhaps more complex.

The texts range from an early de Worde print which closely reflects manuscript trends and conventions, through to Kyngston's mid-century print beginning to show evidence of inconsistency in punctuation practices; moving forward to Islip's edition dating from the end of the sixteenth century illustrates definite conflicting influences. However, the early rhetorical interpretation of the poem survives throughout these prints to varying extents and is only fully abolished in Speght's edition, being replaced by a consistent grammatical approach and by adopting the contemporary poetic convention of end-line punctuation. Comparisons with the Chaucerian texts contained in the same anthology demonstrate that editing practices were updated earlier and more consistently in these texts, and Lydgate's single poem receives less editorial attention. Speght does modernise the punctuation and brings it closer in line with the Chaucerian texts of his edition. However, *The Siege of Thebes* remains at the end of the book as an additional text and there is no apparent interest in the biographical details of Lydgate's life and career. It is the increasingly complex paratextual material in these editions which demonstrates the most dramatic change in reading preferences and expectations while the punctuation shows that shifts in practices were more gradual and that techniques often blended together. The approach to Chaucerian publishing had also developed into a scholarly undertaking and the editorial decisions continue to shape our perceptions and expectations of Chaucer and his work. It can be argued that in Lydgate's case, it is the very lack of editorial attention which has shaped our perceptions of the author, his work, and role in the canon of English literature.



### 3.3.3 The Temple Of Glas

Lydgate's *Temple of Glas* is an early courtly poem in the form of a love complaint dating from around 1403. The eight surviving manuscripts can attest to the contemporary popularity of the text, while the print history demonstrates that editions were published throughout the sixteenth century (Ebin 1985: 20). It is the only large work which Lydgate completed without an "extended source" (Ebin 1985: 29) although it is clear he was strongly influenced by his master Chaucer. The genre of medieval courtly love poetry was unwavering in popularity throughout the medieval period and highly conventionalised in plot and theme, and Lydgate fully engages with the genre in the Chaucerian tradition. No patron for the poem has been definitively identified; Schirmer suggests it was a work commissioned by the Pastons to honour a family wedding (Schirmer 1961: 37-38) while Bianco proposes it was a celebration of the marriage of Henry IV and Joanna of Navarre on the basis of subtle textual references relating to the historical circumstances of the union (Bianco 2001: 107).

There is an irony involved when a monk taught to condemn female sin and weakness is charged with composing a courtly love complaint. However, women themselves occupied a contradictory place in medieval society; worshipped as the focus of much contemporary literature they were simultaneously unable to determine their own fate. Despite his unconventional position Lydgate proves to be influential in the development of the genre. Although *The Temple of Glas* reflects the well established conventions of the genre, there are significant differences between Lydgate's work and other contemporary courtly poetry. His main differentiating practice is the focus he gives to the complaint itself by dedicating less attention to the framing devices and narrative (Ebin 1985: 20). Lydgate also chooses to represent both the male and female perspective which can be considered as an innovation in the genre. It is these differences, Ebin argues, which influence later poetry of the period (Ebin 1985: 29).

The editions chosen for analysis move from an incunabula print by Caxton through to an edition by Berthelet in 1527. All pre-date the Henrician Reformation and represent Lydgate's early publishing history. Each of the printers remain very conservative with regards to the punctuation methods employed and Berthelet's edition contains only subtle variations from Caxton's print. The paratextual material is sparse or non-existent and this presents a minimalist reading experience. The theme of the courtly love complaint and the presentation of the texts combined with the basic rhetorical punctuation offers a selection which remain close to their medieval origins.

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A. Printer: **Caxton**

Date: **1477**

i. *Commentary:*

Caxton's print of *The Temple of Glas* dates from the initial years of English printing and is the earliest edition chosen for analysis. This text could be easily mistaken on first viewing for a manuscript copy, due to the type-face and presentation of the single-column text on the page. The text begins immediately with only a simple, centred title and there are no woodcuts or decorated initials. A centred title informs the reader when the individual complaints begin and they are also separated from the dreamer's narrative by being presented in Rhyme Royal stanzas. Despite the minimal nature of the print, it is well-spaced and neat. The edition in which the text survives is in particularly good condition and free from scribbled annotations by later owners. A small rule measure included in the facsimile by the British Library indicates that the book was approximately 6 inches across and 9 inches long making it a relatively compact edition. While the early print is closely styled on certain manuscript trends, Caxton's compact print would have looked very different from contemporary manuscript copies.

ii. *Analysis:*

Caxton's print utilises only the capital and virgule as punctuation markers. The form of the virgule is small and unobtrusive and hard to distinguish from the main text. There is no end-line punctuation and, where the virgule appears, it is regularly after four initial stresses in the verse line. This is consistent with the placing of mid-line pauses in editions of *Troy Book* and *The Siege of Thebes*. However, unlike the punctuation practices employed in those texts, Caxton's *Temple of Glas* is not consistently marked and they are rather sparse. Abbreviations appear frequently, mainly marking the omission of /m/ or /n/ but the use of abbreviations steadily declines in the subsequent prints.

The scattered placing of the virgules initially seems haphazard and useless given the infrequency. However, it is only when reading the text aloud that the significance of the marking becomes clear. The pauses are minimal and basic but perform a specific role.

Not upon stele / but on a craggy roche  
Lyke yse I froze / and as I did approche  
Agayne the sonne that shone so clere  
As ony cristal and euer ner and ner  
As I cam nyghe this grisly dredful place  
I wex astoynd / the light so in my face  
Be gan to smyte / so persing euer in one  
On euery part wher that I gan gone (lines 19-26)

Analysis of this section illustrates that the virgules are placed to mark the most dramatic pauses. The reader or speaker is encouraged to pause theatrically after 'froze' and we stop, astonished, with the dreamer in line 24. Surveying the rest of the text displays a tendency to reserve the rhetorical markings for places where they would have the most impact. The rhythm and rhyme scheme of the poem as a whole guides the reader/speaker through the text and pauses come naturally. The

virgules work to alert the reader to the most important pauses, leaving the rest of the text to be interpreted by the individual. This interpretation of the punctuation method is obviously rhetorical but also adds a sense of performance and drama to the text which serves to remind us of the oral culture still in existence during the late medieval period.

Along with the capital and the virgule, Caxton uses spacing and layout to help guide the reader through the text. The narration, which is written in rhyming couplets, appears as block text. Both lovers' complaints to Venus are written in seven line Rhyme Royal stanzas (ABABBCC) and presented spaciouly, introduced by a simple section title. As such, direct speech markers are not necessary and the consistent presentation means the reader is always aware of who is speaking. Once comfortable with the minimal punctuation and familiar with the rhythm and layout, any additional punctuation would be superfluous.

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**B. Printer: de Worde**

**Date: 1495, 1500 and 1506**

i. *Commentary:*

De Worde issued three editions of Lydgate's *Temple of Glas* in total. However, both the 1495 and 1500 edition are punctuated identically to Caxton's print, resulting in the same analysis and interpretation. In terms of paratextual material and layout, there are some minor differences between the editions. De Worde's print from 1495 introduces a woodcut at the start of the text; entitled 'The assemble de dyeus' and depicting what appears to be Chaucer's pilgrims around the table. The illustration is perhaps more for decoration than relevance. De Worde's issue from 1500 dispenses with the woodcut and he opts to introduce each verse line with a decorative paraph

mark. Both editions end with a prayer in Latin and English and have de Worde's print mark.

De Worde's third print edition of the text begins with a woodcut depicting a courtly scene of gentleman and lady in a garden. The text is presented in single-column Black Letter and ends with the same prayer in Latin and English poem as previous editions. Neither appears in Caxton's edition and it is unclear whether the 14-line poem is Lydgate's own or an editorial addition. The poem is addressed to readers from all social levels and urges them to accept their place and carry out their duties accordingly. The printer's mark in this edition is more elaborate and is placed within a woodcut of the Virgin with Child. By this point, the type-face is developing into the more conventionalised Black Letter which becomes one of the most popular fonts used for the printing of secular texts. It is markedly different in appearance from Caxton's type-face which retains many features of cursive Secretary hand.

ii. *Analysis:*

The 1506 edition is very similar to previous prints in terms of the punctuation technique applied to the text as a whole, utilising only the capital and virgule. Each line starts with a capital letter and there is no end-line punctuation. The same text breaks and stanza divisions are observed in this print as in previous and there are infrequent abbreviations throughout the text. The placing of the virgules also follows the same general pattern, although overall marking in the 1506 edition is even less frequent. Like Caxton's print and de Worde's own earlier editions, the placing of the virgules can be interpreted as having a more dramatic purpose. Where the virgules do appear, it is during moments of heightened emotion or dramatic description. When the gentleman is describing the virtues of his lady, for example, the verse is more heavily marked, encouraging the reader to pause and consider the lady's list of attributes;

Her porte her chere / her godenes more & more  
Her womanhed and eke her gentylnes  
Her trouth / her fayth and her kyndnes  
With all vertues eche set in her degree  
Ther is noo lacke / sauynge oonly of pyte

(lines 45-49 of *The complaynt of the man*)

The pause in the last line of the stanza is particularly dramatic and emphasises the knight's grief; his lady lacks nothing, except pity for him.

In comparison to the other texts chosen for analysis which follow a rhetorical technique, the punctuation in *The Temple of Glas* takes a different approach. Where the rhetorical punctuation applied to *Troy* and *Thebes* relies on the consistent mid-line pauses to signal the metre of the verse, the placing of the virgules in *Temple* is reserved for dramatic impact. The metre and rhythm are signalled by the rhyme scheme and verse divisions, with the virgules highlighting the most intense points in the narrative. De Worde's edition of *The Siege of Thebes* dating from 1500 utilises the punctus as a medial pause in every verse line yet his approach to *Temple* is minimal. This suggests that within the rhetorical tradition there were various ways punctuation could be employed in different types of text to produce certain effects and interpretations.

C. Printer: **Berthelet**

Date: **1529**

i. *Commentary:*

Berthelet's edition is issued just before the Reformation takes hold, when rumblings of discontent spread across the social spectrum. On first inspection, the edition looks very similar to de Worde's print from twenty years earlier. The typeface and layout are similar and Berthelet also only employs the capital and virgule from the repertoire of marks for the main body of the text. The punctus makes an appearance at the very end of the text and marks the end of each line of the Latin prayer. The title page contains a woodcut of what appears to be Fortune atop her wheel with the title of the text but no mention of Lydgate's authorship. This is followed by a woodcut depicting a courtly garden scene with lady and knight. The book ends with the prayer, the little poem and Berthelet's printing details. Overall it is still a relatively conservative edition in decoration and punctuation, and the paratextual material is minimal. From the texts surveyed it appears that the increased use of paratextual material begins from nearer the middle of the sixteenth century.

ii. *Analysis:*

There are some subtle yet significant differences in the way Berthelet has approached this text. Gillespie mentions this specific edition when discussing Lydgate's print history, noting that Berthelet found it necessary to "modernise the linguistic forms, vocabulary, and orthography" of an earlier edition of the text (Gillespie 2000: 67). Indeed, Berthelet asserts on the title page of the volume that the text is "in many places amended" which was perhaps an advertisement for his edition. Comparing this text with de Worde's last issue it can be observed that Berthelet has occasionally altered the syntax of the verse line. Line two of the

transcribed section reads in de Worde's edition, "For pensyfnes and hygh dystres"; Berthelet has altered this to read, "For great thought & highe pensyunesse". Although Berthelet's minor alterations do not affect the rhyme scheme or narrative of the poem, the metre is modified. Berthelet also considered it necessary to supply the reader with additional punctuation marks and this edition is the most extensively marked of the *Temple of Glas* texts analysed. He replicates the positions of the virgules found in earlier editions but adds to this, tripling on average the number of virgules used. Berthelet's approach could be considered more extensive and therefore more neutral in its presentation of the text according to Parkes' evaluation (Parkes 1992: 70). As a result, however, the 'dramatic' rhetorical reading is no longer applicable.

Even at this early stage of Lydgate's print history it is clear that the demands of the readership were changing. Berthelet advertised his modernisation attempts and he edits the vocabulary, syntax, orthography and punctuation. The establishment of the printing press gave readers greater access to a wider range of texts and reading culture was moving from medieval traditions of intensive reading to a more extensive reading practice. Berthelet's decision to increase the punctuation is perhaps a reflection of this move towards silent, individual reading and an increased demand for punctuation to guide the readers through the text.

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### **Overview of *The Temple of Glas***

Lydgate's *Temple of Glas* does not remain in print for the same length of time as *Troy Book* and *The Siege of Thebes*, accounting for the earlier selection of prints. However, it was undoubtedly one of the poet's most popular contemporary works and satisfied the public taste for courtly romance. It is highly likely that Lydgate was influenced by Chaucer's courtly love poems and in *The Temple of Glas* he attempts to emulate this tradition. However, Lydgate is an author in his own right and he had a significant influence on later poetry of that period. Sue Bianco asserts that much of the criticism which has been levied



at Lydgate is a result of critics “looking for Chaucer” and finding an author with his own distinct style and preoccupations (Bianco 2001: 95). Lydgate engages with the popular genre but makes some significant changes to the format and focus. It is interesting to note that none of the above editions of the text names Lydgate as the author or makes any kind of reference to him. Compared with Kyngston’s elaborate edition of Chaucer’s works only 30 years later which contains an extensive array of paratextual material detailing the life and times of the author, the complete lack of acknowledgement in these editions is striking. However, these prints do represent the early years of the publishing industry and Lydgate never receives the same attention as Chaucer. By the time the demand for biographical detail had increased, Lydgate’s conspicuous status as a medieval monk would not have been so easy to promote.

The ‘dramatic’ interpretation applied to the punctuation techniques is definitively rhetorical but it also raises the possibility of performance which is not so obvious in the other texts. *Troy Book* and *The Siege of Thebes* are historical epics focused on the serious themes of dutiful kingship and the pitfalls of pride. *The Temple of Glas* is a courtly love complaint which takes place in a fanciful dreamscape under the watchful eye of Venus. These two very different types of text fulfil different purposes and their layout and punctuation reflect this. The lengthy passages of text in *Troy* and *Thebes* are broken up by chapter headings and narrative summaries; the main focus of the narrative in the *Temple of Glas* is presented in regular Rhyme Royal stanzas. The regular mid-line breaks applied to the earlier prints of *Troy* and *Thebes* in particular provide consistent divisions to aid the reader through a more dense piece of text. As a more literary text with a lighter subject matter, *The Temple of Glas* is easier to engage with in the first instance and less punctuation is required. The punctuation which is supplied encourages a more literary interpretation by pointing the reader towards the more intense lines of the poem. The nature of the text and the methods of punctuation applied by the earliest printers make it easy to imagine *The Temple of Glas* in performance and this could be successfully taken into account by modern editors when producing a new edition.

### 3.3.4 The Churl and the Bird

One of Lydgate's most popular minor works, *The Churl and the Bird* is written in continuous Rhyme Royal. The text was first printed by Caxton in 1477 and twice by de Worde during his career. Alongside a selection of Lydgate's secular works, the poem remained in print until the middle of the sixteenth century with William Copland issuing an edition in 1565. It is a lively fable which focuses on the animated exchanges between a greedy churl and the clever little bird who manages to outsmart him using wit and wisdom. Lois Ebin asserts that Lydgate cannot overcome his didactic nature and the tale fulfils the late medieval readerships' desire for entertainment and moral instruction (Ebin 1985: 106). The other texts chosen for analysis comprise two Classical epics and a courtly love complaint, both genres which survive into the early modern period. As a traditional fable with strong moral lessons throughout, *The Churl and the Bird* may fit best with our modern conceptions of medieval poetry. By the time of Copland's print in 1565 the publishing industry had evolved significantly, as had the preferences and needs of the Renaissance readership. However, there was evidently still demand for this type of moral text which once again highlights the complex tastes and overlap between the late medieval and early modern periods.

The editions chosen for analysis range from de Worde's two prints dating from 1497 and 1510 through to Mychell's 1534 print and Copland's issue from 1565. From an aesthetic and layout perspective, the presentation of the text changes very little between these prints and there is no paratextual material included beyond an initial title or woodcut. The punctuation is also conservative, with rhyme scheme and stanza division providing guidance through the text and any punctuation added is supplementary. The shortest of the texts, *The Churl and the Bird* is presented in 7-line stanzas throughout and the high level of dialogue keeps the text lively and well-paced.

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A. Printer: **Wynkyn de Worde**

Date: **1497 and 1510**

i. *Commentary:*

Both de Worde prints are identical in terms of punctuation and layout. Both are presented in single-column, compact Black Letter type-face with only one woodcut introducing the text. The earlier print has an initial woodcut depicting an enthroned king surrounded by three kneeling figures. The text is printed during Henry VII's reign but could represent either Henry IV or V, reflecting Lydgate's patrons. The edition printed in 1510 contains a more relevant woodcut showing a figure and bird in dialogue underneath the title. The *Early English Books Online* catalogue contains a fragment of Caxton's print of the text from 1477 with only a few surviving pages. The type-face of Caxton's edition is likely to be the same type he used for his 1477 edition of *The Temple of Glas* and closely resembles a cursive secretary hand. Each line of de Worde's 1497 print begins with a paraph mark, a feature which does not appear in the later copy. Both editions are in good overall condition, with the exception of the first stanza of the poem in the 1510 edition which is obscured by horizontal smudge marks.

The printing details which appear at the end of both texts show that de Worde had moved from Caxton's original print premises in Westminster to London in the years between the two editions. This move also signalled a change in direction for de Worde who began to focus on printing more popular texts, including religious and educational texts. In his essay contained in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, N.F. Blake suggests that de Worde had the foresight to take the business forward to the growing centre of commercial book activity in London (Blake 2004). Had he continued to print from Westminster and imitate Caxton's preference for printing courtly material, his business would likely have failed.

ii. *Analysis:*

In terms of the layout and punctuation applied by de Worde, both texts are identical, observing the 7-line stanza divisions and utilising only the capital letter at the beginning of each verse line. One punctus appears in each text at the end of the printer's details but no other mark is used in either text. Caxton's edition dating from 1477 also does not use mid-line punctuation and it is probable that de Worde used this as an exemplar. The later prints by Mychell and Copland both provide consistent mid-line punctuation and occasional punctus marks are deployed at the end of stanzas. Despite the high level of dialogue in the poem, direct speech is not marked. Lydgate introduces the speaker when a new section of dialogue begins and the reader can also easily distinguish the bird and churl from the content of their speech.

While punctuating the stanzaic *Temple of Glas*, both Caxton and de Worde employ rhetorical mid-line marks; two of de Worde's prints of the text are identically punctuated to Caxton's, giving further weight to the suggestion that he was using the earlier editions as exemplars. The stanzaic *Churl and the Bird*, however, is left unpunctuated prompting us to consider whether there was any perceived difference between these two literary texts. The methods employed in *The Temple of Glas* have been interpreted as providing a rhetorical and 'dramatic' reading of the text, whereby the distribution of marks highlights the most emotional or dramatic parts of the narrative. As a didactic fable *The Churl and the Bird* does not focus on the emotional intensity of a love complaint, but on moral lessons delivered in a traditional format. The rhyme scheme and layout provides the reader with a guide through the text.

Since Antiquity scribes had signified the rhythmical structure of verse "primarily by means of layout" and it was also considered a means of aiding less sophisticated readers (Parkes 1992: 97). The texts which are presented in 7-line stanzas with a consistent rhyme scheme are the courtly love complaint and fable, both of which would have appealed to a wide and varied audience. *The Siege of Thebes* and *Troy Book* are denser, more erudite texts peppered with a higher level of aureate vocabulary and historical reference. Due to the nature of the text's themes and intended audience, ease of navigation through the text

was perhaps not such a pertinent issue. The lighter subject matter of the popular courtly love poem and humorous fable would have commanded a wider audience with less sophisticated readers among them; the composition and presentation of the text reflect this.

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B. Printer: **John Mychell**

Date: **1534**

i. *Commentary:*

John Mychell was a printer active around the first quarter to middle of the sixteenth century and is known to have operated in both London and Canterbury. Many of Mychell's prints only survive in fragments and the majority are undated and contain no printing details, making a catalogue of his printing history difficult to compile (Freeman 2008). Mychell's printing career spans Henry VIII's and Edward VI's reign and he continues to print beyond the upheaval of Mary I's accession for several years. This edition of Lydgate's *The Churl and the Bird* was printed early in his career and the text is rare in providing specific details which cite St. Paul's in Canterbury as the location.

The text is presented in the conventional single-column Black Letter type-face and follows the same stanzaic layout as the earlier editions. The title page contains a good quality woodcut depicting two human figures and a bird. Overall, the text is in relatively good condition with no corrections or annotations from later owners. However, there are parts of the text which have seen the ink rub away over time. There are several instances where the regular stanza division has been omitted; where this occurs, a paraph mark is used to mark the new stanza line. As with each of the editions analysed, the poem ends with a stanza asking the book to act as a recommendation of the author's humbleness, adopting the conventional medieval modesty pose.

*ii. Analysis:*

Mychell's print utilises the capital, virgule and punctus. Each verse line begins with a capital letter and the punctus is used only at the end of a stanza where a more definite pause is required. Unlike de Worde's prints and the fragmentary example of Caxton's edition from 1477, Mychell introduces mid-line pauses marked by the virgule. They are used extensively, though not on every line, and follow the rhythmical pattern of placing the break after four or five beats in the verse line. The medial mid-line pauses suggest a rhetorical interpretation and the extensive spread presents a relatively neutral rendering of the text. The occasional use of the punctus at the end of a stanza notifies the reader/speaker when a new sentence or narrative episode is beginning.

Like both de Worde's editions, direct speech is not marked. However, paraph marks are used several times throughout the text and correspond to changes in narrative direction or to signify a new speaker, although it is not consistent in its use. Mychell's decision to add the mid-line punctuation does not alter the interpretation of the text and the rhetorical essence is retained. Layout and rhyme scheme are sufficient in guiding the reader through the text and the continuous lively dialogue presents a well-paced text which balances the medieval taste for moral instruction and entertainment.

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C. Printer: **William Copland**

Date: **1565**

*i. Commentary:*

The latest edition of *The Churl and the Bird* dates from the second half of the sixteenth century during Elizabeth I's reign. It was printed by William Copland, the successor of Robert Copland who was thought to have began his printing career as Wynkyn de Worde's apprentice (Erler 2008). Like the other editions, this is a relatively modest text which is

presented in Black Letter type with a single introductory woodcut depicting a human figure engaged in dialogue with the little bird. The woodcut is not as good quality as Mychell's and the text is more compact than all earlier editions. However, the stanza divisions are observed and the text ends with Lydgate's humble prayer and brief printing details which specify Saint Margaret's Church in London as the printing location. After the mid sixteenth century, Lydgate's print history becomes rather more patchy and the texts which survive are his historical epics *Troy Book*, *Fall of Princes* and *The Siege of Thebes*, which continues to be printed as an addition to Chaucer's anthology.

It is interesting to compare a contemporary edition of *The Siege of Thebes* by Kyngston with Copland's *Churl and the Bird* print. Printed four years earlier, Kyngston's edition of Chaucer's *Workes* featuring Lydgate's poem is a significantly different text in terms of paratextual material and reading experience. Kyngston's print is introduced by a Renaissance style title page and containing four pages of material relating to Chaucer's personal life and work which includes a detailed portrait of the author. In contrast, the simple presentation of *The Churl and the Bird* focuses the reader's attention solely towards the text and presents an entirely different view of authorship. Gillespie notes that elaborate editions of Lydgate were produced before the Reformation and were inclined to use visual representations of the author to emphasise his role as monk. Richard Pynson's 1527 edition of the *Fall of Princes* contains a full page depiction of Lydgate with the title emphasising his role as translator and situating the text and author within the contemporary political backdrop. However, this strong association between Lydgate and religious orthodoxy made his texts "more vulnerable" to the changes signalled by the Reformation and provides the explanation as to why elaborate editions of Lydgate's work ceased around the 1530s but continued for Chaucer and Gower (Gillespie 2000: 69).

ii. *Analysis*:

Copland applies a basic repertoire of marks to the text utilising only the capital, comma and punctus. The punctus appears only at the end of stanzas to mark a more definite pause and are identically placed to Mychell's edition. Where Mychell favoured the virgule as a mid-line marker, Copland uses the semi-circular comma, a form which was being used

increasingly by printers as a replacement for the virgule. The mid-line marks are also almost identically placed in both editions and present a neutrally pointed text and rhetorical interpretation overall. However, not every line features a mid-line pause and there are points in the text where a grammatical interpretation could be simultaneously applied.

And semblable poytes laureate  
By darke parables full conuentent  
Fayne that byrdes and beestes of estate  
As royall Egles, and lyons by assent  
Sent out writtes to holde a paralyment  
And made the crye, breuely for to say  
Some to haue lorde shyp, and some to obeye. (lines 15-21)

Line four of the stanza places the comma before the conjunction and signals a medial pause in the sense unit; the last line of the stanza similarly places the comma before the conjunction and the verse ends with a punctus. Using Kyngston's contemporary print as a comparison for a second time, both Kyngston and Copland's editions display a mixture of punctuation influences and represent a transitional stage between rhetorical and grammatical practices. As with all other earlier editions of the text, direct speech is not marked and the editorial intervention is minimal.



## Overview of the *The Churl and the Bird*

The texts of *The Churl and the Bird* range from de Worde's print issued at the turn of the century, through Mychell's issue from 1534 and to William Copland's edition dating from the second half of the sixteenth century. The prints are all very similar in their simple presentation, each displaying the text in single-column Black Letter with a single introductory woodcut. As with the *Temple of Glas*, there are no visual representations or references to Lydgate in any of the editions, a stark contrast to the texts of *Troy Book* and *The Siege of Thebes* which see the use of paratextual material steadily increase throughout the sixteenth century. However, the majority of paratextual material which accompanies *The Siege of Thebes* relates to Chaucer and any mention of Lydgate is minimal, observing the conventional 'Monk of Bury' description. Only in Pynson's 1513 edition of *Troy Book* does the text contain a visual representation of Lydgate; while representations of authorship in the early modern period were focused increasingly on visual imagery, personal details and elevating the status of the author, Lydgate's presence in his texts was diminishing. The denser and more serious texts of *Troy Book* and *The Siege of Thebes* are more consistent in their references to Lydgate and facsimile editions of the authoritative *Fall of Princes* contained in the EEBO catalogue also consistently refer to Lydgate as the author. Among the lighter, more literary texts, references to authorship are scarce and they fall out of print in the second half of the sixteenth century.

Categorising *The Churl and the Bird* together with *The Temple of Glas* as primarily literary texts allows a comparison to be made with the denser, historical texts of *Troy Book* and *The Siege of Thebes*. An overview of the sixteen texts chosen for analysis illustrates that the historical texts are punctuated more heavily and consistently from the very earliest prints. Their survival through the second half of the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth century results in further editorial intervention which applies to the punctuation and layout. Both *The Churl and the Bird* and *The Temple of Glas* are presented in a stanzaic format which serves as the main method of guiding the reader through the text. Any punctuation applied to the texts signifies mid-line pauses, with some editions more extensive and equiparative in their distribution. Each edition of *Troy Book* and *The Siege of Thebes* contains consistent mid or end line punctuation and are presented in

largely unbroken columns of text. Major divisions are marked by chapter headings or narrative summaries which break up the text and provide the reader with a summarised ‘map’ through the text. It is reasonable to assume that readers approaching these more austere and lengthy texts required a higher level of punctuation and clear structure in order to aid their interpretation and understanding.

De Worde chooses to leave the stanzaic poem unpunctuated, using the layout as the primary means of guiding the reader through the text. The decision does not impede the reader as the rhyme scheme and stanza division are sufficient. Both Mychell and Copland provide additional markings, namely mid-line pauses and the occasional use of the punctus. Both are almost identical in their approach and display a tentative merging of punctuation influences. While the rhetorical mid-line pauses are observed, the distribution allows a grammatical interpretation to be applied at certain places throughout the text. Overall, however, the four editions of the text are consistent in their presentation and editing interventions are minimal. Unlike the editions of *Troy Book* which change so significantly that the latest print by Purfoot is almost unrecognisable from the earlier issue by Pynson, *The Churl and the Bird* continues to reflect scribal practices in terms of layout and editorial methods.

The similarities between the earlier prints and Copland’s issue from 1565 is surprising; in comparison with other editions dating from the second half of the sixteenth century, Copland’s edition retains close ties with scribal traditions and does not show any signs of the Renaissance trends which were influencing contemporary book production. The choice to print a didactic fable which is conspicuously medieval in its tone and themes in 1565 is at odds with our perception of Renaissance tastes and the effects of print culture. *The Churl and the Bird* remained popular enough to be re-printed alongside texts such as John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*, illustrating the diverse and unpredictable reading habits of sixteenth-century England. The treatment of this text displays the close and long-lasting interaction between scribal and print culture and the overlapping tastes of the early modern society; punctuation was not the only aspect of book production which underwent a gradual shift from the late medieval to the early modern era.

## Chapter Four

### 4.1 Overview of the Texts

The texts chosen for analysis represent four well-known works by John Lydgate and the printed editions range from incunabula prints at the end of the fifteenth century to the reprint of Speght's 1602 edition of Chaucer's *Workes* dating from 1687. Over this two hundred year period, the print industry progressed from uncertain beginnings to a stable and flourishing publishing industry. Eleven printers are included in the discussion and represent a range of tastes, specialities and religious inclinations. The majority of Lydgate's print editions last until the middle of the sixteenth century, after which his popularity begins to decline and his print history is rather more sporadic. Lydgate's decline has been variously ascribed to his choice of didactic subject matter, the increasing linguistic gap between his aureate diction and the pithiness of the early modern period, and his overt status as a Catholic monk. While scholars debate the level of emphasis to place on each explanation, the work of John Lydgate was undoubtedly difficult to incorporate into a Renaissance society. Lydgate's self-proclaimed master, Chaucer, was more adaptable; his subject matter was lighter, his language less impenetrable and he could be appropriated by Reformers able to emphasise anti-clerical sentiment in his work. Nevertheless, Lydgate's popularity did continue longer than this pessimistic appraisal might suggest, proving that sixteenth-century literary taste is certainly unpredictable. William Copland prints an edition of *The Churl and the Bird* during Elizabeth's reign in 1565. It is a text steeped in medieval literary tradition and Copland's intervention in the text is minimal, producing a text which closely resembles manuscript copies and the earliest prints.

Comparing Copland's edition of *The Churl and the Bird* with the contemporary print of *The Siege of Thebes* issued by Kyngston in 1561 illustrates the ways in which different texts were treated and presented. Copland's *The Churl and the Bird* is simply presented as text with no mention of Lydgate's authorship, while Kyngston's Chaucerian anthology illustrates the increasing use of paratextual material and definite focus on Chaucer and his creative craft. Not one of the editions of *The Churl and the Bird* or *The Temple of Glas* contains a mention of authorship or visual representation of Lydgate,

despite continuing to be printed until the second half of the sixteenth century. The historical epics of *Troy Book* and *The Siege of Thebes* are more consistent in their portrayals of authorship from the earliest prints, although they are far more restrained than the lavish biographies of Chaucer. While the author became an increasingly important figure in the book market, Lydgate's presence in his own texts was diminishing. The elaborate editions of Lydgate produced before the Reformation ceased, his status "vulnerable" to the changes brought about by the religious upheaval (Gillespie 2000: 69). The portrayal of Lydgate's authorship is certainly inconsistent, yet the choice to remove the overt links to Catholicism may have ensured that his work was more palatable to a Renaissance audience, for a limited time at least.

The majority of the texts use a limited repertoire of marks, namely the capital, virgule or comma, and the punctus. Each new verse line begins with a capital letter, medial pauses are marked mid-line and the punctus signifies a more definite pause at the end of a narrative section or stanza. From the middle of the sixteenth century, the use of the colon spreads and is added to the hierarchy of pauses between the comma and the punctus. De Worde's print of *The Siege of Thebes* dating from 1500 is the only edition which presents the text individually, rather than as an addition to Chaucer's anthology. It is also the only text chosen for analysis which utilises the punctus as a medial pause. The mid sixteenth century also saw the introduction of end-line punctuation, such as Marshe's edition of *Troy Book* from 1555. End-line punctuation replaced the consistent use of mid-line pauses, naturally moving away from definitively rhetorical interpretations. However, a notable exception to the rule is Islip's edition of *The Siege of Thebes* from 1598 which retains the mid-line comma. However, Islip adopts the convention of end-line punctuation simultaneously, resulting in a text with an unusual mixture of influences. The printer's approach to Lydgate's text also differs from his presentation of Chaucer's work in the same volume, in which he adds the colon to the repertoire and dispenses with medial pauses.

By the 1520s printers in England began to replace the virgule with the semi-circular comma (Parkes 1992: 51) yet Berthelet's 1529 edition of *The Temple of Glas* uses the virgule extensively. Several of the editions dating from the middle of the century display a merging of influences, whereby residual rhetorical markings survive alongside the

application of grammatical methods. *The Temple of Glas* provides an example of the ways in which rhetorical markings could be applied to produce a particular interpretation. Consistent mid-line marking, or equiparative punctuation, results in a neutral rendering of the text and this is the method generally applied to the earlier editions of *Troy Book* and *The Siege of Thebes*. The selected pointing in Caxton and de Worde's editions of *The Temple of Glas* allows for a more creative interpretation, whereby the marks are used to highlight moments of emotional intensity within the dialogue. Illustrating that medieval scribes and printers could do a lot with very little, it is also an example of the range of systems available to suit different texts.

By the middle of the sixteenth century books began incorporating a vast array of paratextual material. The four editions of *The Siege of Thebes* clearly demonstrate this development, moving from de Worde's modestly decorated single text through to Speght's Chaucerian anthology containing an overwhelming amount of biographical detail and dedications. However, this material applies primarily to Chaucer, and Lydgate's introductions are far more modest. Printers were also clearly conservative in their approach to punctuating Lydgate's texts, with the analysis demonstrating that the medieval practices survived alongside new forms and methods. Berthelet was open about the need to modernise aspects of spelling and orthography in his 1529 edition of *The Temple of Glas* yet he left the punctuation relatively unchanged from earlier prints of the text. Speght also makes a modest attempt to bring Lydgate's text in line with Chaucer's in terms of the repertoire of marks applied to *The Siege of Thebes*. However, it is only Thomas Purfoot who takes the step of dramatically altering the structure and syntax of Lydgate's text.

## **4.2 Challenging Assumptions**

In his comprehensive and insightful study on the development of Western punctuation, M.B Parkes clearly demonstrates that the history of punctuation is also the history of literacy. Punctuation developed in stages which “coincided with changing patterns of literacy” and, as each new generation of readers imposed demands on the reading material, this was reflected in the presentation (Parkes 1992: 2). Early print culture represents a transition period which moves from script to print and from residual oral traditions to a culture of silent reading, and this is reflected in changes to the physical presentation of the book, editing practices and the tastes of the readership. John Lydgate occupies a fascinating position during this period and his work provides an ideal platform for analysis. With his popularity spanning a period of monarchical instability, religious reform and the burgeoning issues of national identity, his work and its treatment in print can provide insight into the preoccupations of late medieval and early modern society. In order to present a more focused study of Lydgate’s treatment in print, this project has analysed the punctuation practices employed by a selection of printers from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries in relation to four Lydgian texts. The overall presentation of the texts in terms of paratextual material and representations of authorship has also been discussed and comparisons between texts and printers have been made. The study has highlighted a number of issues which may challenge certain assumptions about the nature of print culture in the initial years and the treatment of medieval texts by early modern printers.

Print certainly constituted a technical innovation which in turn heralded a dramatic change in European literary culture. Framed by the rumblings of Reformation and the intellectual dawn of the Renaissance, the invention of the printing press comes to encapsulate the upheaval and reinvention of the sixteenth century. It is a cultural revolution, Eisenstein argues, which has been “overlooked” in the development of modern society (Eisenstein 2000: 3). However, the adoption and development of the press were

neither seamless nor free from controversy and criticism. Many early printers, including Gutenberg himself, were left bankrupt by a failure to integrate this new technology into an existing, thriving literary culture. The “high standards” which had been mastered by centuries of scribal tradition had to be matched by this new method (Pettegree 2010: 20). Pettegree’s central line of argument with regards to incunabula printing was that, in the first few decades of the European press, it was not entirely clear that the new technology could live up to expectation (Pettegree 2010: 4). Critics were also quick to express their elitist concern that print was easily corruptible, fleeting and could lead to the “wrong sorts of reader” (Pettegree 2010: 43). Printers did learn to master the new art form and there were plenty of the ‘wrong sorts’ to keep the printers in business, once the issue of supply and demand had been resolved.

Book production became more creative and innovative during the sixteenth century and printers developed features like title pages, glossaries and dedications to enhance the reading experience. It is at this point that the printed book becomes an artefact in its own right, “free of its roots in the manuscript world” (Pettegree 2010: 65). Yet this very development and the evidence provided by the analysis illustrates that this process of distinction between manuscript and print culture was gradual. Caxton’s earliest prints of Lydgate’s *Temple of Glas* and *The Churl and the Bird* are hardly discernible from manuscript conventions and styles. The development of English Black Letter quickly became the preferred type-face and printers retained this type when representing medieval texts in seventeenth-century editions. Developments in punctuation were similarly a process of integration rather than immediate change. New forms available to the printers such as the semi-circular comma and the colon, descended from the punctus elevatus, made their way steadily into the conventional repertoire. Certain forms remained popular, however, and Berthelet’s edition of *The Temple of Glas* dating from 1529 utilises the mid-line virgule extensively while other aspects of the text are modernised. The method of mid-line punctuation also survives beyond the development of grammatical approaches and the conventions of end-line punctuation. Islip’s edition of *The Siege of Thebes* from 1598 retains the mid-line comma as in earlier prints of the text by Kyngston and de Worde. The distribution of the marks does, however, show a definite move towards grammatical usage.

Phillipa Hardman asserts that modern punctuation methods applied to Lydgate's work constitute an "intrusion" in his flow of ideas (Hardman 2006: 16). The notion that modern editing practices are insensitive to the structure and focus of medieval literature is a common theme running through studies of late medieval poetry and its authors. The Victorian era in particular has been accused of being "over-zealous" (Pettegree 2010: 17) in its approach to collating and organising medieval texts. As a result, much evidence has been lost regarding the ways in which book owners treated and organised their own texts. What appeared haphazard to nineteenth-century librarians and bibliographers was in fact an insight into medieval book ownership. Attempts to punctuate medieval texts in a fashion which ignores the surrounding oral traditions and tastes of the readership are a similar mistake. Applying modern preconceptions and conventions to literature from a different reading culture proves to be ill-fitting and harms the interpretation of the text. Yet the analysis in this current project must lead to the conclusion that these 'intrusions' were a result of later editing techniques. Analysis of the texts spanning the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries illustrates a conservative approach by the printers tackling Lydgate's texts. With the exception of Thomas Purfoot's radical editing process in *Troy Book* (1614), editorial intervention in the texts is minimal and most retain their rhetorical essence through layout, form and method of punctuation.

From a perspective which acknowledges the gradual integration of print culture and the overlapping conventions and tastes which survive through the sixteenth century, John Lydgate's survival in print does not present such an ambiguity. His religious tracts are, unsurprisingly, the first casualties of the Renaissance and John Herford's edition of *The Lives of Saint Alban and Saint Amphibal* in 1534 was Lydgate's last Saint's life to be put to print during the Henrician Reformation. It is interesting to note that this is also the last printed work of Lydgate's which survives between the Act of Supremacy and the accession of Mary I in 1553 (Gillespie 2000: 59). Lydgate's overt status as a monk from the popish dark ages was undoubtedly difficult to incorporate into Renaissance society and the expanding canon of English literature. Yet this is only one aspect of Lydgate's fascinating literary career and the explanation also presents an interpretation of the late medieval and early modern periods which is too neatly divided into pre and post-Reformation societies. Recent criticism has rallied against such neat divisions and aims to challenge assumptions



about the nature of medieval literary culture and the impact of the Reformation on the lives of ordinary people. Eamon Duffy argues passionately that the late medieval Catholic church was not the repressive institution the Reformists presented it as in their propaganda campaigns. Rather, the church was at the centre of a diverse literary culture up until the Reformation which presented the laity with a means of accessing and understanding church doctrine (Duffy 1992). James Simpson also inverts the traditional view of the Reformation as a triumphant social revolution by focusing on the “simplifications and centralizations” of institutional power which occurred in the sixteenth century. This resulted in the narrowing and simplification of literature, and the diversity and heterogeneity which had characterised the middle ages was lost (Simpson 2007: 1). Andrew Pettegree argues on a similar theme that there is little evidence to show that Luther’s initial rumblings were taken seriously in England (Pettegree 2010: 126). Developments on the continent were certainly followed with interest, but the initial impact of the Reformation in England and on the European book market was “patchy” to say the least (Pettegree 2010: 107). The Henrician Reformation saw England simultaneously split from Rome while the heresies of Reformist literature and Bible translations were condemned. Henry did, of course, change his mind and the Great Bible was first printed under his instruction in 1539. Against the backdrop of such upheaval and contradiction, Lydgate’s complex print history appears less bewildering.

The study of book history challenges the scholar to understand what place books and literature had on the lives of people in the past and the society in which they lived. It subsequently raises the issue of the role of books in our present society and future developments in the publishing industry. Given that we are standing on the cusp of a digital revolution and are currently debating the future of the print industry, it is fitting that modern book history scholarship is taking a fresh look at the impact of the printing press in late medieval and early modern culture. In the move from script to print, the book became an easily accessible, tradable commodity no longer reserved for the privileged few. The innovation of print required a merging of existing skills and craftsmen but early printers also had to overcome the initial challenges of assessing the state of supply and demand. The role of the author had changed dramatically over the course of Lydgate’s print career and the function of the patron had been usurped by the publisher. John Lydgate and his

work spans this period of transition and analysis of his treatment in print can shed light on the ways in which medieval literature was transmitted across readerships and reading cultures. Focusing on punctuation as one aspect of this shifting culture allows us to interpret the data in a meaningful way and frame it within the changing backdrop of early modern England.

# Appendices

## Transcriptions

The transcriptions follow a consistent and basic policy. Where paraph marks and hedera appear in titles and in the main body of the text, they have been replicated in the transcription. Enlarged initials have also been replicated to show the relative sizing of the letter forms. Expansions are signalled throughout by the use of rounded brackets and any missing or illegible text is denoted by [...].

All editions have been referenced from the catalogue of the *Early English Books Online*. Further bibliographical details given by EEBO regarding the current location of the texts have been provided below.

## Troy Book

The following transcriptions from editions of Troy Book are taken from Book One of the text, lines 1-50.

 Printer: **Richard Pynson**

Date: **1513**

Place of Publication: **London**

Source: **Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery**

In the reygne/ and londe of Thesalye  
The whiche is now/ ynamed Salonye  
There was a kynge/ callyd Pelleus  
Wyse and discrete/ and also vertuous  
The whiche as Guydo/ lyste to specyfye  
Helde the lordshyp/ and the regalye  
Of this yle/ as gouernour and kynge  
Of whiche the people/ by recorde of wrytynge

Myrundones were callyd/ in tho dayes  
Of whom Ouyde/ teyneth in his sayes  
Methamorphoseos/ where as ye may rede  
How this people/ sothfastly in dede  
So as myn Auctour/ maketh mencion  
Were brought/ ech one to destruccion  
With sodayne tempest/ and with fyry leuen  
By the goddes/ sent downe from the heuen  
For they of yre/ without more offence  
With the swerde and stroke/ of pestylence  
On this yle/ whylom toke vengauce  
Lyke as it is/ put in remembraunce  
For this people/ distroyed were certayne  
With thunder dynt/ (and) with hayle and rayne  
Full unwarely/ as Guydo lyst descryue  
For there was none/ of them lefte a lyue  
In all the lande/ that the vyolence  
Escape myght/ of this pestylence  
Except the kynge/ the whiche went alone  
In to a wood/ for to make his mone  
Sool by hymselfe/ all disconsolate  
In a place/ that stode all desolate  
Where this kynge romynge/ to and fro  
Complaynynge aye/ of his fatall wo  
And the harmys/ that he dyde endure  
Tyll at the laste/ of caas or auenture  
Besyde an holt/ he sawe where stode a tree  
Of full great heyght/ and large of quantytee  
Hole by the roote/ as he cowde knowe  
Where as he sawe/ by the erthe lowe  
Of Amptys crepe/ passynge great plente  
With whiche syghte/ he fylle downe on his kne

And made his prayer/ in his paynym wyse  
To the goddes/ with humble sacrefyse  
Upon his wo/ and great aduersytee  
Donly of mercy/ for to haue pytee  
To tourne these Amptys/ into fourme of man  
Thus gan he praye/ with colour pale (and) wan  
His lande to enhabyte/ whiche sta(n)deth desolate  
And he alone/ a wapyd and a mate  
Comfortles/ of any creature  
Hym to releue of that he dyde endure

 Printer: **Thomas Marshe**

Date: **1555**

Place of Publication: **London**

Source: **Henry E. Huntingdon Library and Art Gallery**

In (the) reigne and land of Thesalye,  
The which is now ynamed saloni  
There was a king called Pelleus:  
Wyse and discrete (and) also vertuous.  
The which as Guido list to specifie,  
Helde the lordshippe and the regalye,  
Of this yle as gouernour and kynge.  
Of whych the people by recorde of writinge,  
Mirundones were called in tho dayes.  
Of whom Ouide fayneth in his sayes,  
Metamorphoseos where as ye may rede,  
How this people sothfastly in dede,

So as mine Auctour maketh mencion,  
Were brought echeone to destruction  
With sodayne tempest and with fyry leuen,  
By the goddes sent downe from the heaue(n),  
For they of yre without more offence,  
With swerde and with (the) stroke of pestilence,  
On this yle whilom toke vengeaunce:  
Like as it is put in remembraunce.  
For this people destroyed were certayne,  
With thunder dint (and) with hayle and rayne,  
Full unwarely as Guido list descriue,  
For there was none of them a liue,  
In all the lande that the vyolence,  
Escape might of this pestilence.  
Except the kinge the which went alone,  
Into a wood there to make his mone,  
Sool by him selfe all disconsolate,  
In a place that stode all desolate.  
Where this kinge ronnyng to and fro,  
Complayninge aye of this his fatall woo:  
And the harmes that did endure,  
Till at the last of case or auenture.  
Beside an holt he sawe where stode a tree,  
Of full great hight and large of quantyie:  
Holowe by thee roote as he coulde knowe,  
Where as he sawe by the earthe lowe,  
Of Antes crepe passing greate plente,  
With which sight he fell downe on his kne.  
And made his prayer in his panim wise,  
To the goddes with humble sacrafise.  
Upon his wo and great aduersytee,  
Onely of mercy for to haue pytee.

To turne these Antes into fourme of man:  
Thus gan he praye with coloure pale (and) wan.  
His lande tenhabite which standeth desolate,  
And he alone awhaped and a mate,  
Comfortles of any creature:  
Him to releue of that he did endure.

👉 Printer: **Thomas Purfoot**

Date: **1614**

Place of Publication: **London**

Source: **The British Library**

(lines 1-54)

In *Thessalie* King *Peleus* once did raigne,  
For vertue held a Prince of worthy fame,  
Whose subiects as mine Author doth explaine,  
Were *Myrmidons* so called by their name.  
Of whose beginning *Ouid* doth rehearse,  
The History at large in Latine verse.

And saith, that in that Countrie downe did fall  
So furious a tempest from the skie,  
That it consum'd the people great and small,  
And left not one, but all di'de sodainlie,  
Except the King, who desolate alone,  
Went wandring in the woods, to make his mone.

Where for a time he walked to and fro,  
Lamenting sore in mind his dolefull state,  
And to himselfe complaining of his woe,  
Began to curse his hard and cruell fate:  
    Till in the wood he chanst to spie a tree,  
    For height and thicknesse huge of quantity.

Whiche at the foot a hole had in the ground,  
From whence of *Ants* great quantitie did creepe,  
Which when this Prince so desolate had found,  
He fell vpon his knees and sore did weepe:  
    And Paynim-like his prayer gan to make,  
    To moue the Gods some pittie on him take.

By miracle to shew their power as then  
In transformation of those *Ants* so little,  
Into the right and perfect shape of men,  
Therewith againe his Land to fill with people:  
    And so his poore distressed case to tender,  
    For which he vow'd continuall thanks to render.

Which his request as *Ouid* setteth downe,  
With pittie mou'd God *Iupiter* did heare,  
And by a sodaine transmutation,  
The *Ants* did cause in forme of men t'appeare:  
    Who presently arising on their feet,  
    With all speed went their famous Prince to meet.

Which people by their strength and hardinesse,  
The Storie saith, obtained lofty fame,  
And anciently for their great worthines,  
As first I said, *Myrmidons* had to name:



Who for their great fore-sight in euery thing,  
The Poet fain'd them from those *Ants* to spring.

(For as the *Ants* in Summers heat by care,  
Prouides his food in Winter time to liue,  
This people so their labour did not spare,  
Industriously their bodies to relieue.

In peace and Warre prouiding for their need,  
As all men should, the better for to speed.

For if that care and labour we neglect,  
Our food and clothes in time for to prouide,  
We may perchance our follie so detect,  
That men our sloath will openly deride:)

But to affirme this fable to be true,  
Therein I leaue the iudgement vnto you.

## The Siege Of Thebes

The following transcriptions represent lines 1-44 in the text.

👉 Printer: **de Worde**

Date: **1500**

Place of Publication: **Westminster**

Source: **The British Library**

¶ Here begynneth the prologue of the Storye of Thebes

**W**han bryght phebus passed was the Ram

Myd of Aprell & in to the Bole cam

And Satourne olde. with his frosty face

An Virgyne. taken had his place

Melencolyke. and slouth of mocyon

And was also. in thopposycyon

Of Lucyna the mone. moyste and pale

That many shoure. fro heuen made auale

Whan Aurora. was in the morow red

And Jupyter. in the Crabbes hed

Hath take his paleys. and his mansyon

The lusty tyme. and Joly fresshe season

Whan that flora. the noble myghty quene

The soyll hath clad. in newe tender grene

With her floures. craftely meynte

Branche & bough. with red & whyte depeynte

Fletynge the baume. on hylles and on vales

The tyme in soth. whan Canterbury tales

Compleat and tolde. at many sondry stage

Of estates. in the pylgrymage  
Eueryche man. lyke to his degree  
Some of desporte. some of moralyte  
Some of knyghthode. loue and gentyllesse  
And some also. of parfyte holynesse  
And some also. in soche of Rybaudrye  
To make laughter. in the companye  
Eche admytted. for none wolde other greue  
Lyke as the Coke. the Myller and the Reue  
Aquyte hemselve. shortly to conclude  
Boystously in her termes rude  
Whan they badden. well dronken of the bolle  
And eke also. with his pyllled nolle  
The Pardoner. beardles all his chyn  
Glasy eyes. and face of Cherubyn  
Tellyng a tale. to angere with the frere  
As openly. the story can you lere  
Worde by worde. with euery circumstaunce  
Echone I wryte. and put in remembraunce  
By hym that was. yf I shall not fayne  
Floure of Poetes. thourgh out of all Bretayne  
Whiche sothly had. moost of excellence  
An Rethoryke. and in eloquence  
Rede his makyng. who lyst the trouthe fynde  
Whiche neuer shall. appallen in my mynde

👉 Printer: **Kynsgton**

Date: **1561**

Place of Publication: **London**

Source: **Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery**

¶ Here beginneth

the Prologue, of the Storie of Thebes.

**W**hen bright Phebus, passed was the Ram

Midde of April, and into the Bulle cam

And Saturne olde, with his frostie face

In virgine, taken had his place

Malencolike, and slough of mocion

And was also, in thoppisicion

Of Lucina the Moone, moiste and pale

That many shoure, fro heauen made availe

When Aurora, was in the morowe redde

And Jupiter, in the Crabbes hedde

Hath take his paleis, and his mansion

The lustie tyme. and ioly freshe season

When that Flora, the noble mightie quene

The soile hath clad, in newe tender grene

With her floures, craftely meint

Braunche & bough, with red & white depeint

Fletyng the Baume, on hilles and on vales

The tyme in soth, when Canterburie tales

Compleat and tolde, at many sondrie stage

Of estates, in the pilgrimage

Eueriche man, like to his degree

Some of disporte, some of moralitee

Some of knighthode, loue and gentillesse  
And some also, of partie holinesse  
And some also, in soth, of ribaudrie  
To make laughter, in the companie  
Eche admitted, for none would other greue  
Like as the Coke, the Miller and the Reue  
Aquite hem self, shortly to conclude  
Boistouslie in her termes rude  
When thei hadden, well dronken of the bolle  
And eke also, with his pilled nolle  
The Pardoner, beardles all his chin  
Glasie iyes, and face of Cherubin  
Tellyng a tale, to anger with the frere  
As openly, the storie can you lere  
Worde by worde, with euery circumstance  
Echone iwrite, and put in remembrance  
By hym that was, if I shall not faine  
Floure of Poetes, throughout all Bretaine  
Whiche sothly had, moste of excellence  
In Rhetorike, and in eloquence  
Rede his makyng, who liste the trouthe finde  
Whiche neuer shall, appallen in my minde

👉 Printer: **Islip**

Date: **1598**

Place of Publication: **London**

Source: **Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery**

👉 Here beginneth the Prologue

*of the story of Thebes*

**W**hen bright Phebus passed was the Ram,

Midde of Aprill, and into the Bull cam

And Saturne old, with his frostie face

In Virgine, taken had his place

Melancolike and slow of motion

And was also in thopposicion

Of Lucina the Moone, moist and pale

That many shoure, for heauen made availe

When Aurora was in the morow redde

And Jupiter in the Crabbes hedde

Hath take his paleis, and his mansion

The lustie time, and ioly fresh season

When that Flora, the noble mighty quene

[...] hath clad, in new tender greene

With her floures, craftily meint

[...] and baugh, with white & red depeint

[...] the Baume, on hilles and on vales

The time in soth, when Canterbury tales

Compleat and told at many sondry stage

Of estates, in the pilgrimage

Euerich man, like to his degree

Some of disporte, some of moralitee

Some of knighthood, loue and gentillesse  
And some also, of perfit holinesse  
And some also, in soth of ribaudrie  
To make laughter, in the company  
Ech admitted, for none would other greue  
Like as the Coke, the Millar and the Reue  
Aquite hem selfe, shortly to conclude  
Boistouslie in her termes rude  
When they hadden well dronken of the bolle  
And eke also with his pilled nolle  
The Pardoner, beardles all his chin  
Glassie eyes, and face of Cherubin  
Telling a tale, to anger with the frere  
As openly, the story can you lere  
Word by word, with euey circimstance  
Echone ywrite, and put in remembraunce  
By him that was, if I shall not faine  
Floure of Poets, throughout all Bretaine  
Which sothly had most of excellence  
In Rhetorike, and in eloquence  
Rede his making , who list the trouthe find  
Which neuer shall, appallen in my mind

👉 Printer: **Speght**

Date: **1687**

Place of Publication: **London**

Source: **The British Library**

The  
Story of THEBES,  
Compiled by *John Lidgate*, Monk of *Bury*.

*The Prologue to the Story of THEBES.*

When bright Phebus passed was the the Ram  
Midde of Aprill, and into the Bull came,  
And Saturne old, with his frosty face,  
In Virgine take had his place,  
Melancolike, and slough of motion,  
And was also in the opposition  
Of Lucina the Moone, moist and pale,  
That many shoure fro heauen made auaile,  
When Aurora was in the morow redde,  
And Jupiter in the Crabs hedde  
Hath take his paleis and his mansion,  
The lusty time, and joly fresh season,  
When that Flora the noble mighty queene  
The soile hath clad in new tender greene,  
With her floures craftely meint,  
Braunche & bough with red & white depeint,  
Fleeting the Baume on hils and on vales,  
The time in sooth, when Canterbury tales,  
Compleat and told at many a sundry stage  
Of estates in the pilgrimage,



Eueriche man like to his degree,  
Some of disport, some of moralitie,  
Some of knighthood, loue, and gentillesse,  
And some also of parfite holinesse,  
And some also, in soth of ribaudry,  
To make laughter in the the company,  
Ech admitted, for none would other greue,  
Like as the Coke, the Miller, and the Reue,  
Aquite hemselve, shortly to conclude  
Boistously in her tearmes rude,  
When they hadden well dronken of the boll,  
And eke also with his pilled noll,  
The Pardoner beardlesse all his chin,  
Glasie eyes, and face of Cherubin,  
Telling a tale, to anger with the frere,  
As openly the story can you lere  
Word by word, with euery circumstance,  
Echone ywrit, and put in remembrance,  
By him that was, if I shall not faine,  
Floure of Poetes, throughout all Bretaine,  
Which soothly had most of excellence  
In Rhetorike, and in eloquence,  
Rede his making, who list the trouth find,  
Which neuer shall appallen in my mind,

## The Temple of Glas

The following transcriptions from *The Temple of Glas* represent lines 1-54 in each edition.

👉 Printer: **Caxton**

Date: **1477**

Place of Publication: **Westminster**

Source: **Cambridge University Library**

+The temple of glas +

f                    Or thought constreynt & greuouse heuynes  
                         For pensithed and high distres  
To bed I went now this other nyght  
Whan that lucina with hir pale light  
Was joyned last with phebus in aquarye  
Amyd decembre / whan of januarie  
Ther be kalendes of the new yere  
And derk dyane horned and nothing clere  
Had her beames under a mysty cloude  
With in my bed for cold I gan me shroude  
Al desolate for constraynt of my woo  
The long myght walowyng to and fro  
Til at laste er I began take kepe  
Me dyde oppresse a sodeyn dedly slepe  
With in the whiche me thought I was  
Rauysshed in spiryte in to a temple of glas  
I nyste how fer in wildernes  
That founded was as by liklynes

Not upon stele / but on a craggy roche  
Lyke yse y froze / and as I did approche  
Agayne the sonne that shone so clere  
As ony Cristal and euer ner and ner  
As I cam nyghe this grisly dredful place  
I wex astonyed / the light so in my face  
Be gan to smyte / so persing euer in one  
On euery part wher that I gan gone  
That I ne might no thing as I wolde  
Aboute me considere and beholde  
The wonder estres for brightnes of the sonne  
Til atte last certayn skyes donne  
With wynde chaced han her cours y went  
To fore the stremes of titan and y blent  
So that I mighte with in and with oute  
Wherso I wolde beholden me aboute  
For to reporte the fac(i)on and manere  
Of all this place that was circuler  
In compas wyse / round by entayle wrought  
And whan I had longe gone and sought  
I found a wicket and entred in as fast  
In to the temple and myn eyen cast  
On euery syde now lowe est alofte  
And right anon as I gan walken softe  
Yf I the soth a right reporte shal  
I sawe depeynted upon a wal  
From este to weste many a fair ymage  
Of sondry louers lyke as they were of age  
Y sette in ordre after they were trewe  
With liuely colours wonder fresh of hue  
And as me thought I sawe som sitte & som sta(n)de  
And som(m)e knelyng with billes in their hande

And som(m)e with compleynt woful & pietous  
With doleful chere to putten to venus  
So as she sat fleetyng in the see  
Upon her woo forto haue pitee

👉 Printer: **de Worde**

Date: **1495**

Place of Publication: **Westminster**

Source: **The British Library and the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art  
Gallery**


[In the edition /J/ is used to represent capital /I/ and this typographical feature appears in each of de Worde's prints of the poem].

¶ here begynneth the Temple of glas

F Or thought constreynt & greuous heuynes  
for pensythed and hyghe distres  
To bed J wente now this other nyght  
whan that lucyna with hyr pale lyght  
was joyned last with phebus in aquarye  
Amyd decembre / whan of Januarye  
Ther be kalandes of the new yere  
And derke dyane horned and nothyng clere  
Had her beames under a mysty cloude  
with in my bed for cold J gan me shroude  
All desolate for constraynt of my woo  
The long nyght walowyng to and fro

Tyll at laste er J gan take kepe  
Me dyde oppresse a sodeyn dedly slepe  
with in the whiche me thought J was  
Rauysshed in spirite in to a Temple of glas  
J nyste how ferre in wyldernes  
That founded was as by lyclynes  
Not upon stele / but on a craggy roche  
Lyke yse I froze / and as J dide approche  
Agayn the sonne that shone soo clere  
As ony crystall and euer nere and nere  
As J han nyghe this grysly dredfull place  
J wex astonyed / the lyght soo in my face  
Began to smyte / soo persyng euer in one  
On euery parte where J gan gone  
That J ne myght no thyng as J wolde  
Aboute me consydere and beholde  
The wonder estres for bryghtnes of the sonne  
Tyll atte last certayn skyes donne  
with wynde chaced han her cours J went  
Tofore the stremes of titan and J blent  
Soo that J myght within and withoute  
wherso J wolde beholden me aboute  
For to reporte the facyon and manere  
Of all this place that was circuler  
An compas wyse / round by entayle wrought  
And whan I had longe gone and sought  
J founde a wyket and entred in as fast  
In to the temple and myn eyen cast  
On euery syde now lowe and now est alofte  
And right anone as J gan walken softe  
Yf J the sothe a right reporte shall  
J sawe depaynted upon a wall

From este to weste many a fayr ymage  
Of sondry louers lyke as they were of age  
J sette in ordre after they were trewe  
With lyfly colours wonder fresh of hue  
And as me thought I sawe som(e) syt and som(e) sta(n)de  
And som(e) knelyng with bylles in theyr hande  
And som(e) with complaynt wofull and pyetous  
With dolefull chere to putten to venus  
Soo as she sate fletyng in the see  
Upon her woo for to haue pytee

 Printer: **de Worde**

Date: **1500**

Place of Publication: **Westminster**

Source: **The National Library of Scotland**

¶ here begynnyth þ(e) temple of Glas

F Or through constreynt & greuous heuynes

for pensythed and hyghe distres

¶ To bed J wente now this other nyght

¶ whan that lucyna with hyr pale lyght

¶ was joyned last with phebus in aquarye

¶ Amyd decembre / whan of januarie

¶ Ther be kalendes of the new yere

¶ And derke dyane horned and nothyng clere

¶ Had her beames under a mysty cloude

¶ with in my bed for cold J gan me shroude

¶ All desolate for constraunt of my won  
 ¶ The long nyght walowyng to and fro  
 ¶ Tyll at laste er J gan take kepe  
 ¶ Me dyde oppresse a sodeyn dedely slepe  
 ¶ with in the whiche me thought J was  
 ¶ Rauysshed in spiryte into Temple of Glas  
 ¶ J nyste how ferre in wyldernes  
 ¶ That founded was as by lyclynes  
 ¶ Not upon stele / but on a craggy roche  
 ¶ Lyke yse J froze / and as J dide approche  
 ¶ Agayn the sonne that shone soo clere  
 ¶ As ony crystall and euer nere and nere  
 ¶ As J gan nyghe this grysly dredfull place  
 ¶ J wex astonyd / the lyght soo in my face  
 ¶ Began to smyte / soo persyng euer in one  
 ¶ On euery parte where that J gone  
 ¶ That J ne myghtno thyng as J wolde  
 ¶ D Abute me consydere and beholde  
 ¶ The wonder esters for bryghtnes of the sonne  
 ¶ Tyll atte last certayn lykes donne  
 ¶ with wynde chaced han her conrs J went  
 ¶ Tofore the stremes of tytan and J blent  
 ¶ Soo that J myght within and withoute  
 ¶ werso J wolde beholden me aboute  
 ¶ For to reporte the facyon and manere  
 ¶ Of all this place that was circular  
 ¶ J compas wyse / round by entayle wrought  
 ¶ And whan J had longe and sought  
 ¶ J founde awyket and entred in as fast  
 ¶ Into the temple and myn eyen cast

¶ On euery syde now low and now eft alofte  
¶ And right anone as J gau walken softe  
¶ Yf I the lothe a right reporte shall  
¶ J sawe depaynted upon a wall  
¶ From este to weste many a fayr ymage  
¶ Of sondry louers lyke as they were of age  
¶ J lette in ordre after they were trewe  
¶ With lyfly colours wonder fresh of hue  
¶ And as me thought I sawe som(e) sit & som(e) sta(n)de  
¶ And som(e) knelyng with bylles in theyr hande  
¶ And som(e) with complaynt wofull and pyetuos  
¶ With dolefull chere to putten to venus  
¶ So as she sate fletyng in the see  
¶ Upon her woo for to haue pytee

👉 Printer: **de Worde**

Date: **1506**

Place of Publication: **London**

Source: **The British Library**

**T** Hrough cōnstreynt & greuous heuines

For pensyfnes and hygh dystres

To bed J went now this other nyghte

Whan þ(a)t Lucyna with her pale lyght

Was Joyned last w(ith) phe(bus) in aquarye

Amyd Decembre whan of Januarye


There be kalendes of the newe yere

And derke dyane horned and no thyng clere



Had her beames under a mysty cloude  
Within my bed for colde J gan me shroude  
All desolate for constreynt of my woo  
The longe nyght walowyng to and fro  
Tyll at last or J gan take kepe  
Me dyde oppresse a sodeyn deedly slepe  
Within the whiche me thought J was  
Rauysshed in spyryte in to Temple of glas  
J ne wyste how ferre in wyldernes  
That founded was all by lyclynes  
Not upon stele / but on a craggy roche  
Lyke yse J froze / and as J dyde approche  
Agayne the sonne that shone so clere  
As ony crystall and euer nere and nere  
As J gan nyghe this grysly dredfull place  
J wext astonyed the lyght so in my face  
Began to smyte so passynge euer in one  
On every parte where that J gone  
That J ne myght no thyng as J wolde  
Aboute me consydere and beholde  
The wonder esters for bryghtnes of the sonne  
Tyll at last certayne skyes donne  
With wynde chased than her cours J went  
Tofore the stremes of Tytan and J blent  
So that J myght within and without  
Wher so I wolde beholde me abonte  
For to reporte the facyon and manere  
Of all this place that was cyrculer  
I compas wyse / rounde by entayle wrought  
I founde a wyket and entred in as faste  
In to the temple and myn eyen cast  
On euery syde now low and now efte alofte

And ryght anone as J gan walke softe  
Yf J the sothe a ryght reporte shall  
J sawe depaynted upon a wall  
From est to west many a fayre ymage  
Of sondry louers lyke as they were of aege  
J sette in ordre after they were trewe  
With lyfly colours wonder fresshe of hewe  
And as me thought J sawe som syt & som stande  
And som knelyng with bylles in theyr hande  
And som with complaynt wofull & pyteous  
With dolefull chere to putte to Venus  
So as she sate fletyng in the see  
Upon theyr wo for to haue pyte

 Printer: **Berthelet**

Date: **1529**

Place of Publication: **London**

Source: **The Bodleian Library**

**T** Hrough co(n)streynt and greuouse heynesse

For great thought & highe pensyuenesse

To bedde J went nowe this other night

Whan that Lucina with her pale lyght

Was ioyned last with Phebus in Aquary

Amydde Decembre / whan of January

There be kalendes of the newe yere

And derke Dyana / horned and nothyng clere

Hydde her beames under a mysty cloude  
Within my bedde for colde J gan me shroude  
All desolate for constraynt of my wo  
The long night walowyng to and fro  
Tyll at last or J gan take kepe  
Me dyde oppresse a sodayne deedly slepe  
Within the whiche me thought that J was  
Rauysshed in spyrite in to a temple of glas  
J ne wyst howe ferre in wyldernesse  
That founded was all by lyckelynesse  
Nat upon stele / but on a craggy roche  
Lyke yse ifrosen / and as J dyde approche  
Agayne the sonne that shone so clere  
As any christall / and euer nere and nere  
As J came nyghe this grisely dreedfull place  
I wext astonyd / the lyght so in my face  
Began to smyte so passyng euer in one  
On euery parte where that J dyde gone  
That J ne might nothyng as J wolde  
Aboute me consydre and beholde  
The wonders esters for brightnesse of the sonne  
Tyll at last certayne skyes donne  
With wynde chased and their course ywent  
Before the stremes of Titan and iblent  
So that J myght within and without  
Where so J wolde beholde me about  
For to reporte the facyon and manere  
Of all this place / that was circuler  
In cumpace wyse rounde by intayle wrought  
And whan J had longe and well sought  
J founde a wycket / and entred in as faste  
Into the temple / and myn eyen caste

On euery syde / nowe lowe / and nowe este alofte  
And right anone / as J gan walke softe  
If J the sothe aright report shall  
J sawe depeynted upon a wall  
From Est to west many a fayre ymage  
Of sondry louers / lyke as they were of age  
J let in ordre after they were trewe  
With lyfly colours wonders fresshe of hewe  
And as me thought J saw som syt and som stn(n)de  
And some knelyng / with bylles in theyr hande  
And some with complaynt woful and pitious  
With dolefull chere / to put to Venus  
So as she sate fletynge in the see  
Upon theyre wo for to haue pite

## The Churl and the Bird

The following transcriptions correspond to lines 1-35 arranged in 7-line stanzas from the text.

 Printer: **Wynkyn de Worde**

Date: **1497**

Place of Publication: **Westminster**

Source: **The British Library**

**P** Roblemes of olde lykenes and fygures

¶ Whiche prouyd ben fructuous of sentence

¶ And auctorytates grounded on scryptures

¶ By resemblau(n)ce of notable apparence

¶ With moralytees concludynge on prudence

¶ Lyke as the byble reherceth by wrytynge

¶ How trees chese hem somtyme a kynge

¶ Fyrst in theyr chose they named tholyue

¶ To regne amonge them (Judiciu(m)) doth expres

¶ But he hym selfe gan ex~~c~~usen blyve

¶ He myghe not forsaken his fatrenesse

¶ Ne the fyge tree his amerouse swetnesse

¶ Ne the vyne his holsome tarage

¶ Whiche gyueth comfort to all maner age

¶ And semblably poetes laureate

¶ By derke parables full conuenient

¶ Fayne that byrdes and bestes of astate


¶ As ryall egles and lyons by assent

¶ Sente out wryttes to holde a parleament

¶ And made decrees bryefly for to seye  
¶ Some to haue lordshyp & some to obeye

¶ Egles to to thayre hyghest to make the flyght  
¶ Power of lyons on the grounde is sene  
¶ Cedre amonge trees byghest is of syght  
¶ And the laurere of nature is aye grene  
¶ Of floures all flora ay goddesse & quene  
¶ Thus of all thynges ther ben dyuersytees  
¶ Some of astate and some of lowe degrees

¶ Poetes wryte wonderfull lykenes  
¶ And under couerte kepe him self close  
¶ They take bestes and foules to wytnes  
¶ Of whos faynynges fables fyrste arose  
¶ And here I caste to my pourpose  
¶ Out of frensshe a tale to transilate  
¶ Whiche in a paunflete I rede & sawe late

 Printer: **de Worde**

Date: **1510**

Place of Publication: **London**

Source: **The British Library**

(The first stanza is obscured in the original text and has been omitted in this transcription)

Fyrst in theyr chose they named the olyue  
To reygne amonge them (Judiciu(m)) doth expresse  
But he hym selfe gan excuse belyue  
He myght not forsake his tatrenesse  
Ne the fygge tree his amerous swetnesse  
Ne the vyne his holsome tarage  
Whiche gyveth comforte to all maner aege

And semblably poetes laureate  
By derke parables full conuenient  
Fayne that byrdes and beestes of estats  
As ryall egles and lyons by assente  
Sente out wryttes to holde a parlayment  
And make decrees bryefly for to say  
Some to haue lordshyp and some to obeye

Egles in the ayre hyghest make theyr flyght  
Power of lyons on the grounde is sene  
Cedre amonge trees hyghest is of syght  
And the laurere of nature os aye grene  
Of floures all flora aye goddesse and quene  
Thus of all thynges there ben dyuersytees  
Some of estate and some of lowe degrees

Poetes wryte wonderfull lyknes  
And under couerte kepe hem selfe close  
They take beestes and foules to wytnes  
Of whole faynynges fables fyrst arose  
And here I call to my purpose  
Out of frensshe a tale to translate  
Whiche in a paunflete I redde and sawe late

👉 Printer: **John Mychell**

Date: **1534**

Place of Publication: **Canterbury**

Source: **The Bodleian Library**

**P** Roblemes / of olde lykenesse and fygure

Which proued ben / fructuous of sentence  
And haue auctorites / grounded in scripture  
By resemblaunce / of notable aparaunce  
With moralities / concludynge of prude(n)ce  
Lyke as the byble reherceth by wrytynge  
How trees somtyme chose them a kynge.

Fyrste in theyr choyse / they named Olyve  
To rayne amonge them / iudicu(m) doth expresse  
But he hymselfe gan excuse blyue  
That they myght nat forsake the fatnesse  
Nor the fygge tre / her amorous swetnes  
Nor the vyne tre / his holsome fresshe corage  
Which gyueth comforte / to all maner of age

And semblable poytes laureate  
By darke parables full conuenient  
Fayne that byrdes and beestes of estate  
As royall Egles / and lyons by assent  
Sent out writtes to holde a paralymment  
And make the crye / breuely for to say  
Some to haue lordshyp / and some to obeye.

Egles in the ayre / hiest to take theyr flyght  
Power of lyons / on the grounde is sene  
Cedre amonge trees / hyghest is syght  
The laurell of nature / is aye grene  
Of floures all Flora / aye goddesse and quene  
Thus in all thynges / there ben dyuersytyees  
Some of estate / and some of lowe degrees.



Poytes wryte / wonderfull lykenesse  
And under couert / kepe them selfe full close  
They take beestes and foules to wytnesse  
Of whole sayenges / fables fyrst a rose  
And here I cast on my purpose  
Out of frenche / a tale to translate  
Which in a pamflete / I saw and redde but late

 Printer: **William Copland**

Date: **1565**

Place of Publication: **London**

Source: **Henry E. Huntingdon Library and Art Gallery**

**P** Roblemes of olde lykenesse and fygure  
Which prouyd ben, fructuous of s(en)tence  
\* \* And haue auctorites, grounded in scripture  
By resemblaunce, of notable aparaunce  
With moralities, concludynge on prude(n)ce  
Lyke as the byble reherceth by wrytynge  
How trees somtyme chose them a kynge.

Fyrste in theyr choyse, they named Olyue  
To rayne amonge them, iudicu(m) doth expresse  
But he hymselfe gan excuse blyue  
That they myght nat forsake the fatnesse  
Nor the fygge tre, her amorous swetnes  
Nor the vyne tre, his holsome fresshe corage  
Which gyueth comforte, to all maner of age

And semblable poytes laureate  
By darke parables full conuenient  
Fayne that byrdes and beestes of estate  
As royall Egles, and lyons by assent  
Sent out writtes to holde a paralyment

And made the crye, breuely for to say  
Some to haue lorde shyp, and some to obeye.

Egles in the ayre, hiest to take theyre flyght  
Power of lyons, on the grounde is sene  
Cedre amonge trees, highest in syght  
The laurell of nature, is aye grene  
Of floures all Flora, aye goddesse and quene  
Thus in all thynges, ther ben dyuersytyees  
Some of estate, and some of lowe degrees.

Poytes wryte, wonderfull lykenesse  
And under couert, kepe then selfe full close  
They take beestes, and foules to wytnesse  
Of whole sayenges, fables fyrst a rose  
And here I cast on my purpose  
Out of frenche, a tale to translate  
Whiche in a pamflete, I saw and redde but late

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