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Shape-shifting, sound-change and the genesis of prodigal writing systems

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Shape-shifting, sound-change and the genesis of prodigal writing systems[1]

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In a series of articles we have looked at individual early Middle English writing systems and explored aspects of multivocal sound/symbol and symbol/sound relationships. This article combines previous observations with new material, and provides insights into the genesis of these relations and how they may interconnect. Since many early Middle English texts survive as copies, not originals, they may give clues to the orthographic systems of their exemplars too.

We investigate the 'extensibility' of Litteral and Potestatic Substitution Sets. Writing systems may be economical or prodigal. The 'ideal' economical system would map into a broad phonetic or a phonemic transcription: that is, one 'sound', one symbol. In early Middle English there is no one standard written norm, so there is potentially less restraint on diversity than in standard systems. Further extensibility is built into the system. We show that much of what tends to be dismissed as 'scribal error' rather represents writing praxis no longer familiar to us – flexible matrices of substitution and variation.

1   Background to prodigal systems

1.1   Litteral and Potestatic[2] Substitution Sets

Few writing systems with evolutionary histories are economical, approaching the ideal of one *littera* one *potestas*.[3] Even most modern so-called 'standard' systems have

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[1] These observations arise from detailed analytical work on early Middle English manuscript texts being undertaken at the Institute for Historical Dialectology, Linguistics and English Language, School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences, University of Edinburgh towards the compilation of *A linguistic atlas of early Middle English* (*LAEME*). This research project was supported from 2000 to 2006 by AHRC, for which gratitude is here expressed. RL thanks the University of Cape Town for generous travel support. A version of this paper was first delivered at the 6th International Conference on Middle English, Cambridge 2008. It continues a series of studies on early Middle English writing systems (Laing 1999, 2008; Laing & Lass 2003, 2005). We are grateful to Michael Benskin, Derek Britton and Keith Williamson for comments on earlier drafts and to the reviewers and editors of *English Language and Linguistics* for further suggestions.

[2] We use the terminology of the medieval theory of *littera*. The conventions (established by Michael Benskin (1997: 1, n. 1 and 2001: 194, note 4)) are as follows. *Littera* is the abstract or superordinate notion of the letter, and (when referred to independently of manuscript citation) *litterae* are enclosed in single inverted commas. *Figura* is the shape of a *littera*. This can refer both to the *figura* that is associated with the *littera* in a particular script or type of script (Textura, Anglicana, charter hand, etc.); or it can indicate a particular realisation within any one script. Manuscript *figurae* are here enclosed in angle brackets or are italicised when combined as whole words or longer. *Potestates* are sound values and are represented by IPA symbols in phonetic brackets. As an additional convention, glosses and names of lexical categories are in small capitals. Etymological categories and citations are in italics.

[3] That is, histories excluding massive centrally directed spelling reform. A famous early Middle English exception is the system developed by Orm.

islands of prodigality. A prodigal system allows considerable multivocal relationship in the mappings of sound to symbol. Hence Litteral and Potestatic Substitution Sets:

> A set of *litterae* in variation for the same *potestas* or etymological category we call a *Litteral Substitution Set* (LSS: see Laing 1999). Thus Hand C [of Cambridge, Trinity College B.14.39 (323)] has for OE -*ht* the LSS {'t', 'tt'}, Hand B has the LSS {'st', 't', 'tt' 'd'}, Hand D has the LSS {'t', 'st', 'cht', 'ch', 'ct', 'd', 'th', 'tht', 'ʒt', 'dt', 'tf', 'tt'} and Hand A has the LSS {'st', 't', 'tt', 'cst', 'ct', 'th', 'chit', 'cht', 'cðth', 'sþ', 'th', 'thth', 'tth'}. The inverse of an LSS we call a *Potestatic Substitution Set* (PSS: Laing & Lass 2003: 262–3). So in Trinity Hand D the littera 'ʒ' maps to the PSS {[h], [x], [j], [w], [ɣ]}. For instance [h]: *ʒu* HOW < OE *hū*; [x] *driʒten* LORD < OE *dryhten*; [j]: *ʒe* YE < OE *gē*; [w]: *roʒen* TO ROW < OE *rōwan*; [ɣ]: *daʒes* DAYS < OE *dagas* (*LAEME*, Introduction, chapter 2, section 2.3.2).

We examine further some of the usage in Hands A and D of Cambridge, Trinity College B.14.39 (323) in relation to the work of several other scribes. We illustrate how the figural confusion in 'þ', 'y' and 'ƿ' in some early Middle English writing systems also interacts with the *figura* <ʒ> (yogh) to produce an extensive range of LSS types. We demonstrate how changes in the mappings of sound to symbol between Old English and early Middle English cause the *litterae* listed above, as well as some others, to develop varied new patterns of reference and distribution. We consider the multiple mappings of 'þ', 'y', 'ƿ', 'ʒ', 'w', 'h', 'g' and Ø to [θ∼ð], [i∼j], [w∼u], [ç∼x], [ɣ], [h] and Ø. Graphic interaction and phonetic change lead to LSSs and PSSs that show not only one-to-many mappings, but many-to-many mappings as well.

1.2   Background to shape-shifting: 'þ' and 'y' in late Middle English

In the writing of later Middle English, the representation of the *litterae* 'þ' and 'y' as a single *figura* is the mark of a northern, northerly or North-East Midland scribe (Benskin 1982). For late Middle English, there is in fact a clear 'þ'/'y' boundary.

> South of a line running roughly from the Mersey to the Wash, but excluding much of East Anglia, the distinction [between the functions of 'þ' and 'y'] was regularly maintained; north of this line, and also over much of East Anglia, 'þ' and 'y' were represented by the same (usually *y*-like) symbol. (*LALME* 3: xv)

The *figurae* <þ> and <y> may sometimes appear as end points of a cline: there is no systematic functional distinction made between <y>-shaped, <þ>-shaped or formally indeterminate *figurae*, however many actual shapes the scribe employs (Benskin 1982: 14).

There are therefore four types of scribal praxis in relation to 'þ' and 'y':

   (a) 'southern' <þ>/<y> differentiation both in shape and function;
   (b) 'northern' <þ/y> confusion where a single *figura*, usually <y>-shaped but sometimes <þ>-shaped is used for both [θ∼ð] and [i∼j];[4]

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[4] The phonetic representation [i] stands for [i(ː)], *et passim*.

(c) the use of a figural cline for the same functions, i.e. there are clearly defined end points and an ambiguous middle;

(d) '<þ> and <y> are discretely distinct symbols and there are no intermediate letter-shapes which defy classification as *either <þ> or <y>*, but their functions are confused' (Benskin 1982: 14).

1.3 Confusion

We use the terms 'confusion' and 'confused' without pejorative intent. We do not mean to imply any necessary mental failure on the part of the scribe(s). The terms refer to a formal equivalence and/or an overlap in function, which is normally systematic. They rarely denote intellectual confusion, or even inadvertence. Formal equivalence and functional overlap may sometimes lead to genuine intellectual confusions; but in our experience they are unusual. 'Confusions' are more often than not systematically explicable in terms of the writing praxis of the exemplar and/or of the copyist. Simple scribal error, whose existence in individual cases we of course do not deny, is comparatively uncommon.

2 'þ', 'y' and 'ƿ' in early Middle English

In early Middle English, the developments in script that create the <þ/y> confusion are already in evidence. Early Textura scripts[5] become squared and compressed, while the cut of the pen makes for the decorative alternation of thick vertical strokes with hairline diagonals. In such scripts, the ascender of <þ> tends to become shortened. There also develops a type of <y> with the long element on the left and the short element on the right (cf. Benskin 1982: 23 pl. 4 ii). The short element begins with a hairline approach stroke. In some scripts, this begins from contact with the upper part of the first long element, creating a closed-lobe type of <y>. The result can be very like a short-ascendered <þ>. In early Middle English, there is little surviving material from the North and North-East Midlands, but <þ/y> confusion is frequently observable in such texts as do survive. However, it is not so clearly regionally restricted as in later Middle English. Moreover, in early Middle English, there is another *littera* with which 'þ' and 'y' are easily confusable – 'ƿ' (wynn).

In some early Middle English scripts, the shortening of the ascender of 'þ' that makes it potentially confusable with 'y' can cause equal or even closer resemblance to 'ƿ', both 'þ' and 'ƿ' being lobed characters from the start. The functions [θ∼ð] and [w] may thus be represented by the same *figura*, whether it be <þ>-like or <ƿ>-like. There are also clinal *figurae*. As with 'þ' and 'y', therefore, 'þ' and 'ƿ' may be formally and functionally distinct, formally and functionally confused, clinal, or distinct formally but confused functionally.

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[5] For the palaeographic terminology used here see Parkes (1969) and Roberts (2005).

2.1   The <þ> and <y>/<p> cline: London, British Library, Cotton Caligula A ix, part II

Cotton Caligula A ix (hereafter C) contains one of the two surviving versions of *The Owl and the Nightingale* (*O&N*). It is written in a single hand dated to the second half of the thirteenth century and the script is Textura semiquadrata. The C scribe uses a cline of shapes for 'þ' and 'p' (Stanley 1960: 9–10; Laing 1998: note 14; Cartlidge 2001: l–li). 'p' is usually dotted, and 'þ' not, though there are exceptions in both cases. The C scribe rarely uses the *littera* 'y', preferring 'ȝ' for [j] and 'i' for [i]. He does however use 'y' very occasionally for [i]. His 'y' is identical to his 'p'. For examples of the cline of shapes for 'þ', 'p' and 'y', and illustration of their functions, see figure 1.[6]

   These alternations in C are 'purely graphic'. This is shown by the fact that there is usually no difficulty in reading the correct *littera* from any one *figura* according to which linguistic item is being represented. However, there is a source of possible ambiguity for the reader in the C scribe's forms for THEN/WHEN and THERE/WHERE, which may reflect Old English initials in either *h p-* or *þ-*, and for which therefore an ambiguous initial *figura* <þ/p> can lead to multiple lexical identifications (Cartlidge 2001: l–li). Whether or not these ambiguities were in the C scribe's head when he wrote his text is unknowable. If the *figurae* for 'þ' and 'p' were identical or clinal in his exemplar, the C scribe might have had the same difficulty as we do. Where there is potestatic ambiguity there may be litteral confusion as well as figural confusion. In this case the potestatic ambiguity lies in the fact that there is a choice between reading [θ] and [w] depending on the word intended. This case illustrates one kind of potestatic ambiguity: where a given *figura* maps to more than one *littera* and hence to more than one *potestas*, and context does not always reliably indicate lexical identity.

2.2   <þ/p> + <y> confusion

2.2.1   Cambridge, Gonville and Caius 234/120, Ancrene Riwle
Most early Middle English confusers of <þ> with <p> show something of a cline, as the C scribe does. One, however, the scribe of Gonville and Caius *Ancrene Riwle* (hereafter G)[7] consistently uses a single lobed *figura* for both functions. It is neither a prototypical 'þ', since it always lacks an ascender, nor a prototypical 'p', since it has a very long descender. Sometimes the lobe is left slightly open at the top. The G scribe

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[6] The *figurae* and word-shapes in the figures are traced from microfilm copies of the original manuscripts. The sizes of the traced words depend on the magnification used in the making of the microfilm; they do not necessarily match their sizes in the original. It was not practicable to arrange for photographs to be made of so many individual examples; we have therefore used tracings for convenience. Considerable care has been taken in making them, but inevitably the results are somewhat more impressionistic than photographs would be. It has not been possible, for instance, to replicate the fineness of the hairlines in some of the hands. Such strokes therefore may appear heavier here than they are in manuscript. However, it is the basic shapes of the *figurae* that are at issue here, and these are what the tracings indicate.

[7] The observations and citations given here are mostly taken from the sample of this text tagged for *LAEME*, viz pp. 1–59 of the manuscript, which is paginated not foliated. For convenience we also give here references to Wilson's (1954) edition.

ꝥ ꝥ̇

a. Ideal <þ> and ideal <p>/<y>

ꝥarto

b. Ideal <þ> in context in *þarto* THERETO (fol. 239va, line 898)

ẏdel ꝥel

c. Ideal <y> and <p> in context in *ydel pel* IDLE WELL (fol. 239va, line 917)

boꝥe

d. Thorn-shaped <p> undotted in *bope* BOUGH (fol. 242ra, line 1244)

ꝥ̇as

e. Wynn-shaped <þ> dotted in *þas* THAT genitive (fol. 243va, line 1442)

ꝥi ꝺꝥeole

f. **Wynn-shaped <þ> and wynn-shaped <p> both undotted in** *þi dpeole* THY
MISLEADING [SONG] (fol. 239vb, line 926)

leꝥ

g. Thorn-shaped <y> undotted in *ley* LAY (3rd sg past ind of LIE) (fol. 243vb, line
1494)

Figure 1. Examples from the Cotton *Owl and the Nightingale*

has a separate *figura* for 'y', made up of a long back-curving first stroke and a short
second stroke meeting the first at the baseline. The *figura* is not lobed but open, and is
usually (though not always) dotted between the two arms. See figure 2 for illustration

a. The G scribe's <þ/p> *figurae*,   and <y> *figurae*

b. <þ/p> for [θ, ð] in *þenne* THEN (MS p. 8, line 4) and *oþer* OR (MS p. 5, line 3)

c. <þ/p> for [w] in *þei* way (MS p. 6, line 9) and *spiþe* (MS p. 5, line 11)

d. <y> for [i] dotted in *apay* (MS p. 7, line 22) and undotted in *ytimbrid* CONSTRUCTED (MS p. 3, line 6)

e. <y> for [w] in *ye* for WE (MS p. 2, line 14) and *cyic* for QUICK (MS p. 22, line 14)
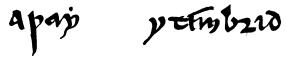
Figure 2. Examples from Cambridge, Gonville and Caius 234/120, *Ancrene Riwle*

of the G scribe's <þ/p> and <y>. He uses 'y' (beside much more usual 'i') for [i] both syllabic and nonsyllabic.[8] He does not use 'y' for [j]; for this he regularly employs 'g' and rarely 'i'.[9] However, there are a few examples of the G scribe's <y>-shape (undotted) being used for [w] – a confusion of function rather than form. See e.g. *ye* for

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[8] The import of the term syllabic is obvious. By nonsyllabic [i] we mean the second elements of diphthongs. We use the symbol [j] to indicate the 'semi-vowel' that occurs in syllable onsets.

[9] These both hark back to Old English. 'g' for [j] (as well as for [g] and [ɣ]) is normal Old English usage. For subsequent figural and functional changes see section 3 below. 'i' for [j] is a minority usage in Old English: see Campbell (1959: section 54).

WE (manuscript p. 2, line 14; Wilson 1954: 2, line 29) and *cyic* for QUICK (manuscript p. 22, line 14; Wilson 1954: 12, line 11).[10] Scribe G's system has potentially the same built-in potestatic ambiguity in THEN/WHEN and THERE/WHERE, etc. contexts as the C scribe's system.[11] We will return to the G scribe's usage later.

2.2.2 *Cambridge, Trinity College B.14.39 (323), Scribe A*

Trinity College B.14.39 is a manuscript containing pieces in prose and verse in Latin, Anglo-French and English. At least four hands contribute to the English texts, all of which may be dated to the last quarter of the thirteenth century. Two of them (A and D) are particularly prodigal in their litteral substitution. We will begin by considering Scribe A's usage with regard to 'þ', 'y' and 'p'. For [w], he tends to favour 'w', but also employs a <þ>-shaped *figura* for [w][12] as well as for [θ∼ð]. The *figura* is variable, the lobe sometimes being left a little open at the top perhaps because the hairline stroke fails to 'hold'. However, the *figura* is mostly more prototypically <þ>-like than <p>-like, in that it usually has a clear ascender above minim height. Scribe A also uses 'v/u' for [w] and 'w' beside 'v/u' for [v], including historical initial *f-* (see further Laing 1999: tables 3 and 4). The interpretation of his usage is made more difficult by the fact that while his 'p' is <þ>-shaped, his 'v' is not unlike some scribes' realisation of <p>. Scribe A's <v> *figura* often has the second stroke meet the first only about half way down instead of near the foot. In these cases it is tempting to read it as a <p>, but it appears in such a form in his Latin text (e.g. in *vigili*, fol. 19r) and the second part of his normal ligatured <w> also matches it in shape, so Brown (1932) and Reichl (1973) are right to read it as <v>. See figure 3 for examples of Scribe A's relevant letter shapes.

Scribe A distinguishes the *figurae* <þ> and <y> but he confuses their functions. Like the G scribe, Scribe A makes his 'y' with a long back-curving first stroke and a short second stroke meeting the first at the baseline; it is always dotted. The functional confusion is not symmetrical. <y> is never used for [θ∼ð] nor for [j] but appears for [i] both syllabic and nonsyllabic. (It appears once only for [w] in *syikel* (< OE *swicol*) DECEITFUL.) However, <þ/p> is used in 'y' contexts both for [j], and for nonsyllabic [i]. In these functional contexts, where <þ/p> is being used neither for the etymologically appropriate [θ∼ð] nor for the etymologically appropriate [w], we transcribe *þ*: e.g. *iþeuene* GIVEN, *paþede* PAID and *ioþe* (alternating with *ioye*) JOY. As well as in these
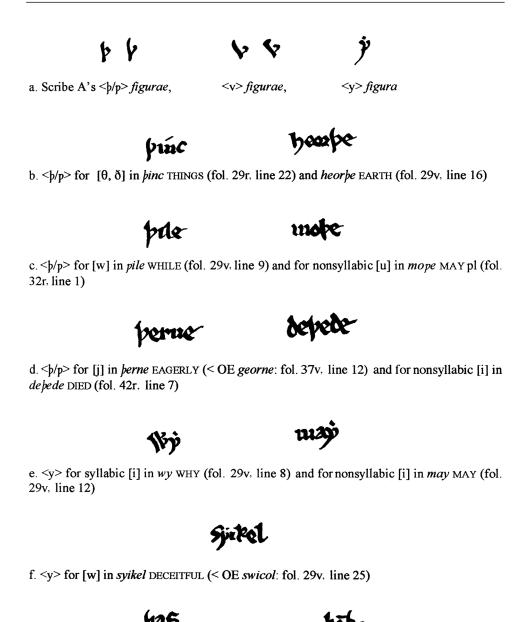
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[10] Though Wilson in each case transcribes it as 'p' without comment. This usage is a clear litteral substitution rather than a figural equivalence.

[11] In the C scribe's usage opportunities for ambiguity are common, because his normal spellings for OE *hw*-words lack 'h'. Figurally equivalent <þ/p> therefore appears initially in all such words. In the G scribe's usage, OE *hw*- words are almost always spelled *hp*- and only rarely *p*-. Note also that he occasionally added initial 'h' to an OE *hw*- word that he originally wrote with 'p' alone. Nevertheless, ambiguity in the unchanged examples was sufficient occasionally to lead Wilson (1954) astray in printing the ambiguous *figura* as 'þ' in e.g. *þenne* WHEN (18/22), which should probably be transcribed *penne* because the other texts here all have forms in *hp*-. We take any level of potestatic/litteral ambiguity to be significant because it is via such avenues that prodigal systems are generated.

[12] Scribe A's contributions to Trinity are on fols. 19r, 25rb, 25v, 28r–29v, 32r–33v, 36r–46r, 47r–v, 83v–84r. <þ>-shaped <p> for [w] is found from fol. 29r and especially from fol. 33v.

þ ʄ   v v   ẏ

a. Scribe A's <þ/p> *figurae,*   <v> *figurae,*   <y> *figura*

þinc   heorþe

b. <þ/p> for [θ, ð] in *þinc* THINGS (fol. 29r, line 22) and *heorþe* EARTH (fol. 29v, line 16)

þile   moþe

c. <þ/p> for [w] in *þile* WHILE (fol. 29v, line 9) and for nonsyllabic [u] in *moþe* MAY pl (fol. 32r, line 1)

þerne   deþede

d. <þ/p> for [j] in *þerne* EAGERLY (< OE *georne*: fol. 37v, line 12) and for nonsyllabic [i] in *deþede* DIED (fol. 42r, line 7)

wy   may

e. <y> for syllabic [i] in *wy* WHY (fol. 29v, line 8) and for nonsyllabic [i] in *may* MAY (fol. 29v, line 12)

syikel

f. <y> for [w] in *syikel* DECEITFUL (< OE *swicol*: fol. 29v, line 25)

5af   honk3

g. Scribe A's unique 5-shaped *figura,* apparently for yogh, in *5af* GAVE (fol. 36v, line 13) and his <3>-shaped syllabic for *-et* in *honk3* HANG pl. (fol. 83v, line 11)

Figure 3. Examples from Cambridge, Trinity College B.14.39 (323), Scribe A

diphthongs of French origin, <þ/ρ> is found for nonsyllabic [i] also in native Germanic words, e.g. *eþen* EYES, *deþen* DIE (beside *deyþe* once),[13] *heþe* (alternating with *hey* and *hei*) HIGH, and note *daiþe* (alternating with *dai* and *day*) DAY. Scribe A's own writing system probably did not include 'ȝ'.[14]

3 Excursus on 'ȝ'

Middle English 'ȝ' formally develops from Old English insular 'g' (<ᵹ>). The history of the *littera* 'g' from Old to Middle English is complex:

> In Anglo-Saxon scripts insular 'g' (<ᵹ>) served for [g], [j] and [ɣ] and, in combination with <c> (or sometimes just doubled), for medial [dʒ:]. Before the Conquest, Caroline script was reserved for the writing of Latin. The post-Conquest adoption of Caroline minuscule for the writing also of English introduced a new *figura* for 'g' (<g>). Some early Middle English scribes . . . simply transferred the composite functions of insular 'g' to Caroline 'g'. But there gradually emerged a new consensus. This was to use Caroline 'g' for [g] and [dʒ], while insular 'g' (whose shape developed from <ᵹ> to <ȝ>, and is thereafter perceived as a different *littera* – yogh) retained the functions of [j] and [ɣ]. Later, in some systems, yogh was also adopted (with or without the support of <h>) for [x], a function carried out in Old English by <h>, and in later Middle English and beyond also by <gh>. (Laing 2008: 8–9)[15]

In *LAEME* 'ᵹ' and 'ȝ' are transcribed according to manuscript *figura*. Judgements as to whether the shape (as opposed to any developments in function) is classifiable as one or the other in particular early Middle English scripts are sometimes problematic. There are intermediate shapes between classic insular 'g' forms and forms that have not fully 'arrived' at the varying 3-shaped *figurae* of later Middle English. The decision to keep them separate in *LAEME* was made to allow us to observe diachronic development in

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[13] By the thirteenth century it is possible that in words with OE *-eg-* or ON *-ey-* the [ei] had already become [i:], but the spellings here do not suggest this.

[14] Scribe A uses a <ȝ>-shaped symbol on fol. 83v in *honkȝ* HANG (3rd pl. pres. ind.). In this case the symbol is not historically the *littera* yogh, but the syllabic abbreviation for *-et* from Latin and French usage (on this see further section 4.4.2 below). In two other places in his output, Scribe A uses a symbol that we take to be functioning as a yogh, but which is unlike any other <ȝ>-shape that we have come across. The only clear example is on fol. 36v in the word *ȝaf* GAVE, where <ȝ> is a *figura* that starts with a curved stroke well above the baseline, as if for the first stroke of a 'c', 'e' or 't' above the line. From this a vertical stroke is drawn to the baseline. The final *figura* is exactly like one of the commonly used shapes for Arabic figure 5 in medieval scripts. Arabic numbers were not commonly found early in Middle English (though Dan Michel employed them extensively in the section numbering of *Ayenbite*). If Scribe A deliberately substituted a number-shape for a letter, this is (as far as we know) unique. This same shape is found in some Visigothic scripts for the *littera* 'g', but this is most likely a coincidence. The only other possible example of yogh in Scribe A's usage is on fol. 36r in the word *?hai[ȝ]en* (?OUGHT < OE *āgan*) but the letter here is neither like 'normal' yogh nor like the 5-shaped symbol. It seems likely that Scribe A's own writing system did not include yogh and that both these examples are in some sense fudged.

[15] In the article quoted, the symbol <g> to denote the *figura* for Caroline 'g' was employed because the newly adopted shape with the single upper compartment was important for the discussion. In this article we will use the normal modern two-compartment symbol <g> because we wish only to distinguish Caroline 'g' of any subsequently developed shape from insular 'g' (<ᵹ>) and its later development 'yogh' (<ȝ>).

figura as well as in function. However, there is never any problem in distinguishing between the <ȝ/ʒ> *figurae* and the <þ/ƿ> *figurae*.

4   The addition of 'ʒ' to the substitution set

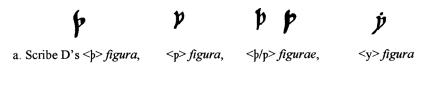### 4.1   *Cambridge Trinity College B.14.39 (323), Scribe D*

Scribe D writes two texts, *Orison to Our Lady* (fols. 81v–82r) and *The Proverbs of Alfred* (*PofA*: fols. 85r–87v). First we will describe Scribe D's usage with regard to 'þ', 'ƿ' and 'y'. In *Orison* he writes 'w' to the exclusion of 'ƿ' for [w]. In *PofA*, however, 'ƿ' is much preferred, especially after the first few stanzas.[16] There seems to be some initial attempt to differentiate the shapes of 'þ' and 'ƿ' in *PofA*, but this is very soon abandoned and the previous cline reduced to a <þ>-shaped symbol, which is used for the functions of both. For examples see figure 4.

Scribe D's usage is like that of Scribe A in that the <þ/ƿ> *figura* and <y> are distinct in shape and confused in function. Again the functional confusion is not symmetrical, and for these *figurae* is identical to that of Scribe A (section 2.2.2). His system, however, includes the use of 'ʒ' for some of the functions listed above, where Scribe A's does not. To summarise: in Scribe D's writing system <þ/ƿ> often appears (beside <ʒ>) for [j] and occasionally (beside <i> and <y>) for nonsyllabic [i]. <y> is not only never used for [θ~ð] but it is not used for [j] either. Its function is confined to syllabic or nonsyllabic [i] for which <i> is also commonly used.

Scribe D's use of 'ʒ' is peculiar. In *Orison* 'ʒ' does not appear at all. In *PofA*, however, the *figura* <ʒ> is used, as one might expect, for [j] (e.g. *ʒung* YOUNG) and for [x~ç] (e.g. *taʒte* TAUGHT, *driʒten* LORD). It is used (also expectedly) for OE -*g*- (e.g. *daʒes* DAYS, *amorʒe* AMORROW) where historically it stood for [ɣ]. However, in these contexts it is arguable that <ʒ> could stand for some form of nonsyllabic [u] ([w]).[17] The rationale for this suggestion is that it alternates with <w> and <þ/ƿ>, for historical [ɣ], in e.g. *laʒe*, *lawe* and *laƿe* LAW. The status of this 'ʒ'~'w'/'ƿ' alternation is uncertain. Middle English [ɣ] was certainly on its way to becoming [u] at this time, but whether the textual alternation represents a completed sound change with which the orthography has not yet caught up, or a case of lexical diffusion, is undecidable. What is clear is that Scribe D also sometimes writes <ʒ> instead of <w> or <þ/ƿ> for historical [w], e.g. *ʒerlde* WORLD, *ʒise* WISE, *roʒen* TO ROW, *saʒin* SOWN. Moreover, it also appears for historic [v] twice (in *heʒe[de]* HAD, *perʒe* for OE *weorf* (after preposition) BEAST FOR RIDING) where the environment could also accept the *litterae* 'w' or 'ƿ', since Scribe D sometimes uses these for medial [v]. <ʒ> also appears once for [θ(:)] in *praʒed* WRATHED (past participle).

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a. Scribe D's <þ> *figura,*   <p> *figura,*   <þ/p> *figurae,*   <y> *figura*

b. <þ/p> for [θ, ð] in *þoch* THOUGH (fol. 85vb, line 1) and *peleþe* WEALTH (fol. 85vb, line 1)

c. <þ/p> for [w] in *porde* WORD (fol. 86ra, line 14), for nonsyllabic [u] in *þeþes* HABITS (< OE *þēaw*: fol. 86rb, line 14) and for [v] in *hapen* HAVE (fol. 86rb, line 22)

d. <þ/p> for [j] in *þif* IF (fol. 86rb, line 29) and for nonsyllabic [i] in *saþe* SAY (fol. 86va, line 34)

e. <y> for syllabic [i] in *yuil* EVIL (fol. 85rb, line 33) and for nonsyllabic [i] in *may* MAY (fol. 85rb, line 32)

f. <ȝ> for [j] in *ȝif* IF (fol. 86rb, line 29), for [x] in *taȝte* TAUGHT (fol. 85vb, line 26), for historical [ɣ] in *daȝes* DAYS (fol. 86vb, line 23) and for [w] in *ȝerlde* WORLD (fol. 85va, line 10)

Figure 4. Examples from Cambridge, Trinity College B.14.39 (323), Scribe D

The writing of <ȝ> for <þ/p> has traditionally been put down to the ignorance of Anglo-Norman scribes.[18] But as Benskin (1982: 20–1) puts it:

If, however, we observe that <þ> and <y> are as letter-shapes not distinguished, and that when <þ/y> corresponds to a [j]-segment, it is equivalent to <ȝ>, writing <ȝ> for

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[18] See e.g. Skeat (1907: xiv–xxii); Arngart (1955: 31), but contrast Clark (1992). On this see further Laing (1999: 259–61) and references.

<þ> is merely a case of back-spelling: if, for example, 'year' can be spelled either <þer> or <ʒer>, then it is not unreasonable for 'that' to be spelled either in the traditional way, with <þ>, or as <ʒat>. Notice that in order to make this substitution, the scribe has to know the language: a Norman monoglot could perpetuate such a system, but he could scarcely invent it.

Scribe D is no doubt unusual in being such a florid <ʒ> substituter, but there is evidence that he was not alone.

4.2   Indications of the addition of 'ʒ' in Cotton O&N

Evidence for complex litteral interchanges is not always directly accessible. Sometimes it comes in the form of show-throughs from a copyist's exemplar, where the system of the copyist himself would not normally display the phenomenon in question. The exemplar for *O&N* and the other texts in Cotton Caligula A ix is known as X. It is generally accepted that X was common to the two surviving copies of *O&N* (the other being that in Oxford, Jesus College 29 (J)). The C scribe of *O&N* is a well-known literatim copyist whose language reflects closely that of his exemplar. This is clear from the two distinct types of language, C1 and C2, that alternate in his text. It is assumed that these were faithfully transmitted from X, where the two types may have been the work of two different scribes. The evidence of the C scribe's copy suggests that not only did X's writing system have similar *figurae* for 'þ' and 'p' (<þ/p>), but that it could also allow occasional substitution of <ʒ> for <þ/p> and vice versa. Two clear examples are (from language C1) *soʒe* SOOTH (184, J *soþe*) and (from language C2) *ʒif* WIFE (1469) (J *wif*). Further show-throughs are observable in corrected forms in C1: *poʒe* < OE *wōh* CROOKED (815, with <p> corrected from a partially erased <ʒ>); *þin* THINE (990, with <þ> corrected from <ʒ> by overwriting); *noþeles* NONETHELESS (679, with <þ> corrected from <ʒ> by overwriting). Since the C scribe strongly prefers <ʒ> to <y> for [j], another probable example of interchange between <ʒ> and <þ/p> is *underþat* UNDERSTOOD (1091, J *underyat*).[19] It is evident from this that the scribe of X had <þ/p> + <ʒ> confusion.[20]

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[19] 'Compare also (l. 1403) C's *ʒeoneþ* "gape after" with J's *wunneþ* "strive after". Whatever the first consonant in X, it seems that the two copyists have interpreted the figural equivalence differently' (Laing 2007: 466–7).

[20] One result of this interpretation of the X scribe's behaviour has been the possibility of suggesting four new readings, all based on <þ/p> and <ʒ> substitutions, for hitherto recalcitrant cruces in the text of *O&N* (Laing 2007: 462–73). Other early Middle English texts show signs that their exemplars may have had similar substitutions involving 'ʒ'. The scribe of *Genesis and Exodus* (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 444) uses the *littera* 'g' not only for [g] but also for [j] and [ɣ] where other Middle English writing systems would more commonly use 'ʒ' (or 'y') for the former and 'ʒ' (or '(g)h') for the latter. The scribe shows no signs of historical irregularity in his use of 'þ' and 'p', but on fol. 7v of *Genesis and Exodus* there are three examples of *gu* for THOU. This suggests that the scribe's exemplar may have had <þ/ʒ> or <þ/y> equivalence. The scribe of the Lambeth Homilies (London, Lambeth Palace Library MS 487) normally uses 'þ', 'p' and 'ð' in historically appropriate functions. But there are a few spellings that suggest miscopying from his exemplar: *pu* for THOU, *punres* for THUNDERS, *penien* for OE *þegnian* SERVE, and conversely *þeorð* (< OE *peorð*) BECOMES, *þe* for WE (4x). All these readings suggest that his exemplar had <þ/p> confusion. The Lambeth scribe also has *peorne* for OE *georne* EAGERLY and *pe* for YE, suggesting that the exemplar might also have had <þ/p/ʒ> or <þ/p/y/ʒ>

4.3 Indications of the addition of 'ʒ' in Gonville and Caius *Ancrene Riwle*[21]

The evidence for interchange of <þ/ƿ> and <ʒ> in Gonville and Caius is more equivocal than that cited above for Cotton *O&N*. The G scribe himself does not use 'ʒ' at all. For [j] he regularly employs 'g' and rarely 'i'. He does however also occasionally write <þ/ƿ> for [j]. In our tagged sample we have noted the following: *þe* YE, *þet* YET, *þatte* GATE, *underþeten* (< OE *-gitan*) UNDERSTAND, *chircþard* CHURCHYARD.[22] The G scribe does not use his separate <y> *figura* for [j] nor for [θ~ð]. The only functional confusion for <y> is two instances where it appears for [w] (see section 2.2.1 above). The G scribe's own system seems normally to reserve <y> for vocalic use. It seems unlikely therefore that the examples of <þ/ƿ> for [j] cited above can be explained as substitution of <þ/ƿ> for <y>. It is possible that these have a more complex explanation.

Note the following: *druhiegh* DRY (3rd plural present indicative). Here the verbal ending is puzzling. For the present indicative plural of Old English class II weak verbs the G scribe uses elsewhere the following endings: *-ed*, *-ied*, *-et*, *-eð*, *-ieð* and in other types of verb plurals also *-eth*. That is, he uses both fricative and stop symbols in

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confusion. This possibility is supported by the fact that on fol. 44v there is a piece about Christ being THE WAY where *þeþes* was probably written in mistake for exemplar *þeʒes* or *þeyes*. All these examples are from the part of the Lambeth Homilies labelled 'Language 1' in *LAEME*.

[21] In the discussion of G here and in section 5.3 below, we frequently express views that differ from those in Scahill (2009). Many of Scahill's observations are based on the premise (2009: 92) that the G scribe was an 'incompetent' copyist whose 'knowledge of English... often fails him'. Our own work on the text leads us to very different conclusions. Scahill's account also supposes that the G scribe's exemplar was in 'pristine' AB-like language. The exemplar itself does not survive. The only evidence we have for its linguistic status is that indirectly provided by G, which evidence, in our opinion, rather suggests that the exemplar was itself in a prodigal writing system. The idea that the G scribe was not a native writer of English stems primarily from efforts to account for his assumed incompetence. The notion that the G scribe was 'trained abroad' was first expressed by Neil Ker (in Wilson 1954: xi–xiii). Ker's opinion is based on the scribe's supposed difficulties with English letters, and the shape of his 'r'. Ker points out that the G scribe makes his <r> as a short 'v'-shaped *figura* to which he then adds a tail; this Ker assumes to be 'an adaptation of the Continental form [of 'r'] to English usage'. He claims that the first 'v'-shaped short element is common on the Continent but rare in England (though oddly he identifies the shape by reference to 'r' no. 10 in Johnson & Jenkinson's (1915: 41) book on *English Court Hand*). This type of short 'r' is not in fact unusual in English hands of the thirteenth century, especially those with cursive tendencies (there are many examples in the main hand of Digby 86) and it is a shape that shows the early beginnings of the longer 'v'-shaped Anglicana 'r'. Ker says that G's script shows 'no specifically English features'; but this is misleading. In fact there are no specifically *non*-English features. We quote from *LAEME*, Auxiliary Data Sets, Index of Sources, entry for Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College 234/120, Evidence and Comments: 'Malcolm Parkes (pers. comm. 2002) says that *pace* NRK, the addition of descenders to 'f', 's' and 'r' is a phenomenon that appears in other English book hands of early C13.' References to illustrations of such formations are given in the same passage in *LAEME*. It continues: 'Moreover, the G scribe, far from having an imperfect command of orthography, is similar to many other early Middle English scribes in his use of certain litteral substitution sets...The G scribe was not incapable of error, and his script suggests that he copied at great speed, which would tend to make errors even more likely, but it is not credible that someone who struggled with competence in English would have had any incentive to copy out a long text in that language, or that anyone else would have employed him to do so. Any "uncertainty" in the G scribe's use of the Old English letter shapes is just as likely to have been triggered by different sets of litteral substitutions from his own being used in his exemplar.' To conclude, there is no evidence that the G scribe was anything but a native English speaker and writer, or had any problems with the recognition of English letters or words. We will treat his output under this assumption.

[22] Note also from Scahill (2009: note 26) *þer* corrected to *ger* YEAR, and *geren* corrected to *þeren* WERE.

these endings (as well as elsewhere).[23] The ending *-iegh* is clearly anomalous. The sequence *gh* here is the equivalent in his system of *d*, *t, th* or *ð*, and presumably must therefore stand for [d], [t] or [θ]. The simplest explanation is to assume that the G scribe's exemplar, unlike the G scribe himself, had (at least sometimes) <ʒ> for [j], and also occasionally <ʒ> for <þ>. If this were the case, wherever he found <ʒ> for [j], the G scribe would need to translate it to his own normal usage for [j], namely <g>. If the exemplar scribe was an occasional <þ>/<ʒ> substituter, then we may suppose that in the case of *druhiegh* the G scribe had in front of him something like **druhieʒ(h)* and automatically substituted <g> for <ʒ> in his copy without taking account of the sound involved. There is another piece of evidence that may support this intricate interpretation.

On p. 119 of the manuscript[24] the G text has (Wilson 1954: 56/14–16): *Ah þat / god ded him. oþer hapied idon him. oþer him / oþer hire. Magen ha understonden gif ha / þel biþohten.* This might be translated '. . . but which God does for him or hath done for him (either for him or for her). They may understand if they bethought themselves well. . .' However, the G version here is not the same as the other early Middle English copies of *Ancrene Riwle.* These all have close variants of the text preserved in version A (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 402), fol. 53v (Tolkien 1962: 103/14–16): *ah þ̄ godd deð him. oðer haueð idon him. / oðer him oðer hire. mare þen ha understont ʒef ha / hire þel biþohte.* This might be translated '. . . but which God does for him or hath done for him (either for him or for her), more than she understands if she bethought herself well . . .'. The G scribe's *Magen* corresponds to the consensus (and probably authorial) reading *mare þen.* G's anomalous text may be explained by assuming that the version behind G, whether in its proximate exemplar or further back in the copying history, had something like *ma ʒen going back to *ma þen as a variant of *mare þen.* The creation of a plural verb form out of a comparative construction in G then demanded the substitution of a plural ending also for *biþohten*, an alteration facilitated by the formal equivalence of *ha* for both SHE and THEY.

It is difficult to account for either *druhiegh* or *Magen* in G without invoking interchange of <þ> and <ʒ> in the exemplar. This in turn gives further support for accounting for *þe*, *þet*, *þatte*, *underþeten* and *chircþard* in the same way.

4.4   Avenues for the addition of 'ʒ' to the substitution set

4.4.1   Via [j]

The *litterae* 'y' and 'ʒ' overlap in usage for the *potestas* [j]. Like 'y', 'ʒ' can represent [j] both initially and also intervocalically in the context of front vowels. In writing

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[23] Scahill (2009: 92) says that the G scribe uses 'ð' and 'd' 'at random' because 'whatever lexical and semantic knowledge he has of English fails him'. See Lass & Laing (forthcoming 2009) for the argument that his use of stop and fricative *litterae* for dentals reflects not lack of knowledge but a variable sound change observable in many early Middle English writing systems including those of the Corpus *Ancrene Wisse*, Bodley 34 and other texts of the 'AB' tradition which no one would claim were written by non-English scribes. See too section 5.3 below for evidence that G's system represents unexceptionable if somewhat idiosyncratic English praxis.

[24] The quotations in this section do not form part of the *LAEME* tagged samples. In the quotations, / indicates a manuscript line end.

systems with figural equivalence or functional confusion of 'þ', 'p' and 'y', the *figurae* <þ> and <p> (or <þ/p>), not normally associated with [j], are usable for [i~j] in addition to their respective traditional *potestates*. In such systems, then, <þ>, <p> or <þ/p> are able to represent any or all of [θ~ð], [w] and [i~j] and so is <y>. Therefore <ȝ> can also be used wherever <þ>, <p> or <þ/p> are used.

4.4.2   *Via the* -et *syllabic*

The *figura* <ȝ> when used word finally may not have its origins in the *littera* 'ȝ' but may derive from the abbreviation for -*et* found in Latin and French, especially in verbal endings (see note 14 above). The orthographic practice can be transferred to the writing of indicative verb endings in Middle English, whether the written-out equivalents be -*et* or -*eþ, -eð, -eth* and irrespective of whether the scribe's spoken language may have had fricative or stop variants. Although <ȝ> in these contexts was originally a syllabic sign, it could be reinterpreted as a simple consonant and combined with a preceding vowel, whence its further reinterpretation as [θ] (Benskin in *LALME*: 3, xv (section 14.6)). This phenomenon is not as common in early Middle English as it is later, and we do not discuss it further.[25]

4.4.3   *Via* [ɣ]

As a result of the sound to symbol remappings between Old and Middle English discussed in section 3 above, insular 'ᵹ' lost its association with the voiced velar stop. In most early Middle English writing systems, [g] is represented by Caroline 'g' (<g>), which was also normally used for [dʒ] (other than in initial position where 'i' was usual, e.g. *ioye* JOY). Occasionally Caroline 'g' was also employed (with or without the addition of 'h') for the old intervocalic uses of insular 'ᵹ'. Thus [ɣ] may be written 'g' or 'gh', *dag(h)es* beside *daȝes* DAYS. The 'new' *littera* 'ȝ' (Laing 1999: 255, table 4) took over the use of 'ᵹ' to represent [j] and most frequently [ɣ] too. It also, to some extent, and in some writing systems, took over from Old English 'h' the functions of [x~ç].[26]

   If 'ȝ' can be used for [ɣ], it has the potential to be used for anything that [ɣ] becomes. Litteral history is carried along on the back of phonetic history. By the first half of the thirteenth century there is already evidence of the vocalisation of [ɣ]. For instance, the Worcester Tremulous Scribe has spellings of DAYS (< OE *daᵹas*) with medial 'p'

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[25] Another possible function for the *figura* <ȝ>, again more common in later Middle English, is for [z] (though <ⱬ>- and <ⱬ>-shapes also appear in this function). Since the <ȝ>-shape was also a syllabic, its use in verbal inflections can therefore show another ambiguity. The *potestates* of <ȝ> and <z> (i.e. whether they stand for [(e)θ] or for [z] and by transference [s]) have to be established from reference to the rest of a scribe's writing system. For instance, the scribe of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* has a special usage for monosyllabic verbs: *dotȝ, gotȝ, hatȝ, watȝ*. Here <tȝ> is adapted from Old French where <z> and <tz> represented [ts]. This [ts] simplified to [s] in the thirteenth century (or earlier), so <tz~tȝ> then became possible spellings for [s] whether in Anglo-French or Middle English. The use of <ȝ> for [z] is not part of our discussion here.

[26] Beside continued use of 'h' and a number of other *litterae* and compound *litterae* including: 'g(h)' '(c)ch', 'hg'. For [xt~çt] there are many more possible combinations mostly with additional 't'. For examples from the usage of all four hands of Cambridge Trinity College B.14.39 (323) see the quotation from *LAEME* Introduction in section 1.1 above.

beside medial 'ȝ'. In the mid thirteenth century we find the two scribes of Laȝamon A spelling DAYS with both medial 'w' and medial 'ȝ'.

We have already noted for the late thirteenth century the alternation of 'ȝ' with 'w' and 'þ/ƿ' for historical [ɣ] in e.g. *laȝe*, *lawe* and *laƿe* LAW. By this date spellings in 'u', 'v', 'w' and 'ƿ' are commonplace. Some early thirteenth-century scribes adopt a different solution – the use of 'h'. We will return to this in section 5.3 below.

5   'h' and lenition

Changes in spelling may be either phonetically or nonphonetically motivated. We have already seen some examples of nonphonetic motivation: similarities in shape lie behind the possibilities of 'þ', 'ƿ' and 'y' entering into substitution sets. In contrast, the use of 'w' and 'ƿ' for the reflexes of Old English intervocalic *-g-*, as discussed in the previous section, is motivated by a phonetic change – vocalisation of [ɣ]. There are also 'mixed' cases in which combinations of phonological and orthographic change trigger alterations of sound/symbol mappings, creating what might be called 'floating *figurae*'.

The discussion so far illustrates how remappings of *litterae*, *figurae* and *potestates* during the transition between Old and Middle English caused the *figurae* <þ>, <y>, <ƿ> and <ȝ> in some writing systems to become floating. That is, they are 'unanchored' from their original potestatic moorings and can therefore be redeployed. Different scribes adopt different local remappings of sound to symbol, which vary depending on which floating *figurae* they happen to utilise. Figural redeployments may have implications for individual scribes' perceptions of the boundaries of particular *litterae*, which in their turn may become floating.[27]

5.1   *London, British Library, Arundel 248*

Arundel 248 contains on fols. 154r–155r four religious lyrics with musical notation (Brown 1932: 75–80, 83–5). The hand is dated to the last quarter of the thirteenth century. The writing system has features that are of great interest to our present discussion: they are fully described in Laing (2008: 31–4, 42–4). and we here present only a short summary. In initial position, the scribe deploys two floating *figurae*, <h> and <þ>, suggesting particular potestatic developments. The script shows no figural confusions, so we do not illustrate it here. The Arundel scribe shows alternations of initial 'h' and Ø, both in cases where there is etymological [h] and cases where there is not, indicating at least variable loss of historical initial [h]. This interchange happens in both lexical and grammatical words e.g. *auest* HAST (main verb), *im-self* HIMSELF and *houet* OWETH, *hure* OUR. There is also interchange between initial <h> and <þ> and Ø and <þ>, e.g. *þe* HE, *þauet* HAVETH, *þar-þan* ERETHAT, beside historical

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27 We have already seen a case of litteral drift (section 2.1 above) where figural equivalence of <þ> and <ƿ> leads to potestatic and therefore lexical ambiguity.

spellings. Additionally, <þ> is used initially in words with historical initial [j], e.g. *þif* IF, *þielde* YIELD. Initial <þ> is used historically in THE, THAT, THOU, THEE, THY (but compare *hin* THINE and *hese* (beside *þis*) THIS). Initial <þ> is also used historically in all nonpronominal words except for *hare* THERE.

The evidence of deletion and excrescence suggests that <h> used initially is virtually a null symbol.[28] If so, then its use even occasionally in [θ∼ð] contexts suggests that historical initial [θ∼ð] may sometimes also be weakened to zero in Arundel's system. This is not unexpected given the standard lenition hierarchy of oral fricative > laryngeal fricative > Ø (Lass & Anderson 1975: ch. V; Lass 1984: section 8.3.1).[29] If this weakening has occurred in Arundel's system, then it makes sense that the *figura* <þ> has here been partially 'unanchored' from its historical uses. It can thus represent either [h] (as its appearance in HE and HAVETH could imply), or zero (implying [h]-loss in HE and HAVETH) as its appearance initially in ERETHAT rather indicates. Laing (2008: 33–4) gives a summary of the likely explanations of the orthographic facts:

(1) Variable loss of initial [h], especially (but not exclusively) in low stressed words or contexts. <h> therefore becomes a symbol that used in initial position can imply either [h] or Ø.

(2) Reduction of unstressed initial [θ∼ð] to [h] or (given (1) above) to Ø. <þ> therefore becomes a symbol that used in initial position can imply [θ], [ð], [h] or Ø.

(3) (a) One explanation for the use of <þ> for initial [j] is that it is a purely orthographic substitution of <þ> for 'y' or <þ> for 'ʒ': both are paralleled in other early Middle English writing systems. This scribe does use the *figura* <y> in vocalic contexts; he does not use the *figura* <ʒ>. (b) However, given (2) above, it could be argued that the use of <þ> in these contexts might just possibly imply loss of initial [j] and substitution (or continued use) of a symbol that can imply Ø.

On the above evidence the Arundel scribe has the following LSS {'þ', 'h', 'Ø', ?'y'}.[30] As the examples indicate, the potential for potestatic ambiguity is very great. The Arundel scribe must have had some uncertainty about which *litterae* to relate to sounds that had changed. Here we surmise that these *litterae* themselves have, for the Arundel scribe, also become floating.

5.2 'h' in Maidstone Museum A.13

Maidstone Museum A.13 (hereafter M) is in several early thirteenth-century hands and contains mostly Latin. There are a few short texts and fragments in English. At least four of these, and possibly two others, are by the same rather variable hand. Two of the texts, a shortened version of *Proverbs of Alfred* (*PofA*) on fol. 93r and a version of

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[28] For a theoretically quite different interpretation of the import of absent and excrescent 'h', see Crisma (2007).

[29] Lenition of [θ] to [h] is not unusual. It occurs in a number of modern English varieties, e.g. Central Scots (e.g. [hɪŋk] THINK, [hɪŋ] THING) and RL's New York dialect, e.g. [hæŋks] THANKS.

[30] For the justification of zero as a potential member of a substitution set, see the discussion in *LAEME*, Introduction, chapter 2, section 2.5.

the lyric *Death's Wither-Clench* on fol. 93v, show usage that is relevant to our present discussion.

The M scribe clearly differentiates <ρ> from <þ>. In the first four stanzas of *PofA* he uses <w> in preference to <ρ>, but thereafter no <w> appears. Note that this change from <w>-usage to <ρ>-usage is paralleled in the version of *PofA* copied by Scribe D of Trinity, but there the switch is made a stanza earlier. In M <w> also appears three times for [j], in *wiuen* and *wyuen* for GIVE and *awen* for AGAINST. The avenue for this substitution is most easily explained as <ρ> for <ȝ> and then <w> for <ρ>.[31] Since <ρ> tends to interchange with <ȝ> via <þ/ρ> figural equivalence, this may suggest that the scribe of M's exemplar (like Scribe D of Trinity) confused <þ/ρ> and <ȝ>.[32] The M scribe himself presumably understood such a system but displays only <ρ>/<ȝ> confusion. However, his usage shows some additional complexity.

The M scribe also sometimes writes <h> where one would expect <þ>, and vice versa. He normally contrasts the shapes clearly, but they can be similar enough to make differentiation uncertain. At times the ascender of <h> crosses below the baseline and the curved limb hits the bottom of it, making it look like <þ>. Sometimes the descender of <þ> is short and the lobe lengthened so that it cuts the bottom of the descender rather than meeting it at the level of the baseline, making it look like a malformed <h>. There is in effect a cline of shapes for <þ/h> in much the same way as there can be clines for <þ/y> or for <þ/ρ>. See figure 5 for examples of clear <þ> and <h> *figurae* and ambiguous clinal ones. In all the examples cited below, the <þ> and <h> *figurae* are clear ends of the cline.

5.2.1   The deployment of 'h' in M
The M scribe appears to have litteral substitution of 'h' and 'þ'. But the situation is somewhat different from that of Arundel discussed in section 5.1 above. We set out all the etymological contexts for which the M scribe uses the *littera* 'h' and list also his spellings for historical 'h'.

The M scribe's uses of 'h'

(a) 'h' for historical initial [h], e.g. *him* HIM, *herte* HEART;
(b) 'h' for historical medial and final [x] e.g. *tahte* TAUGHT, *þoh* THOUGH;
(c) 'h' for historical medial [ç] in *miht* MIGHT, *drihten* (< OE *dryhten*) LORD;
(d) 'h' preceding 'ρ' for historical initial [h] in OE *hw*-, eg. *hρanne* WHEN, *hρo* WHO;
(e) 'h' following 'w' for historical *hw*- in *what* WHAT (once only – usually *hρ*-);
(f) 'h' following 'c' in the digraph for historical [tʃ], e.g. *child* CHILD, *-liche* -LY;
(g) 'h' following 's' in the digraph for historical [ʃ], e.g. *sholde* SHOULD (once only – usual spelling 'sc');
(h) 'h' following 't' in the digraph for historical [θ], e.g. *soweth* SOWETH;

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[31] Or for <y>, but the M scribe seems not to use <y> for [j], only for [i] whether syllabic or nonsyllabic. The single exception is for the letter name *ye* for <ȝ> in the list of letters and signs at the start of the text of *PofA*.
[32] The M scribe has a *figura* that is very similar to Old English insular <ȝ> formed with three strokes: a 't'-like shaft, a curved tail and a horizontal top stroke. This is therefore transcribed in *LAEME* as insular <ȝ>, but for the purposes of our present argument we can take it to be equivalent to <ȝ> because the M scribe uses an 8-shaped 'Gothic' <g> for [g] and for [dʒ].

a. Example of the M scribe's unambiguous <þ> *figura* and <h> *figura*

b. The M scribe's use of an unambiguous <þ> *figura* for historical [θ] in *þinge* THING (fol. 93rc, line 7) and for historical [h] in *þise* HIS (crossed through and then corrected: fol. 93rb, line 59)

c. The M scribe's use of an unambiguous <h> *figura* for historical [h] in *hauede* HAD (fol. 93ra, line 11), for historical [x] in *riht* RIGHT (fol. 93ra, line 5) and for historical [θ] in *wrakesih* MISERY (< OE *wracusīþ*: fol. 93r, line 15)

d. The M scribe's use of the ambiguous <þ/h> *figura* for historical [θ] in *peneþ/h* thinks (< OE *wēnan*: fol. 93rc, line 24) and *Drinkeþ/h* DRINKS (fol. 93rb, line 44) and for historical [ð] in *boþ/he* BOTH (fol. 93ra, line 4) and *ʒuþ/he* YOUTH (fol. 93ra, line 25)

e. Examples of probable changes of <h> to <þ> *un-wurþ/h* UNWORTHY (fol. 93ra, line 10) and in *ouer-goþ/h* SURPASS (fol. 93rb, line 1)

Figure 5. Examples from the text of *Proverbs of Alfred* in Maidstone Museum A.13

(i) 'th' for historical [t], e.g. *beth* BETTER, *selth* SHALT, *þath* THAT;
(j) 'h' in various combinations with 'c' or 't' (other than simple 'ht') for historical [xt, çt], e.g. *nocht* NOT, *tothte* TAUGHT, *brith* BRIGHT, *mith* MIGHT, *drithten* (< OE *dryhten*) LORD;
(k) 'h' alone for historical [θ~ð], e.g. *wurh* (< OE *weorþan*) IS, BECOMES, *Wih-vten* WITHOUT;
(l) 'h' in combination with 'þ' for historical [θ], e.g. *haueþh* HATH, *dohþ* DOTH (these examples only);
(m) 'h' for historical [j], e.g. *hwng* YOUNG (this example only);
(n) 'ch' for historical [k], e.g. *starch* STARK (this example only);

(o) 'nch' for historical [ŋg], e.g. *endinch* ENDING (this example only);
(p) 'nch' for historical [ŋkθ], e.g. *brinch* BRINGETH (this example only);
(q) excrescent 'h' in *his* IS (this example only beside usual *is*)

The M scribe's non-'h' spellings for historical 'h'[33]

(r) initial 'h' loss in *is* HIS (only in this word beside usual *his*);
(s) final 'h' loss in *þo* THOUGH (once beside usual *þoh*) and *þur* THROUGH (once beside *þurh* once).
(t) <fw> for OE *hw-* e.g. *fwi* WHY.

Other possibly relevant unhistorical spellings

(u) 'þ' for historical [j] in *þung* YOUNG;
(v) 'w' for historical [j] in *wiuen*, *wyuen* GIVE inf.;
(w) 'sw' for historical [ʃ] in *swo* SHOE.
(x) possible loss of final [θ] in *wur* (< OE *weorþan*) BE imp. (two examples and no counterexamples).

The picture may appear complex, but the M scribe's uses of 'h' seem to fall into four categories, some of which overlap:[34]

(1): as an autonomous historical segmental representation – (a)–(d);
(2): as part of an already accepted digraph – (e)–(h) and possibly (i) if 'th' for historical [t] represents spirantisation;
(3): as a diacritic possibly indicating fricativeness – (j);
(4): as part of a litteral and/or potestatic substitution set – (k)–(q) and possibly (i) if historical [t] still represents a stop.

5.2.2 Commentary

The assignment of types (a)–(c) to category (1) requires no further explanation since the mappings of symbol to sound are straightforward survivals from Old English. Type (d) may also belong to category (1) but could arguably be assigned instead to category (3) since in Middle English, 'h' in combination with 'w/ƿ' may represent not an autonomous segment, but a diacritic implying voicelessness. Type (e) belongs in both categories (2) and (3): 'ph/wh' is already well established in early Middle English as a digraph for the reflexes of OE *hw-*; its membership of (3) assumes that within the established digraph 'h' is a diacritic for voicelessness. Types (f)–(h) also belong in both categories (2) and (3) for the same reasons. Type (i) may plausibly fall in with (h) if the [t] in these instances has been spirantised.[35] If 'th' is taken to represent unchanged historical [t] in these examples, type (i) must be listed in category (4). The M scribe has endings for the 3rd sg. pres. ind. in *-eth*, *-(e)þ* and *-et*; these may be either phonetic variants or the results of litteral substitutions. We incline to the phonetic interpretation for the reasons given in Lass & Laing (forthcoming 2009).

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[33] We do not include here 'þ' for [h] in corrected *þise* for HIS illustrated in figure 5 above.
[34] Note that our taxonomy is not based on standard sets but on fuzzy sets.
[35] Such a spirantisation is not just an *ad hoc* device to 'save the phenomena'. For justification and discussion of just such a change see Lass & Laing (forthcoming 2009).

Type (j) is complex. The examples here include several different combinations for historical *-ht*. The various possible *potestates* implied include [çt], [xt], [θ] and [θt]. The possible membership categories would then include (2), (3) and (4) depending on interpretation. We suggest that they all belong at least to category (3). The motivation for calling 'h' in these cases a diacritic for fricativeness is simple: in every case, if 'h' is removed what is left behind is a canonical representation for a stop.

Types (k)–(r), (t)–(w) and possibly (s) and (x) all fall into category (4). Type (k) is our main subject. It provides the means by which to account also for (l), (p), (w) and possibly for (s) and (x), and also (via (v) and (u)) for (m). Before we discuss this matter, we will indicate the arguments by which the other types listed above may be explained. The very small numbers of examples of each type make it difficult to be sure whether they are all part of the M scribe's own system or whether some may be carried over from the usage of his exemplar(s).

Since the M scribe (or the scribe of his exemplar) is clearly interested in the registration of phonetic detail (see the account of type (t) below), the most likely explanation for type (n), 'ch' for historical [k], is that 'ch' here is an attempt to represent a final affricate. This might perhaps be of the type [kx], as in modern vernacular Merseyside speech. Type (o), 'nch' for historical [ŋg], is difficult. The only explanation we can offer invokes a postulated exemplar system for which we have parallel examples in another writing system, that of Scribe D of Trinity (see section 4.1 above).[36] Scribe D has spellings for both [ŋg] and [ŋk] in both 'ng' ∼ 'nk', e.g. *-þing-* ∼ *-þink-* (< OE *þyncan*) SEEM, *þing* ∼ *þinke* THING, *þeng* ∼ *þenk-* THINK, *-ing* ∼ *-inke* for verbal noun endings (see Jordan 1968: section 158). Scribe D also has spellings for [ŋg] in 'nh', e.g. *brinhin* inf. BRING, *kinhis* KINGS, *þinhes* THINGS. It seems likely that [ŋg] and [ŋk] have fallen together in his system and, judging by the 'nh' spellings, the final stop has weakened, at least in some instances. There is no evidence for this change having happened in the M scribe's own usage, but if we postulate some such litteral interchange in his exemplar, then the form *endinch* may be explained as follows: [ŋg] and [ŋk] have merged and the stops have weakened; the spellings 'nk/nc', 'ng' and 'nh' are therefore all available to represent this output; the combination 'nch' is an extension of this set, substituting two available *litterae* for one.[37]

Type (q), excrescent 'h', and the non-'h' spelling types (r), (t) and possibly (s) belong together as a sub-group. The (r) type, (variable) loss of initial [h], is well known throughout early Middle English (see Milroy 1983). The one example of excrescent initial 'h' may be assumed to be a back-spelling dependent on loss of initial [h]. The (s) type may be explained as external sandhi. The contexts of the examples listed

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[36] As Trinity Scribe D and the scribe of M both switch from <w> to <þ> in their copies of *PofA*, albeit at a stanza apart, it may be that they have a common (though not necessarily proximate) exemplar.

[37] This intricate account may be extended still further to account for yet another anomalous spelling convention in Scribe D's usage: *huge* for EACH and *dige* for DITCH. The explanation is as follows: if 'nch' can represent [ŋg] then 'ch' can represent [g]; then conversely 'g' can represent a sound elsewhere represented by 'ch'; then 'g' can represent [tʃ].

are as follows: *þo him* THOUGH HIM, *þur his* THROUGH HIS.[38] The (t) type, 'fw' for historical [hw], is probably an attempt at direct phonetic representation: loss of [h] as a segment but retention of voiceless labialised friction over the cluster. Our purpose in this long explication is to illustrate the potential prodigality and inventiveness of scribal behaviour in relation to even a single *littera*.

We now return to the pivotal type (k). We have observed that <h> and <þ> in M form a cline of shapes (see figure 5) similar to the <þ/y> cline in some late Middle English northern and northerly orthographies, or to the <þ/ƿ> cline in the spelling systems of the Cotton scribe and the A and D scribes of Trinity (sections 2.1, 2.2.2 and 4.1 above). This means that in any 'þ' or 'h' context <þ>, <h> (or any other member of the cline) may be used. 'þ/h' is the main litteral substitution involved not just in type (k) but also in types (l) and (p). Type (l) may be explained by the practice of 'two for one'. Many Middle English writing systems have litteral substitutions for [θ∼ð]. These often include the digraph 'th'. If a system can employ two symbols for one sound in some contexts, then the two-for-one principle is often extended into similar contexts. In the M scribe's system, simple <þ>, simple <h> and intraclinal <þ/h> vary with <th> and (in verbal endings) with <t> for historical [θ]; <þh> and <hþ> simply extend the set. In type (p) we assume that the sequence 'ch' in *brinch* stands not for usual [tʃ] but for [k] followed by inflexional [θ]; this is then a simple 'h' for 'þ' substitution.

We have postulated (section 5.2 above) that the scribe of M's exemplar had <þ/ƿ> + <ȝ> confusion. Type (w), *swo* for SHOE, may be explained by the following sequence of substitutions: 'sh' (beside usual 'sc') may represent [ʃ]; there is 'þ/h' substitution making 'sþ' theoretically possible for [ʃ]; via the postulated exemplar system, 'þ' and 'ƿ' are interchangeable (though in M itself they have distinct *figurae*), therefore *sƿ*- is a possible spelling for [ʃ]; with substitution of <w> for <þ/ƿ>, *sw*- is a possible spelling for [ʃ] – hence *swo* for SHOE.[39]

We have already explained type (v) in section 5.2 above. The supposition is that the exemplar for M confused <þ/ƿ> + <ȝ>. With substitution of <w> for <þ/ƿ>, this

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[38] The (x) type, loss of final [θ], may also be explained as external sandhi. The context for both examples is *wur þu* BE THOU. The *þu* is not overtly cliticised to the verb, there being a clear space in the manuscript between the two in each case. Nevertheless, this example could indicate simple coalescence of [θ # θ] into [Ø # θ]. The (s) and (x) type could however also be explained as part of the narrative in section 5.2.4 below.

[39] 'sw' for [ʃ] is not the kind of one-off phenomenon that should be dismissed as scribal error. The same LSS appears in the Gonville and Caius *Ancrene Riwle* (G) (see section 5.3 below), which has *sƿaƿed* SHOWED and *sƿulen* SHALL 2nd pers. pl. G also has the reverse spelling 'sh' for historical [sw] in *shuch* SUCH (once beside *schuc* 4x beside usual *sƿuch*), *alsha* ALSO, *forsholegen*, SWALLOW UP and *shiþe* VERY. Most of these examples are in the *LAEME* tagged text for G; the last two are cited from Scahill (2009: note 15). 'sh' for historical [sw] is also found in other early Middle English writing systems. The C scribe of *O&N* has, in his copy of *Death's Wither-Clench*, *shuch* for SUCH and in *O&N* itself the apparently hybrid spelling *hsƿucche*. Version E of *Poema Morale* (London, British Library, Egerton 613, fols. 7r–12v) has *scuche* for SUCH. Scahill (2009: 91) does not see an LSS in the G scribe's usage here, but 'erratic behaviour', and the usage 'sh' for historical [sw] as 'largely unidirectional replacement of exotic characters' and 'the scribe's general tendency to replace Anglo-Saxon characters'. These last two observations sit rather oddly with the G scribe's use of the <þ/ƿ> *figura* in almost every line of his text.

would enable <w> to represent [j], accounting for *wiuen* and *wyuen* for GIVE. Type (u) is also directly explained by <þ/p> + <ʒ> substitution, allowing *þung* for YOUNG. The explanation of type (m), *hwng* for YOUNG, follows from an intertwining of the two strands of substitution: initial [j] is represented by 'h' for 'þ' for 'y'/'ʒ'. 'w' for [u] is a variant of the two-for-one principle. It is part of a common early Middle English substitution set where 'p', 'u', 'v', 'uu', 'vv', 'w' may all interchange for [u], [v], [w] or [wu].

5.2.3 Implications

So far we have treated type (k) as litteral substitution: there are four clear cases of 'h' for expected 'þ'. But as we stated in section 5.2 and illustrated in figure 5, the M scribe has a cline of *figurae* for <þ/h>. One of the primary functions of alphabetic writing is to map phonology. Is it possible that the cline could in fact indicate a potestatic (i.e. phonetic) phenomenon? In the great majority of cases the M scribe clearly writes the *figura* that we would associate unambiguously with the historically correct clinal end point. But in a small number he not only confuses the functions of 'h' and 'þ', he also occasionally has second thoughts about the original *figura* employed and changes it. Some of these changes are made by altering or overwriting a *figura* at or near one end of the cline with a *figura* at or near the other end. In these circumstances, it is sometimes difficult to decipher what has been changed into what. But some changes are made by deletion of all or part of the word and substitution of a new version after it or in the margin. These changes involve alteration of clear 'h' or 'þ' to the other clinal end point. The changes happen in both directions: e.g. *muh* MOUTH is corrected to *muþ*, *ʒuʒehe* YOUTH to *ʒuʒeþe*, and *þise* HIS to *hise*. Here the new versions are all historically 'correct'. Change away from historical spelling is illustrated by one example: the sequence *lih* is crossed through and the whole word *liþet* for the 3rd sg. pres. ind. of LIE (< OE *lēogan*) is written immediately after the aborted attempt.

Including the examples above there are eight changed forms. Of these six are <h> changed to <þ> for historical [θ], one is <þ> changed to <h> for historical [h] and one is <h> changed to <þ> for historical [h]. So only one change is historically 'erroneous'. We have found eight examples of intraclinal ambiguous *figurae*. Seven of these are employed in words where we would expect 'þ' and one where we would expect 'h'. The M scribe seems to have had a sense of how these words 'should' be spelled, but given the numbers of 'uncorrected' spellings, we consider that these represent something more complex than scribal error. They may even suggest something more than confusion caused by an ambiguous clinal *figura*.

The potestatic values we would assign to the *litterae* 'þ' and 'h' are related on a significant phonological hierarchy: that of 'strength'. It is usually assumed that fricatives are 'weaker' than stops and glottal segments are weaker than those with supraglottal articulation (see Lass 1976: 145–6, 156–63).

The standard treatments of weakness are based on strength scales where processes of lenition involve the crossing of intercategory spaces, which are not filled with any

material. A typical scale might read stop > fricative > approximant > zero. In phonetic reality, however, the intercategory spaces may be clines. For instance, maximal lenition of [θ] would begin with full supraglottal articulation (apex of the tongue making full contact with the upper incisors). There may then be an indefinitely large series of weaker articulations, in which the tongue tip is gradually removed from the teeth but the formant structure of the friction is still (though decreasingly) [θ]-like. At some point in this sequence, the audible dentality vanishes and we have [h]. We can assume that such phenomena occurred in Middle English as well as in modern English. Since we have seen that the M scribe is sensitive to phonetic detail, such a cline might very well have had an obfuscating effect on his ability to distinguish prototypical [θ] from [h]. When writing, he had to choose one or the other – or did he? We can assume that his phonetic repertoire (upon which he must to some extent have drawn when making decisions about representation) included sounds that could not 'properly' be expressed either by 'þ' or 'h'. For these segments he usually wrote according to both prototype and history, but how might we explain the nonhistorical spellings? Our hypothesis is that phonetic ambiguity led him at times to choose an unhistoric representation, which he sometimes thought better of on reflection. That accounts for the surviving unhistoric spellings and the 'corrected' forms. Given the mannerisms of his script, he also had the opportunity of producing a fudged *figura*, which exhibits elements of both end points of the cline. Might this figural fudge represent an indeterminate *potestas*?

What we are suggesting here is something very different from the 'classical' figural clines sometimes associated with the functional confusion of 'þ' and 'y' or 'þ' and 'p'. In the case of 'þ' and 'y', one or other of the two prototypical *figurae*, or a clinal sequence with the two *figurae* as end points, may be employed to represent both [θ∼ð] and [i∼j]; similarly, in the case of 'þ' and 'p', for both [θ∼ð] and [w]. Nobody would suggest that [θ∼ð] and [i∼j] or [θ∼ð] and [w] have fallen together. The common *figura*, and/or the cline, represent still distinct phonetic categories or *potestates*, and context alone tells us which is intended. With the M scribe's (as far as we know) unique system, the two end points and the cline may represent precisely that – two end points and a cline.

The M scribe's type (k) spellings may then be accounted for as a characteristic type of lenition via loss of glottal articulation like that observed in Arundel 248 of initial [θ] > [h] and [h] > Ø. In the M scribe's case the apparent lenition of [θ∼ð] to [h] is in syllable-medial and final position rather than in initial position. Although there are two examples of 'h'-loss and one example of excrescent 'h', there is no direct evidence of historical [θ]-loss as there is in Arundel. We might here assume therefore that the postulated lenition in M was a merger of [θ] with already existing [h], which potentially could have further weakened and deleted but apparently did not.

If we consider that the M scribe's type (k) spellings might be explained as part of a PSS, instead of, or combined with, an LSS, does this have any implications for our explanations of the other types of 'h' spellings listed above? The two types that we have not yet fully accounted for are (s) and (x). We have suggested that both types

might represent sandhi, which would be as much morphological as phonological. But equally, type (s) (*þo* for THOUGH and *þur* for THROUGH) and type (x) (*wur* for *wurþ BE) could represent staged lenitions leading to zero.

There is sporadic evidence also in other texts[40] for weakening of [θ] to [h] and occasionally to zero. Examples of loss are least common and are mainly confined to the word THROUGH. Examples of 'h' for historical [θ] and inverse spellings of dental fricative *litterae* ('þ', 'ð', 'th') for historical *h* are each roughly three times as common as deletions. Lest it be thought that such spellings represent sporadic scribal errors, the *Ormulum* also shows evidence of weakening of [θ] to [h] and of [h] to zero. As Orm was the original writer of his verse homilies, this evidence cannot be dismissed as transmission error in the usual sense. However, Orm himself in almost all tell-tale cases 'normalises' his own prior output. In only one case does he leave uncorrected *þur˄þ* THROUGH. Elsewhere (not in the *LAEME* tagged sample) he corrects original *þur˄þ* THROUGH to *þur˄h* (once), original *purrh* WORTHY to *purrð* (once), original *pur˄hlike* and *pur˄like* WORTHLY to *pur˄þlike* (once each) original *purrli/ke* to *purrþli/ke* (once).[41]

5.3   'h' in Gonville and Caius Ancrene Riwle (G)

5.3.1   Functions of 'h'

The history of 'h' in both Arundel and M involves lenition. The history of 'h' in G apparently also involves lenition but in a different phonological context.

In section 2.2.1 we characterised the G scribe as having <þ/ƿ> + <y> confusion. In section 4.3 we made the case for the G scribe's exemplar having at least occasional substitution of <þ/ƿ> + <ȝ>. The G scribe himself does not use <ȝ> but has <g> for [g] and [j] and also for [ɣ], where it varies with <gh> and with <h>. This latter usage also occurs in AB language and in G it may therefore be carried over from that found in his exemplar, and may or may not also belong to the G scribe's own active repertoire.

The G scribe is as prodigal in his use of 'h' as the M scribe. There is considerable overlap, both in historical and unhistorical uses, between the two systems; but they are not identical.

The G scribe's uses of 'h'

(a) 'h' for historical initial [h], e.g. *his* HIS, *heuen* HEAVEN;
(b) 'h' for historical medial and final [x], e.g. *biþoht* BETHOUGHT, *þah* THOUGH;
(c) 'h' for historical medial and final [ç], e.g. *mihte* MIGHT, *heh* HIGH;
(d) 'h' for historical medial [ɣ], e.g. *dahes* DAYS, *-fuhel* FOWL;
(e) 'h' for historical medial [j], e.g. *wiheles* (< OE *wigel*) WILES, *unphrihen* UNWOUND;

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[40] Including such well-known works as the Lambeth Homilies, Laȝamon A (hand B) and Laȝamon B, the Cotton version of *The Owl and the Nightingale* and the final continuation of the Peterborough Chronicle.

[41] We are grateful to Nils-Lennart Johannesson for pointing out this practice in *The Ormulum* and for supplying us with these examples. Note also from the *LAEME* tagged text, one example of *ber˄less* SALVATION (< OE *beorgels and elsewhere in the text written *ber˄hless*) and two examples of *þur˄* THROUGH with 'h' interlined afterwards.

(f) 'h' in combination with 'i' for historical medial [j], e.g. *geihet* (< OE **gēgan) CRY OUT (this example only beside *gei-*, *gey-* with no 'h');

(g) 'h' preceding 'ꝓ' for historical initial [h], e.g. OE *hw-*, e.g. *hꝓet* WHAT, *hꝓen* WHEN;

(h) 'h' following 'ꝓ' for historical *hw-*, e.g. *ꝓhite* WHITE, *ꝓhile* WHILE;

(i) 'h' following 'ꝓ' for historical [w], e.g. *unꝓhrihen* UNWOUND;

(j) 'h' following 'c' in the digraph for historical [tʃ] and [ʃ], e.g. *chirche* CHURCH, *flech* FLESH, *-chipe* -SHIP;

(k) 'h' following 'c' for historical medial and final [x], e.g. *ibrocht* BROUGHT, *ah* OUGHT;

(l) 'h' following 'g' for historical medial [ɣ], e.g. *daghes* DAYS;

(m) 'h' following 'c' for historical medial [ç] and [çt], e.g. *michte* MIGHT, *richꝓisnesse* RIGHTEOUSNESS (note also 'chi' in *nichit* NIGHT);

(n) 'h' following 'ꝓ' for historical [f] in *phariseus* PHARISEE gen., *prophete* PROPHET (ultimately Hellenisms in Latin);

(o) 'h' following 's(c)' in the sequence for historical [ʃ], e.g. *s(c)hulen* SHALL pl., *disch* DISH;

(p) 'h' in combination with 'c' and 's' for historical final [ʃ], e.g. *flechs*, *flecsh-* FLESH, *englichs* ENGLISH;

(q) 'h' following 's' and in combination with 'c' for historical [sw], e.g. *alsha* ALSO, *schuc* SUCH (and see note 39 above);

(r) 'h' following 't' in the digraph for historical final [θ], e.g. *deth* DEATH, *bi-holdeth* BEHOLDETH;

(s) 'th' for historical [t], e.g. *geth* YET (this word only, one example);

(t) 'h' alone or 'gh' for historical final [θ], e.g. *strecheh* STRETCHETH (not in the *LAEME* tagged text: cited from Scahill 2009: note 16), *druhiegh* DRY (3rd plural present indicative) (see section 4.3 above);

(u) 'ch' for historical [k], e.g. *floch* FLOCK, *ach* (< OE *ac*) BUT;

(v) 'nch' for historical [ŋg], e.g. *kanche-ship* (of obscure origin but elsewhere normally *cang-*) FOLLY (note also *unstrechþe* UNSTRENGTH with missing 'n' or abbreviation);

(w) 'sth' for 'str' in *sthengðe* STRENGTH (not in the *LAEME* tagged text: cited from Scahill 2009: note 16);

(x) 'soh' for historical [ʃ] in *i-sohouen* SHOVED (this example only);

(y) excrescent 'h' in *hures* OURS, *huuel* EVIL;

The G scribe's non-'h' spellings for historical 'h'

(z) initial 'h' loss in *is* HIS, *undred* HUNDRED;

(aa) 'þ/ꝓ' for historical *hw-* in e.g. *ꝓet* WHAT (beside usual *hꝓ-*);[42]

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[42] The G scribe occasionally added initial 'h' to an OE *hw-* word that he originally wrote with 'ꝓ' alone, cf. note 11 above. Note also 'b' for historical 'h' in *babbe* HAVE, and (cited from Scahill 2009: note 17) *babbeð* HATH. We do not include these spellings in our main list because they are mechanical errors and not litteral substitutions. Scribes normally form 'h' and 'b' similarly with two strokes, an ascender followed by a lobe drawn from some point on the ascender and curving out and down. In the case of 'b' it typically meets the foot of the ascender at the baseline. In the case of 'h' it typically meets the baseline to the right of the ascender, sometimes descending below it and often curving further inwards. Scribal mistaking of <h> and <b> where intended 'h' has a short limb and/or where it cuts in too much and hits the ascender (forming a <b>-like lobe) is very common indeed. Conversely, where a 'b' is formed somewhat loosely and the lobe does not properly meet the ascender it can easily be read as 'h'. One then has to judge whether the *figura* should be read as the *littera* that it superficially looks like or as what was 'intended'. The G scribe himself differentiates these letters clearly; indeed he uses different stroke patterns to form them: 'h' he forms traditionally with two strokes; 'b' he forms in a single stroke curving the lobe up from the bottom of the ascender. The lobe is often open at the top, failing to meet

Other relevant unhistorical spellings

(ab) 'þ' for historical [j] in *þard* YARD, *þet* YET (see section 4.3 above)
(ac) 'sp' for historical [ʃ] in *spaped* SHOWED, *spulen* SHALL 2nd pers. pl. (see note 39 above).

5.3.2   Commentary

We will not analyse all these types in as much detail as we did for the M scribe. What is clear from both the M scribe and G scribe listings, and what we have presented for Arundel 248 in section 5.1, is that there are large numbers of multivocal mappings for the *littera* 'h' in early Middle English. We have already shown that the LSS {'þ', 'p', 'ʒ', 'h', Ø} existed in the writing systems of both Arundel and M. We suggest that many of the G scribe's unorthodox and 'problematic' spellings can be easily explained if one assumes that his system had the LSS {'þ', 'p', 'h', Ø} with an additional 'ʒ' element operating only via its postulated existence in his exemplar. The G scribe's own mixture of spellings may in part belong to an exemplar in a complex and/or mixed writing system, which may also account for the fact that he returned to his text and made a number of corrections at a later stage. His highly cursive script[43] suggests that he was working at great speed, which also probably has a bearing on some of his idiosyncratic renditions. Speedwriting would tend to promote copying in units larger than single words, and the use of auditory perception and memory rather than visual memory alone.

One striking peculiarity of G (which he shares with the scribes of AB and its related texts)[44] is the use of 'h' to represent the reflexes of OE foot-medial -*g*-. There are two accounts in the literature as to why the designer of AB chose to represent putative OE [ɣ] with 'h' (Dance 2003: 67–8). One is that the devoicing of [ɣ] in final position (e.g. *burh < burg* HILL) created a situation where [ɣ] and [x] were in complementary distribution. They were therefore construable as members of one category, and could be written with the same *littera*. It might seem strange at first that a *littera* with a normally voiceless *potestas* should be used in a prototypically voiced position. However, such apparently contradictory usage would not be foreign to Old English – cf. the use of 'c' for both velars and palatals. The point is that 'h' was available for [ɣ], and this was a stylistic choice either invented, or at least very consistently employed, by the designer

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the ascender further up. The G scribe's miswriting of 'b' for 'h' was presumably triggered by a 'b'-like 'h' in his exemplar, the error unnoticed because the G scribe was writing at speed. Cf. also *bulunges* DELUSIONS and *ibuled* DELUDED (Corpus text *ʒulunges, biʒulet,* cf. OE *geogelere* MAGICIAN) cited from Scahill (2009: note 17). Here the avenue for substitution is 'þ' for 'ʒ' in G's exemplar (see section 4.3) and thereafter also 'h' for 'þ' substitution, for which cf. G's *strecheh* STRETCHETH in (20) above. Exemplar **hulunges* and **ihuled* could account then for the forms in G.

[43] Perhaps evident even from the single-word illustrations in figure 3, and unusual in this kind of text in the thirteenth century.

[44] I.e. *Ancrene Wisse* in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 402 and the Katherine Group in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 34 and to a more varied extent the related versions of *Ancrene Riwle* in London, British Library, Cotton Cleopatra C vi, Nero A xiv and Titus D xviii and the Katherine Group in Titus and in London, British Library, Royal 17 A xxvii.

of AB. The scribes in the copying tradition of the AB and related texts also varyingly adopt it.

Dance, however, prefers an alternative explanation. He suggests that foot-medial 'h' was adopted to avoid a potential ambiguity between [ɣ] and intervocalic [j], which would have resulted from the use of 'ʒ' for both. This 'may have been felt to be a problem' and a 'desire to clarify' led to 'h' being used for [ɣ]. Dance says that a potential weakness in his theory is that such a use of 'h', being exceedingly rare in 'classical' late West Saxon, would have been an unlikely model for thirteenth-century writers. In fact this need not disqualify the idea from serious consideration, as West Saxon would probably not have been the primary influence on the orthographic tradition of the South-West Midlands. However, the usage is also absent from *Vespasian Psalter*, which is often considered a prototypical antecedent of some elements of AB language. We have little other evidence for the West Mercian tradition, which arguably would have had the greatest influence on the writing systems of this area (the *Vespasian Psalter* itself is 400 years older). But there is no reason to suppose that the designer of AB, or any other early Middle English scribe in the South-West Midlands, was incapable of initiating an independent development.

There is, however, a third possible explanation, which as far as we know has not previously been considered. This both explains the use of 'h' and makes its motivation purely phonetic. We suggest that in the tradition represented by AB, the early lenition of OE -*g*-, which led to [ɣ], did not continue via a pathway of vocalisation. Instead the articulation opened further, which produced as output a 'voiced *h*' [ɦ], as in the medial consonant of English *ahead* (cf. the initial of *head*). This is close enough to [h] to be written with the same symbol despite its different glottal attitude. With this suggested trajectory added, there would then have been three possibilities for the development of OE foot-medial [ɣ] during early Middle English, and one or more of them might be represented in the same writing system:

(a) it remains as [ɣ] and is spelled 'g', 'gh' or 'ʒ';
(b) it vocalises to [u] or [w] (assuming these are different) and is spelled 'u', 'w', 'ƿ';
(c) it continues to weaken by simple opening of stricture, becoming [ɦ], spelled 'h'.

We believe that the G scribe's usage indicates that the third pathway is the predominant one for him. His spelling for this category is in fact variable. The variation may have one or more of three sources: change in progress, selection or random variation among different available chronological layers, or exemplar influence. To indicate his hierarchy of spelling preferences we give here the numbers of different spellings for OE foot-medial [ɣ] in the *LAEME* tagged sample for G – see (d) in the listing in section 5.3.1 above:[45]

for original velars (26 types)
'h' 44 tokens

'g' 12 tokens
'gh' 2 tokens + 1 inserted 'h' as a correction[46]
'p' 1 token

We have so far restricted ourselves to back environments, which are in fact where most of the 'h' spellings occur. But 'h' also appears for original palatals (i.e. between front vowels) – see (e) and (f) in the listing in section 5.3.1 above. In palatal contexts 'h' spellings vary with spellings in 'i/y' and minimally with 'g' (though in unstressed syllables, which we do not list here, 'g' is somewhat more common):

for original palatals (23 types)
'h' 13 tokens + 1 inserted 'h' as a correction. Note also 'eih' 1 example
'i' 34 tokens. Note also 'eih' 1 example as above.
'y' 2 tokens
'g' 1 token

If indeed foot-medial 'h' in G represents [ɦ] in back contexts, there appears to be no reason why it should not in front contexts. After all, since it has no supraglottal articulation it is not sensitive to coarticulatory effects, unlike a velar or a palatal. It is effectively neutral for backness, and therefore is appropriate regardless of the surrounding environment.

Although there is only one example of an apparent diphthong in combination with 'h' in our sample of the G scribe's usage for foot-medial [j], the *LAEME* corpus indicates that such spellings do occur occasionally elsewhere in early Middle English. If we suppose that in this context 'h' may represent [ɦ] these combinative spellings presumably indicate a stage before further lenition and diphthong-only realisations.

It is clear from our investigations of the writing systems of Arundel, M and G that 'h' has two main functions. One is its use as multiple segmental representation of [h] or [ɦ] or Ø; the other is its diacritic use for fricativeness and/or weakness.

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[46] Scahill (2009: 93) considers the corrections in G 'remarkable', especially because they often 'change one possible orthographic or morphological form of a word to another'. Given the range of the 'possible' in early Middle English writing systems, most linguistic (as opposed to textual) 'corrections' tend to be changes to preferred forms rather than the eradication of the 'impossible'. Scahill believes the exemplar's forms to have been 'rather pristine' (2009: 98,101) and also to have been subsequently corrected, possibly by the author himself – to something even more 'pristine', one assumes. He believes that these corrections to the exemplar were made after G's original copying of it, and that subsequent recourse to the exemplar then triggered the G scribe's own revisions. In the absence of G's exemplar, this is mere supposition. Almost all the G scribe's corrections are to forms of the words that already appear elsewhere in his copy. A simpler (equally unsubstantiated) supposition might be that the G scribe went back over his (clearly very speedily written) copy and changed aberrant forms to *his own preferred forms* as exemplified in the rest of his text. All but one or two of his changes can be accounted for in this way. With some, the numbers of citations of a word are not sufficient to say it is a preferred form, but even with these, the form to which the change is made is at least a possible G variant. This observation includes the quite numerous corrections cited which do *not* take the text closer to AB language. The presence of these forms argues rather against the likelihood that the G scribe was using an exemplar with 'pristine' AB forms.

5.4 Peroration

This investigation of six early Middle English orthographies illustrates the complex interrelationships of figural, litteral and potestatic mappings that involve both floating *figurae* and floating *litterae*. Each scribal system has to be looked at on its own terms, but their analyses nevertheless inform each other. Scribes are not muddled but are doing sophisticated and interesting linguistic analysis. Prodigal writing systems arise from the interplay of orthographic tradition and sound change in the context of a highly flexible matrix of available items and procedures.

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