

2

Nonlinear reading: the *Orchard of Syon*, *Titus and Vespasian*, and Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*

Published in 1549, *The book of common prayer* for the first time presented the reformed services for worship as reconceived in the wake of English separation from the Church of Rome. In considering medieval reading practices, a passage from its preface deserves particular attention. The preface targets for condemnation the consequences of what it considers flawed Catholic practices of textual organization, stating that the Bible 'hath be so altered, broken and neglected by plaintyng in uncerteyne stories, Legendes, Responds, Verses, vaine repetitions, Commemorations and Sinodalles', and asserts that such additions 'breake the continual course of the reading of the scripture' (Aii^r-iii^r). *The book of common prayer* thus targets practices of textual organization that can be considered collative, relying on the collation of multiple external texts or excerpts drawn together into a single work.¹ Perhaps the most commonplace example of such a work is one that dominated literary and devotional culture in the later Middle Ages, the book of hours. How books of hours compiled texts together, drawn from the Bible and liturgical books, leads directly to the condemnation issued in *The book of common prayer*. As addressed in the preface, this type of textual organization also prompts a particular reading practice.

This reading practice is known as 'nonlinear', 'nonsequential', or 'selective' reading, and it is most conventionally performed when apprehending a text organized into sections, called 'nodes' or 'lexia' in digital media.² The number of terms to describe the concept refers to an inherent contradiction: nonlinear, discontinuous, nonsequential reading can still be said to occur linearly, continuously, or sequentially, as a reader follows the order of words in grammatical sequence or creates a sequence even out of image and text located in separate regions of the page. I have followed the usage of digital media critics in my preference for the term 'nonlinear', in part because it also relates to terms used

to describe both structural and narrative organization, as will be discussed below. In nonlinear reading, readers select their own paths of navigation among lexia, as, for example, when someone clicks from one link to another to move between pages of a website. In its discussion of textual organization and reading, *The book of common prayer* represents texts designed to facilitate nonlinear reading as characteristic of outmoded, misleading ideology. In their stead, *The book of common prayer* encourages religious reform by promoting changes to reading practices, focused in particular on a linear approach to reading scripture.³

The passage from *The book of common prayer* demonstrates several points relevant to the study of medieval reading practices. It indicates that the form of the codex was not viewed as inherently linear, for the way that texts were included and arranged could invite readers to navigate its pages in nonlinear ways. It also shows how, by the mid-sixteenth century, textual organization and reading practices could be linked together to such a degree that the kinds of 'broken' or 'continual' reading that modes of textual organization prompt scarcely need explanation. In effect, *The book of common prayer* demonstrates that writers understood how their organization of texts bore consequences for the ways people apprehended them. For example, arranging a work to be uninterrupted by the 'plaintyng' of other lexia prompts a 'continual course' of reading. In other words, at its most basic, linear textual organization prompts linear reading, and nonlinear organization prompts nonlinear reading.⁴ Building on these points, in this chapter I contend that medieval writers produced texts shaped by norms of textual organization to influence the results of reading practices, in terms of both apprehension and interpretation.

Although nonlinear reading invitations flourish in late-medieval English literature, they do not originate in this period any more than nonlinear reading originates in the era of digital media. Rather, as with emendation invitations, they trace their roots to a long tradition of sophisticated Latinate reading practices stretching back for centuries. Martin Foys argues that Anselm's use of nonlinear reading – particularly through the hypertextual organization of his *Orationes sive meditationes* (Prayers and meditations) into sections accessible nonlinearly and dynamically – 'erases [the] interface' of the physical text's material manuscript instantiation in order to 'rende[r] the act of reading transparent' (46).⁵ In contrast, consider how Walter of Chatillon, writing in the 1170s, references nonlinear reading in *The Alexandreis*: at the end of the prologue, he

writes, ‘Nunc autem quod instat agamus, et ut facilis que quesierit quis possit inuenire, totum opus per capitula distinguamus’, that is: ‘Now let us undertake what is at hand and mark out the whole work with chapter headings, so that the reader can more easily find what he seeks’⁶ (ll. 40–3). Walter’s explanation of the division of his work into chapters conveys his recognition that his Latin-literate, learned readers already know how to read nonlinearly, and will read nonlinearly regardless of the organization of the text. He indicates that he only hopes to make that practice easier for them through his provision of markers to identify textual divisions.

Late-medieval English writers’ attempts to introduce these practices to their audiences of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries testify to how they used these Latinate reading practices to teach their readers. These readers did not resemble the writers themselves, learned in Latin, nor did the writers even closely resemble those of previous centuries. In their turn to practices like nonlinear reading, such writers, as Vincent Gillespie notes, were ‘prompted by the increasing range of vernacular materials available to compilers and collectors and by the increasing sophistication of readers and of the demands they were likely to make on books’.⁷ Yet, in their approach to nonlinear reading, late-medieval writers also move beyond the demands of readers by transforming it, for writers recommending its use to their readers turn to nonlinear practice to teach their readers not only how to read in a sophisticated way, but also to reflect writers’ growing understanding of themselves as authorities on their texts and creators of a relationship with their readers that relies on their readers’ participation with them and their texts. This use of a reading practice to represent writers’ and readers’ authority again, as with emendation, testifies to a developing discourse of participatory reading that also reflects increased understanding of what reading by unlearned audiences could entail, and shows how writers conceived of the ways they might participate through their texts with readers. It also describes what work readers could be expected to accomplish.

Nonlinearity in the Orchard of Syon

One of the expressions of nonlinearity in late-medieval English literature most familiar to today’s audiences of medieval literature appears in the *Orchard of Syon*, a fifteenth-century translation of the dialogues of Catherine of Siena. The instructions given to readers in the prologue by the translator deploys language common

to other explicit descriptions of late-medieval nonlinear reading. Consequently, it represents an exemplary norm by which to assess nonlinear reading. The translator writes:

Therefore, religiouse sustren, in þis goostli orcherd at resonable tyme ordeyned, I wole þat 3e disporte 3ou and walke aboute where 3e wolen wiþ 3oure mynde & resoun, in what aleye 3ou lyke, [and] namely þere 3e savouren best as 3e ben disposid. 3e mowe chese if 3e wole of xxxv aleyes where 3e wolen walke, þat is to seye of xxxv chapitres, o tyme in oon, anoþir tyme in anoþir.⁸

Comparing the text to an orchard and its chapters to the paths within it, the translator encourages readers to ‘savour’ the chapters in the order that suits them best. This recommendation immediately links the mode of apprehension, nonlinearity, to interpretation. Apprehending the text nonlinearly promotes its interpretation as desirably consumable in an intense, lingering way. This is a feature shared among the instructions to read nonlinearly in the *Orchard* and other fifteenth-century Middle English works, and it depicts a practice that supports the kind of intensive reading predominant in book culture in the Middle Ages and early modern periods. In the *Orchard* and texts like it, apprehension is frequently and explicitly connected to interpretation, specifically in the way nonlinear apprehension promotes affective interpretation.⁹

In contrast to Walter of Chatillon, who represents his readers as employing nonlinear reading in order to seek out particular passages already known in advance, and therefore already familiar with its practice and simply in need of navigational aids, the *Orchard* translator takes an approach that implies that his readers, an audience of nuns, will not initially understand how to take advantage of the division of the work into chapters unless he explains to them how they should access this division of the text through nonlinear reading, and describes the advantages nonlinear reading offers to interpretation. As with emendation, the treatment of participatory reading differs in its application to different genders. The majority of explicit invitations to read nonlinearly emerge in texts aimed at audiences of women, whom writers assume need the basic instruction in nonlinear reading – even as most women readers learned to read via the book of hours, inherently a nonlinear text. In contrast to Anselm’s use of nonlinearity, the author of the *Orchard*’s prologue emphasizes the textual organization not to make it transparent, but to explain it to readers that they become mindful of how they read and how the organization of the text can

further their experiences with it in ways that help them develop as more sophisticated readers.

Another prominent feature shared among the *Orcherd* and other invitations to read nonlinearly emerges through how nonlinear reading works relationally by allowing readers to juxtapose sections or chapters of a text. The reader, at her own discretion, determines the sequence in which she proceeds through the text. It is a nonlinear sequence in which, as another fifteenth-century translator explains, ‘is not nede to begynne at the begynnyng, but where it plesith hym best’: the reader begins and concludes reading in whatever passage of the text she prefers.¹⁰ Any text can be apprehended in this way, although the *Orcherd* and a few other texts that advocate nonlinear reading explicitly turn to textual division to explain how it might be accomplished.

In addition to its explicit promotion of nonlinear reading as a reading practice requiring participation among reader, text, and writer, the *Orcherd of Syon* prologue uses the metaphorical language of participation that in later chapters will be explored as literal aspects of reading praxis. These metaphors focus on place and mobility, consumption, and time. Use of this metaphorical language of participatory reading in this fifteenth-century English text demonstrates how deeply participation as a mode of reading experience functions in late-medieval literary culture, and how it conveyed meaning that also shapes perception of its literal practice.

First, the translator recommends readers treat the text as a physical space, an orchard, which is laced through with many divergent paths. This speaks to the nonlinear work of reading, but also contextualizes it in a location remediated by human hands, characterizing Catherine of Siena’s *Dialogue concerning divine providence* dialogue as both cultivated and organic in nature: in other words, blending divine creation through the filter of humanity. This metaphor, of course, evokes the conventional medieval understanding of nature as reflecting divine teachings, and humanity’s role as engaging with nature in order to learn moral and theological lessons.¹¹ The orchard metaphor, in its reliance upon a cultivated place, encourages readers to think about nature in subordination to both the will of God and the will of humans. Yet this metaphor gains refinement in how it positions the translator as the gardener, cultivating the place for his readers, whom he invites to walk along the paths criss-crossing the orchard, itself a place conventionally feminized through its long association with the virgin Mary, often depicted as reading in a *hortus conclusus*, an enclosed garden. The

human will to which the garden is most directly subordinate, then, is that of the translator, who presents himself as possessing the authority to shape and control, and invite readers in at his will. The metaphor thus enables the translator to represent his own writerly authority and present readers as subordinate to it: they walk along paths he has created through the textual divisions he recommends they attend to, even as he encourages them to apply their own agency to the pace of reading – lingering to savour – and the paths along which they start or end their reading. Furthermore, readers, acting in accordance with the metaphor, are invited to think about reading as a cultivated activity, one requiring a writer's guiding hand, but also their discerning engagement. The garden metaphor thus carries the additional weight of negotiating participation between writer and reader played out through the organization of the text and how readers use it.

The text as ground for expression of readers' agency introduces the second aspect of the metaphorical language of the *Orcherd*, that of mobility. Readers of the *Orcherd* can express their agency through movement within the text, marked by following the paths laid out by the translator as indicated by the division of the text. Movement thus becomes a metaphor describing how the work of interpretation takes place: as readers move through the text, pursuing what paths they choose from among those made available by the translator's textual organization, they can draw meaning forth from the text, and with that meaning, shape their affective response. The translator so explains in an additional passage from the prologue expanding on the metaphor of the orchard:

In þis orcherd, whanne 3e wolen be comforted, 3e mowe walke and se boþe fruyt and herbis. And albeit þat sum fruyt or herbis seeme to summe scharpe, hard, or bitter, 3it to purgyng of þe soule þei ben ful speedful and profitable, whanne þei ben discreetly take and resceyued by counceil. (1)

Reading as an act of walking enables orderly reading that facilitates encounters with material that might be appealing or unappealing, but productive either way. Thus readers know that even their difficulties arise from planned encounters shaped by the text and the translator who organized it for their access. Yet by emphasizing mobility, the translator proleptically frames his audience's reading experience in a way that draws attention to the agentive work of readers who have to thoughtfully select their paths, choose their textual encounters, and work through the savoury or bitter

consumption of the text in order to interpret it effectively and to evaluate its relevance to themselves. Walking thus offers a metaphorical frame for conceiving of the participatory work of reading in a way that emphasizes the authority of the reader, even when that authority is conceived of as a subordinated authority ('resceyued by counceil'). Furthermore, reading as walking represents mobility as an active work of development, moving the reader from one state to another. Mobility becomes progression, progression both spatialized through the garden metaphor and also conceptualized as intellectual and spiritual growth. Mobile reading, in this metaphorical usage of walking through the garden of the text, gestures to how reading affects the identity of the reader.

The relationship between participatory reading effected through nonlinear apprehension attains additional prominence through the third use of metaphorical language that suffuses the prologue, the language of consumption. The translator has designed the *Orcherd* to promote the savouring of its text, as he states, and uses the language of taste ('bitter', 'sharp', and 'hard') to represent the affective experience of its interpretation. He returns again to this metaphor in the conclusion of the *Orcherd*, in which he writes, 'I sey to 3ou a3ein, seekiþ þis goostly mete wiþ bisye & ofte redyng' (421). The text is as meat, food for the soul. Consumption and taste function as a metaphorical language of participation representing how the text can be internalized by its readers, signifying their acquisition of knowledge and spiritual improvement through the visceral medium of the body that consumes words as food. Reading becomes a means for gaining sustenance; knowledge becomes written on the body through its metaphorical internalization. Readers thus participate through consumption in the medium of their bodies.

The notion of sustenance implied in the way the *Orcherd* represents reading as consumption introduces the fourth metaphorical category employed in the prologue, that of time. For the translator, reading as consumption can produce 'speedful' effects, an adjective that means the effects of this reading are both beneficial and also swift. The translator evokes time again in the prologue when he states that reading can be performed 'at a reasonable tyme ordeyned', and recommends readers select among the alley-chapters of the text to spend 'o tyme in oon, anoþir tyme in anoþir' (1), and again in the conclusion when referring to 'ofte' reading, reading frequently (421). These references indicate a variety of engagements with time, from the scheduling of reading (presum-

ably according to the affordances for reading incorporated into the daily schedule enjoined upon the nuns by the rules of Syon), to the sequence of reading, to the frequency of reading and rereading, and to the time within which one might expect to experience the effects of reading. In these various treatments of time, the translator of the *Orcherd* shows himself sensitive to the myriad ways temporality enters into the reading experience, and represents these diverse temporalities as subject to the control of readers. For nonlinear readers, time becomes an additional element of this reading practice through which readers might express their agency and control over their reading experiences.

Altogether, these metaphorical representations of nonlinear reading experiences can be adduced, along with the language of emendation discussed in the previous chapter, as contributing to a discourse of participatory reading that pervades late Middle English literary culture. The language draws on many facets of readers' daily experiences, from the medium of the body as walking and consuming, to the organization of inked words on the page, to the landscapes that surrounded the places they lived and visited. Emerging in the vernacular with vigour corresponding to the increasing audience of vernacular readers, the discourse of participatory reading demonstrates how writers sought to address the challenge these unlearned but eager readers posed to writers, who sought to introduce their readers to reading practices that shape textual interpretation, while at the same time trying to figure out where the limits of their increasing agency ended and that of readers began.

As implied by the prologue to the *Orcherd of Syon* and similar instructions on nonlinear reading, writers by the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries assumed that readers – particularly women readers – defaulted to a linear reading practice, and needed encouragement or instruction to effect the practice of nonlinear reading. As, however, evidenced by the overwhelming popularity of books of hours, vernacular audiences – including women and other audiences characterized as non-elite – already understood and frequently, commonly performed the practice of nonlinear reading. Consequently, instructions in the practice of nonlinear reading like those attested in the *Orcherd* demonstrate the assumptions writers bore regarding their less-educated audiences. Indeed, explicit instructions addressing any reading practice will demonstrate stereotypes that writers harbour regarding their audiences. In the case of corrective reading discussed in the previous chapter, writers

clearly assumed readers would either fail to read productively if not prompted to correct, or they would alter the text, but not in productive ways; these assumptions were further inflected by the gender of audience and genre of texts. Here, in the case of nonlinear reading, gender also plays a role in the writers' assumptions that an audience of women will not understand the purpose of textual organization, nor how to use it for reading, unless explained. The instructions thus speak less to readers' capabilities than they do to the writer's expectations about his prospective readers.

Yet instructions about nonlinear reading serve more purposes than documenting the application of conventional medieval gender stereotypes to the practice of reading. The instructions in the *Orcherd* emphasize that writers relied on textual organization to make their works accessible to particular practices of reading, whether nonlinear or linear. These writers' expectations regarding how readers would apprehend their texts also suggest that nonlinearity played an influential role in late-medieval English literary culture. Nonlinear invitations like the *Orcherd's* were not there simply to teach readers how to read, but how to read in particularly sophisticated ways their writers judged them capable of achieving only with some guidance. Understanding nonlinear practice in this way speaks to the pressures surrounding the work of readers. It also attests to the tension between readers and writers who attempted to use nonlinear reading to shape their works' reception and interpretation. For the *Orcherd*, being able to place disparate chapters in conversation with each other and the readers' needs enhances the reading experience and readers' affective interpretation. In the eyes of Protestant Tudor audiences and writers, struggling to forge a new religious identity and practice, the way nonlinear reading enables the juxtaposition – and even collection – of texts threatens the integrity of the Bible, and becomes associated with Catholicism as a reading practice characteristic of it.

Hallmarks of nonlinear reading are, nevertheless, not exclusive to devotional works like the *Orcherd*. As nonlinear reading responds to textual organization, and as textual organization can intersect with narrative organization, the organization of any text invites scrutiny of the kinds of reading practice it promotes. Indeed, Chaucer suggests the applicability of nonlinear reading to the *Canterbury Tales* when he suggests that readers who dislike one story may 'Turne over the leef and chese another tale'.¹² Examining evidence for nonlinear reading across a number of texts further demonstrates different approaches to nonlinear reading. Three modes that

emerge most prominently can be described as elicited nonlinearity, as invited in the prologue of the *Orchard of Syon*; modelled, performed nonlinearity, as evidenced by the late-fourteenth-century poem *Titus and Vespasian*, about the fall of Jerusalem; and hybrid nonlinearity, which combines elicited and performed modes of nonlinearity, as found in John Lydgate's fifteenth-century sequel to the *Canterbury Tales*, the *Siege of Thebes*.

Assessing the modes of nonlinearity demonstrated in these works, and how nonlinearity becomes a practice facilitating relations with readers, reveals how three late-medieval writers composing both devotional and secular texts leveraged nonlinear practices. The different approaches to nonlinearity adopted by these three writers, particularly marked for the attention of readers in these three texts, demonstrate that the use of nonlinearity as a participatory reading practice was not exclusive to religious works, but instead employed by writers both to organize texts and also to guide reading practice across a range of literary genres, from the devotional to the historiographical. The independence of these texts from one another and the range of genres in which nonlinearity emerges thus testifies to its widespread influence in late-medieval literary culture and reading practice. In addition, these treatments of nonlinearity indicate that writers relied upon the choices that readers could make in ways that could affect not only interpretation, but also literary reputation. Far from viewing readers as passive recipients of instructional work, the writers of these texts figure their audiences as involved participants in the construction of meaning and authority. Consequently, how these texts address and use nonlinearity discloses much about their shaping of readers' agency and the writers' own authority in late-medieval England. The study of nonlinear reading practices thus provides an essential contribution to our understanding of medieval reading history and the conditions that determined readers' literary experiences in the late Middle Ages, even as its frame in the theories of digital media demonstrates an approach for evaluating 'old media' practices.

Elicited nonlinearity and guiding readers in the Orchard of Syon

As stated above, the explicit invitation found in the prologue to the *Orchard of Syon* seeks to encourage readers to engage in nonlinear apprehension, thus situating it as an explicit example of elicited nonlinearity. Its reliance upon nonlinearity reading to influence

interpretation based on how readers devote their emotional labour to negotiating and understanding the text emphasizes the agency of readers to determine meaning. Such meaning emerges interstitially, as interpretation takes place through the convergence of the explicit message of the text and the message of the text as readers comprehend its relevancy to their own personal situation. In the context of digital media, nonlinearity elicited in this way is considered a valuable support to motivating readers' interest in a work, for determining the connection between the text and the reader, and which section of text to negotiate to after reading the current section – these offer a way of making the work personally relevant to readers.¹³ As will become clear, medieval writers saw similar possibilities for how their readers might benefit from nonlinear apprehension.

This nonlinear reading practice emerges from what has, in hypertext media, been termed the 'promiscuous possibilities' enabled by the comparisons and associations between lexia. The juxtapositions of nonlinear, associative reading (termed hyper-reading) can provoke critical thinking.¹⁴ By eliciting nonlinear reading, the translator of the *Orcherd* urges his audience to adopt an interpretive strategy that enables them to take charge of their spiritual development. The *Orcherd* thus anticipates an audience of readers able to determine thematic connections between chapters, and between their spiritual state and the subjects of each chapter. In this way, the prologue exemplifies the ahierarchical possibilities of nonlinear textual negotiation and underscores the importance of reader participation and choice.

Yet, even as the *Orcherd* emphasizes the centrality of readers' choices, the reading paths – the 'xxxv aleyes' identified by the translator – are nonetheless predetermined through the organization of the work into chapters and paragraphs. While readers might make any juxtaposition that occurs to them, textual organization facilitates only a specified range of choices, which it makes available through a 'pre-programmed' system presented to readers, a situation that evokes the control exerted by the hypertext link. That is, while the hyperlink enables readers to apprehend a text or move between texts in nonlinear ways, the existence of the link itself facilitates a single, predetermined connection between a text and its subsection or another text. In ways similar to the controlling function of the link, the division of texts into chapters imposes structure on nonlinear reading practice that has been determined by someone other than the reader, whether author or scribe.

In the *Orcherd*, the text has not been designed to facilitate connections between nodes smaller than each alley-chapter. Freedom is thus encouraged for readers along certain confines or, more precisely, along emphasized connections. Such gestures as walking among the *Orcherd*'s alleys lead nonlinear readers to be 'positioned in particular pathways'.¹⁵ As another scholar puts it, the *Orcherd* enables the 'strategic but controlled empowerment of the text's reader or recipient'.¹⁶ In this way, the alleys of the *Orcherd* prologue cast into relief the tension between freedom and control in reading the work, even as they also highlight how readers' ability to effect choices about what they read and in what order they read it was viewed as essential to understanding the text. According to the *Orcherd*, reading is most meaningful when it emerges from readers' exercise of controlled agency, and the translator designed the structure of the text to elicit, guide, and limit that agency in order to direct his readers' attention towards the goal of spiritual development.

One consequence of such nonlinear reading in both medieval and digital media is its emphasis on individualized experiences. The choices readers pursue while navigating a work allow them to 'make sense' of their nonlinear experience with the text, but in order to make sense of it, 'the reader must produce a narrative version of it'.¹⁷ Every individual act of nonlinear reading can create, in a sense, a variant based upon the paths taken and texts and portions of text juxtaposed by each reader. The digital media approach to nonlinearity thus draws attention to how a text reflects an act of narrative creation as the reader assembles it. This narrative may differ in its arrangement from the text as presented on a printed page, depicted via the computer, or written in a manuscript.

The individual path negotiated by a reader of the *Orcherd of Syon*, for example, becomes that reader's narrative experience of the *Orcherd*: a devotional narrative, so to speak. Yet that path is also shaped by the materiality of the manuscript and its practices of textual organization. In the *Orcherd*, and emphasized by the layout of its manuscripts, the 'kalender' following the prologue promotes such individualization when it describes several chapters as containing 'a repeticioun of summe wordis seid bifore' or 'a profitable repeticioun of manye þinges, whiche ben seid'.¹⁸ Such summaries can suggest to a reader that these chapters might offer ideal introductory points for beginning reading, or provide chapters that one might read without or before having to read the foregoing chapters. In some of the surviving manuscripts, the

textual organization, its *ordinatio*, is strikingly complex, belying the simplicity of the translator's description in the preface that the work has simply been divided into chapters for the ease of nonlinear practice.¹⁹ For example, British Library Harley 3423, which dates to the early fifteenth century and represents one of the earliest surviving manuscripts of the text, has an organization that is quite complex. Not only are several folios given elaborate, four-sided borders, but chapter summaries are also noted in red ink, as are the abbreviation of chapter numbers in the text. Each folio is provided with a running title above the text, identifying the book and chapter, and marginal, rubricated glosses are also provided. Consequently, the organizational apparatus of the text and its layout on the page, its *mise-en-page*, serves inexorably to catch the reader's eye, demanding attention be paid to the ways the text supports nonlinear access.²⁰

In these ways, the *Orcherd* yokes proleptic instruction for the reader to organization and layout of text and manuscript in order to facilitate nonlinear reading focused on crafting affective interpretation of the text. In so doing, it exposes the tension between freedom and control that underlies the relationship between late-medieval writers and readers engaged in participatory reading practices. Nonlinear reading relies on readers' agency even as its treatment by these writers exposes concerns about the consequences of agentive readers for writers and the texts they increasingly saw as theirs. As nonlinear reading relied on readers to draw meaning from the text in ways that put them in the centre of literary activity as the source of interpretive meaning, potentially displacing writers' authority and even that of the text, how could writers ensure that readers engaged in responsible nonlinear reading and, consequently, interpretation?

Modelled nonlinearity in *Titus and Vespasian*

One particular response to promote effective nonlinear reading required writers to model such reading for their own audiences. Exemplifying performed nonlinearity, the late fourteenth-century poem *Titus and Vespasian* presents a work that models the writer's own collative, nonlinear reading process. While its presentation of that collative narrative invites linear apprehension, it nevertheless demonstrates the effects of nonlinear reading. In particular, the writer explicitly comments on shifts between narrative episodes. Through performed nonlinearity, the writer of *Titus and Vespasian*

both demonstrates how nonlinear reading can enable readers productively to juxtapose episodes and passages in ways that promote effective interpretation and, in consequence, highlights how nonlinear reading creates space for readers' interpretive participation.

Although focusing its narrative on the subject of the fall of Jerusalem, the writer's frequent and repeated emphasis on the foundational tenets and events of Christianity suggests that *Titus and Vespasian* offers a homiletic text aimed at a lay audience desirous of religious and historical education in the vernacular. The writer treats the narrative of Jerusalem's fall as an occasion for affective devotion, focused in particular on the theme of vengeance. Critical assessment of the poem has primarily focused on its relationship to the *Siege of Jerusalem*, with which it shares anti-Semitic sentiment. Discussion of the poem has largely focused on this element in the context of medieval Christian romance and pious discourse, suggesting that it worked affectively to discourage its audience from sympathizing with Jews.²¹ This research has been critical for understanding how these poems functioned culturally for their medieval readers. Yet in comparison to the *Siege of Jerusalem*, *Titus and Vespasian* has been singled out for critical dismissal, which may also respond to the organization of the poem and the reading practice it prompts, as I will discuss. In an unusual move that has occasioned comment from critics, it begins not with a focus on Jerusalem or Titus and Vespasian, but with a lengthy account of Christ's life and miracles.

Over the course of its more than five thousand lines, *Titus and Vespasian* provides its audiences with a poem organized for linear reading. Yet it is notably episodic in its structure, and comments on this nonlinear organization, which consequently enables the poem to model the results of nonlinear reading based on the author's collation of passages drawn from a variety of sources.²² Its organization thus serves to depict the writer's work as a nonlinear reader, for it presents a text assembled from the juxtaposition of lexia. Modelling nonlinear reading begins in the poem with its incorporation of several other lives and episodes into its account of Jerusalem's fall, which adapt and expand on a variety of sources identified from the outset, for such incorporation relies upon negotiation among, and selecting from, diverse resources. The poet explains how he has composed the poem through nonlinear associations when he describes how he has relied upon 'The Gospelles ... [a]nd the passioun of Nicodeme ... [and] the geestes of emperoures'.²³ Later in the poem, when supplementing the

narrative from a new source, he adds after a description of Pilate's death that 'The Sept Sages þus doth us telle' (4391). By identifying his sources as ones from which he has extracted material to incorporate into the work, the writer thus relies upon and embeds within the text his own nonlinear reading experience, his performance of developing a narrative drawn from multiple narrative sources. For example, the writer's performance of nonlinear reading is staged not only through the identification of sources, but also through extensive, frequent insertions of additional narratives into the story of Jerusalem's fall in a way that highlight the episodic nature of the poem. This is made more transparent in a description of the poem's sequencing of a particular collection of episodes: lines 1169–1226 address Vespasian's illnesses (leprosy and a distressing plague of wasps in his nose), but it is not until more than a thousand lines and several scenes later – after the poem has related the life of Pilate, the story of St Veronica, her encounter with St Clement, his conversion, Clement's sermon to Vespasian about the Christian faith, and a few other events – that Vespasian is cured. Drawing attention to the moments where he joins episodes together, the poet announces, 'Agayn to þe story wil we wende' (1630), and, after explaining the signs that betoken the destruction of Jerusalem and extending the discussion to include St Helen's discovery of the true cross, the poet declares, 'Lete we now þe Jewes dwelle. Here gynneth her wrech for to telle' (1163–4). This episodic structure has been the subject of much of the critical dismissal aimed at the poem, which often focus on its lack of narrative unity.²⁴ Rather than treating these references as providing evidence of inferior poetic craft, however, it is worth considering that different aesthetic preferences may be at play among both medieval audiences and modern critics, for whom literary culture has long been dominated by the linear form of the novel. Indeed, twelve manuscripts of the poem survive, attesting to its steady popularity.²⁵ Survivals of a single poem in more than ten copies is noteworthy, and, although not approaching the numbers of surviving manuscripts of outliers such as the *Canterbury Tales*, which survives in more than sixty-five manuscripts, speaks to medieval audiences' enjoyment of *Titus and Vespasian*. This generous number of surviving witnesses suggests that, despite modern critics' aesthetic dissatisfaction with it, medieval readers of *Titus and Vespasian* certainly did appreciate the poem and responded to its marked engagement with nonlinearity.

Through emphasizing the diverse sources brought together to assemble the poem, *Titus and Vespasian* re-creates for its

audience the experience of nonlinear reading and the collation and assemblage of multiple sources in order to develop narrative meaning. Thus, even as readers apprehend in a linear sequence a poem initially designed for linear apprehension, they experience a performance of nonlinear reading laid out through the organization of the text and the stylistic aspects that identify the work of assembling and linking narrative lexia. Furthermore, the writer's repeated emphasis on his performance of nonlinear reading also reinforces the poem's and writer's authority as to guiding readers among various events. Its modelling of nonlinear reading and writing indicates to readers that the events it relates come from richly complex historical moments that would be a challenge to the general reader to negotiate in order to identify which ones bear particular importance and relevance to the subject. By flagging for readers' attention how he has collected these sources into a single narrative, the writer emphasizes that this work has already been accomplished for the reader through provision of the poem. In this way, the writer of *Titus and Vespasian* turns to nonlinearity as a means for exerting control over readers: the writer is the judge of relevancy and intersecting historical events, and guides readers' apprehension to how these events can be juxtaposed. Consequently, the writer also guides readers to practice how such juxtapositions enable them to discern what actions or themes connect episodes and events.

Comparing *Titus and Vespasian's* use of nonlinearity to that of the *Orchard of Syon* emphasizes how diversely medieval texts present nonlinearity to their audiences, inviting them to make it a feature of their reading practice. The *Orchard* requires nonlinear reading be performed by readers and *Titus and Vespasian* performs nonlinearity for readers. In order to facilitate the performance of nonlinear reading, the *Orchard* urges readers to decide the order in which they negotiate among its chapters and thereby determine the rationale that forges connections to or among chapters. In contrast, *Titus and Vespasian* recreates the experience of nonlinear reading for its audience by emphasizing the text's creation from and continued juxtaposition of varied sources, events, and lives. In elicited nonlinearity, as in the *Orchard*, readers create a sequence of texts or textual segments for themselves as they navigate a work. In performed nonlinearity, as in *Titus and Vespasian*, the text provides readers with a sequence of textual segments linked together not by temporality but by thematic parallels. Whereas the translator of the *Orchard* expects readers to determine how the chapters apply to

their own lives, and through this personal application develop the connecting, thematic, devotional tissue that will link their experience of the text's chapters, the writer of *Titus and Vespasian* has already determined the themes that connect its events, and invites readers to determine what these are. A text can also mix these forms of nonlinearity, offering readers both performed and elicited nonlinearity within the same text, as will be demonstrated below in John Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*.

Performed nonlinearity enables *Titus and Vespasian* to make available to readers the various texts needed to emphasize the lessons that can be derived from the siege of Jerusalem, including thematic connections among the lives of people who do not meet directly and are brought together only through their presence in Jerusalem. This use of nonlinearity in *Titus and Vespasian* emphasizes the writer's devotional aims, which emerge most intensely when he concludes the account of Jerusalem's destruction by juxtaposing it with Pilate's suicide and the life and suicide of Judas Iscariot. These comparisons emphasize the fates of those who – whether they be people or cities – betray Christ through deed or by harbouring those who injure him. As Maija Birenbaum mentions in her discussion of the juxtaposition of these episodes, layering events linked by shared themes allows the poet to urge readers towards a particular experience. '[T]he episodes of miracles of healing and conversion interspersed throughout *Titus and Vespasian*', Birenbaum asserts, 'supplement and enrich the reader's affective devotional experience'.²⁶ Such devotional engagement arises through nonlinearity, which guides readers to recognize the instructive relevance of apparently unrelated episodes and to understand the consequences to those who refuse Christ's message. Used in a devotional context, this reading practice could underscore particular hermeneutic goals by encouraging readers to interpret the concepts, themes, experiences, or ideas that connect episodes. Performed nonlinearity, because it does not require readers to seek out connections between lexia according to their own associations, can be used as a technique for instructing readers in a predetermined manner. It thus closes down some of the interpretive agency made possible by readers in texts such as the *Orchard of Syon*, which allows readers to choose which lexia to assemble and compare, and thus exercise their own interpretive agency in a highly personalized manner, by predetermining the lexia for comparison, and thus limiting the types of interpretations readers might effect.

Strikingly, however, *Titus and Vespasian* does not directly identify or explicate the thematic connections among its juxtaposed lives and events: that work still remains left to the reader (and, of course, the modern critic). For example, the conclusion of Pilate's life moves with only the most minimal of interpretive glosses to the story of Judas's death. Pilate has committed suicide, his body tossed in a barrel thrown to sea; like the Wandering Jew, he will never find rest:

He nas not worthy, I understande,
 To have noo rest in water ny londe,
 He þat demede Jhesu to be spylt
 To shamefull deth withouten gylt.
 Now wil I tellen of a aventure
 Of Judas, Goddes treytoure. (4483–88)

Pilate is found unworthy of rest in death, whether on land or sea, because of his condemnation of Jesus and resistance to acknowledging his guilt for that act. In essence, he becomes subject to God's vengeance for refusing to acknowledge the significance of Jesus' status. In a poem that repeatedly emphasizes Jesus' salvific grace and the several conversions that he inspires – Vespasian's, Titus's, Veronica's, Clement's – Pilate and the Jews destroyed in Jerusalem's fall are marked as those who continually reject him. Similarly, the description of Judas' end concludes with the brief comment that 'Pus cam Judas to the ende, / To dampnacion withouten ende. / Lete we Pilate and Judas dwelle; / Of þe Emperour I wil þou telle' (4883–6). Instead of explicating the connections between these lives and the fall of Jerusalem, however, the author of *Titus and Vespasian* relies upon readers to identify the thematic, devotional rationale behind his juxtaposition of the death of the city, Pilate, and Judas. Consequently, in its use of performed nonlinearity unaccompanied by extensive explanation, *Titus and Vespasian* provides evidence for the poet's assessment of his vernacular audience. The poet clearly anticipates readers capable of identifying for themselves themes used to link the events, lives, and stories related in the poem.

In consequence, although inviting reader participation through identification of themes and subjects that arise from its connection of episodes, *Titus and Vespasian* also structures its engagement with nonlinearity in such a way as to limit the choices of readers. These readers are expected to negotiate the text linearly in a way that has them recreating the writer's nonlinear experience. They

should not associate just any episode with any other, but instead follow the juxtaposition of specific episodes that evoke didactic, thematic connections. The work thus exemplifies the controlled use of performed nonlinearity to enhance readers' devotional experience and understanding. Furthermore, drawing on the discourse of the previous chapter, it presents nonlinear reading within a closed network. By collating the relevant sources into a single poem, the writer of *Titus and Vespasian* makes it unnecessary for readers to turn elsewhere for instruction. Other texts that gesture to nonlinearity may, however, grant more license to readers, a license afforded, for instance, in Chaucer's sly comment that readers who would dislike the ribaldry of the Miller's Tale may 'Turne over the leef and chese another tale'.²⁷

Hybridized nonlinearity in the Siege of Thebes

A work that grants greater license to nonlinear readers is John Lydgate's so-called sequel to the *Canterbury Tales*, the *Siege of Thebes*. The first generations of Chaucer's readers viewed the *Canterbury Tales* as needing completion, since Chaucer's pilgrims never arrived at Canterbury or returned to London to finish their story-telling game as promised in the General Prologue. Among these fifteenth-century responses that sought to complete the work by adding links to the frame or extending the frame narrative, Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* circulated most widely in manuscript and, today, has been assessed by critics as crucial to how Lydgate authorizes himself and his work in the wake of Chaucer's influence and his desire to develop himself as a poet in Chaucer's mould.²⁸ In the poem's prologue, Lydgate relates the arrival of Chaucer's pilgrims in Canterbury. Lydgate thus depicts the reading practice of immersion – most familiar to readers today by its deployment as the primary participatory practice operative in video games that function through the selection and play of user-chosen, user-designed avatars – by inserting himself into the frame narrative of the *Canterbury Tales*. From Lydgate's pen then flows the story of how he joins the pilgrims on their return to London and shares with them a story about the destruction of Thebes. The destruction of Thebes offers a further connection to the *Canterbury Tales*, for it is an event that takes place before the events addressed in the Knight's Tale. Lydgate's prologue thus follows the sequence of the frame narrative of the *Canterbury Tales*, while the story he relates sequentially precedes Chaucer's first tale. This juxtaposi-

tion of multiple sequential relations to the *Canterbury Tales* makes reading practice central to the poem in ways that extend beyond how it might represent Lydgate's presentation of his own reading practice. In specific terms, the poem's chronological and structural relationships to the *Canterbury Tales* and Lydgate's own relationship to Chaucer relate directly to the practice of nonlinearity.

Lydgate first elicits nonlinear reading from his audience by crafting a seeming contradiction into the structure of the *Siege of Thebes*: its frame narrative follows the events of the *Canterbury Tales* chronologically by situating its initial action in Canterbury, where Chaucer's pilgrims encounter the monk John Lydgate at their inn. In contrast, the story told by John Lydgate after joining their company relates events that chronologically precede the actions in the Knight's Tale. The *Siege of Thebes* can thus be associated with the *Canterbury Tales* in two ways, either linked after it by following the chronology of the frame narrative, or before it by following the chronology of the story of Thebes' destruction. This juxtaposition that Lydgate presents his readers with is clearly one of textual organization. The multiple organizational possibilities Lydgate crafts position the *Siege of Thebes* as a challenge to reading sequence. Consequently, Lydgate's use of nonlinearity contrasts with its use in the *Orchard of Syon* and *Titus and Vespasian*. Whereas the *Orchard* relies upon elicited nonlinearity and *Titus and Vespasian* models nonlinear reading, the *Siege of Thebes* exemplifies hybridized nonlinearity. It models nonlinear reading in the way Lydgate juxtaposes and associates his work with the *Canterbury Tales*. It also elicits nonlinear reading, for the dual chronological relationship between the works, that of sequel and prequel, invites readers to choose how to associate and sequence the two. Furthermore, readers' associations have interpretive consequences for Lydgate's relationship to and with Chaucer, which Lydgate seeks to further guide in the poem.

The structural relationship of the *Siege* to the *Canterbury Tales* has gained the attention of scholars writing on the poem for the place it holds among Lydgate's many self-authorization strategies and what it indicates about Lydgate's aspiration to fame. Lydgate's decision to compose a work that incorporates such a layered chronological relationship to the *Canterbury Tales* has often been viewed by critics as an aggressive, anxious work of self-fashioning, particularly when set beside Lydgate's decision not to omit Chaucer from the company of Canterbury pilgrims in the frame narrative of the *Siege*.²⁹ Specifically addressing the structure

of the *Siege*'s relationship to the *Canterbury Tales*, James Simpson describes the *Siege* as a poem constructed 'praeposterously', that is, in a back-to-front order in which 'events that are recounted *later* in the fictional time of the newly enlarged *Canterbury Tales* happen *earlier* in history'.³⁰ Another critic describes the relationship between the two poems as 'circular', for '[t]he end is made to join with the beginning'. This circularity reflects Lydgate's 'vision of a historical past in which heroes and their civilizations constantly re-enact the ritual of rise and fall upon Fortune's wheel'.³¹ Yet more than a parallel to Lydgate's view of history emerges from how readers could negotiate between the *Siege* and the *Canterbury Tales*. While these views treat the relationship between the poems as complex but fixed, in fact that fixity is not a given. A consequence of the organizational relationship between the two texts is that the very multiplicity Lydgate effects creates a space for the exertion of readers' agency.

The possibility of choice is embedded even in the terms used by modern critics to describe the texts' relationship: sequel or prequel. These terms reflect a decision Lydgate thus invites readers to make. How should the two texts be linked? What conditions should influence that choice? Here, Lydgate's careful use of textual organization to prompt choice also turns to guidance, as made evident by considering more fully the work of linking lexia. In digital media, links are crucial tools in staging the expression of readers' agency, for they request the performance of agency even as they forge predetermined connections. In effect, a hypertext link limits readers' choices even as it makes possible the appearance and expression of choice through the exercise of nonlinear apprehension. The link goes from one location to one location; a reader can choose to traverse it bidirectionally, but its end points are fixed. As Paul Delany observes of this practice in literary contexts, nonlinearity 'weakens the boundaries of the text', and this weakening of boundaries can 'be thought of as either correcting the artificial isolation of the text from its contexts or as violating one of the chief qualities of the book'.³² Lydgate weakens the boundaries between his text and the *Canterbury Tales* in order to open a space for reconsidering the texts' relationships. In the parlance of the previous chapter, applied here to the organization of the text, Lydgate crafts an open network that connects his work to another. In opening the network of the text in this way, and by further relying on nonlinear reading practice, he urges readers to perform comparative interpretation

of his work in relation to Chaucer's. He also capitalizes on the limitation of choice enabled through the links his chronologies create with the *Canterbury Tales* to enforce a decision focused on sequence. Which view of the text dominates, sequel or prequel, is decided by the choices readers make. The stakes of readers' choices, however, are not limited to the chronological relationship between the texts.

Lydgate relies on nonlinear practice in writing and reading to, in effect, re-found the Knight's Tale as part of a Theban tradition which begins with himself, whom Chaucer, though the earlier writer, follows in precedence. In order to achieve this re-foundation, Lydgate must elicit from his readers a reading of the *Canterbury Tales* that does not follow the linear trajectory of literary history. Whereas elicited nonlinearity in a devotional context might respond to the explicit initiation urging readers to make decisions about thematic or spiritual connections between passages, Lydgate elicits nonlinearity in a way that invites readers to determine his literary reputation. By relating the *Siege of Thebes* to the *Canterbury Tales* in a way that provokes readers to determine how to associate the two texts, Lydgate invites them to determine whether he is Chaucer's follower and successor, or – despite the temporal relationship imposed upon them by chronological history – whether he is someone capable of superseding Chaucer. Lydgate thus treats the choice readers make in associating the *Siege* with the *Canterbury Tales*, whether viewing and reading it secondarily as a sequel, or reading it first as a prelude to Chaucer's work, as carrying interpretive weight for their view of Lydgate's reputation. Consequently, nonlinear practice supports Lydgate's self-authorization strategies. It reflects his perception of readers as able to effect choices regarding textual organization that carry consequences for the presentation and interpretation of the writer's authority and reputation. This view of the relationship between writer and reader was arguably a fresh development in the late-medieval literary scene. As Deborah McGrady describes this changing relationship between late-medieval writers and readers, writers granted readers authority through a variety of reading strategies in order to promote closer study of their texts, a shift that forged deeper connections between texts and readers. In such a way, 'the concept of the individual reader promised for [vernacular writers] and their works an aura of authority'.³³ Lydgate similarly turns to his readers as a source for granting both his work and himself greater authority.

Having presented his readers with a choice, Lydgate does not rely on them to effect their choice without guidance, however. He thus turns repeatedly to nonlinearity throughout the *Siege of Thebes* to organize, thematize, and comment on workings of chronological history. In doing so, he emphasizes repeatedly that what makes history meaningful is the interpretation people draw from events they associate as meaningful when juxtaposed. That is, history offers a narrative the interpretation of which can be determined by how people – how readers and writers – organize and associate events. Linearity becomes notional, and nonlinearity a practice for shaping historical narrative.

Lydgate furthers this model of history as assembled by readers after the prologue, in the first of the three parts into which he divides the story of the Theban siege, where he moves from relying upon elicited nonlinearity to performing nonlinear reading for his audience. In the first part of the poem, Lydgate relates Thebes' foundation narratives before moving on to the story of Laius and Eddipus. Part I concludes by detailing Eddipus' incestuous marriage and his death. Part II shifts focus to Eddipus' sons, Polymyte and Ethiocles, whose disagreement over the Theban crown leads to strife and Polymyte's exile. Part III relates the battle between these brothers, their deaths, and Theseus' arrival and subsequent destruction of Thebes. As becomes evident throughout the *Siege of Thebes*, nonlinearity is at the heart of Lydgate's view of history. His oft-dismissed didactic moralizations on the events he relates transform them from exemplifications of sinfulness and Theban deceit into passages that provide Lydgate with the occasion for diverting from the narrative of Theban events in order to explore political strengths and weaknesses. These moralizing moments also provide the opportunity for Lydgate to comment on the organization of history. One of the conventional medieval views of history focused on its cyclicity, which operates to repeat, but also to emphasize the linear sequence of events (this happens, then this happens; a man grows in greed, commits sins, falls, and then the sequence repeats with a different person as focus). Lydgate, however, examines how this linear cyclicity can be broken. For example, when Oedipus' son Eteocles, under the burden of his promise to cede the crown to his brother at the end of a year, rethinks his oath, Lydgate uses the moment as an opportunity to exhort kings to hold to truth and avoid falsity (ll. 1721–5). Lydgate suggests, when he informs his readers that Thebes 'Distroied was ... / For doublenesse of Ethiocles' (1777–8), that his readers, and kings in particular, are

not bound to repeat this fate but, keeping truth, may avoid it. That is, history is not, in its effects, inevitably circular. Its cycle can be broken, allowing history to advance in a new direction. In fact, what has become history does not have to become the future. What makes the inevitable cyclicity of the future neither inevitable nor cyclical is determined by the choices individuals, like kings and even his readers, can make.

This transformation that Lydgate seeks to effect in the Theban narrative also extends to his and Chaucer's relationship as poets. Again, as in the structure of the *Siege*, Lydgate relies upon the authority of his readers to determine his reception and reputation. The ability to upend history by making fresh choices effects a change that readers can also apply to how they view his relationship to Chaucer. In order to make this possibility more apparent to his readers, Lydgate turns again to the modelling of nonlinear strategies when discussing the foundation narratives of Thebes. His most pointed modelling of a nonlinear approach to historical chronology emerges when he describes the first foundation of Thebes by Cadmus after Lydgate has already described its second foundation by Amphion. The order of Lydgate's telling is itself a significant feature. But rather than following Lydgate's sequence, let us first address the first foundation. For it, Lydgate turns to older authorities as his source:

Some expositours,
 Groundyng hem / vpon olde auctours,
 Seyn that Cadmvs / the famous olde man,
 Ful longe afor / this Cite first began ...
 With thong out-korve / of a boolys hyde ...
 To get Inne londe / a ful large space
 Wher-vp-on to byld / a dwellyng place (I.293–6, 299, 301–2).

Thus Lydgate summarizes the myth of Thebes' Cadmean founding, in which Cadmus, in search of his sister Europa, was advised by the Delphic oracle to give up the search and instead follow another cow and found a city upon the place it first rested. Cadmus sowed dragon's teeth in this ground, and from them warriors sprang up and began attacking each other. It was there, with the help of the fittest survivors, that Cadmus built his city.

Of course, the history of Thebes does not end with its Cadmean foundation. 'But Cadmus ther hath longe not sojourned', Lydgate notes before he returns to the story of the exemplary King Amphion. This second foundation, for Lydgate, seems more

meaningful. After the exile of Cadmus led to the ruin of the city's first foundation, Amphion rebuilt the city 'With the swetnesse / and melodious soun / And armonye / of his swete song' (I.202–3). The arts, expressed through Amphion's playing and song, figure centrally in this second foundation. A few lines later, Lydgate returns to this theme with an extended comparison of the pen versus the sword. The arts, he concludes, provide a stronger foundation for a city than does military might. As Lois Ebin and Lee Patterson remark, this second foundation demonstrates the triumph of Mercury over Mars, words and song over war.³⁴ For Lydgate, the first poet to refer to rhetoric as artistic 'illumination', the second foundation of Thebes is infinitely preferable to the first.

Yet Lydgate is concerned not only with the foundation of Thebes, but also, as the *Siege* prologue has demonstrated, with the foundation of the English literary scene and his own place in it. In the context of the relationship between the *Siege* and the *Canterbury Tales*, the foundational position of arts resonates strongly, while it simultaneously raises the question of whose arts hold precedence. Lydgate's retelling of the two foundational narratives of Thebes strikingly orders the two events so as to relate Amphion's later foundation first (lines 200–43) and offer a moralization upon the example Amphion sets for rulers. He then turns to Cadmus (lines 293–315), who loses his crown and gains exile in its stead. Last, Lydgate returns to the example of Amphion (lines 325–8), from whom descends a line of kings including Laius and his infamous son Oedipus. As the audience of the *Siege* reads these foundation narratives, they learn first of Amphion, then of Cadmus, and then Amphion again. This sequence represents Lydgate's most prominent use of performed nonlinearity. Lydgate juxtaposes these foundation narratives for his readers in a way that emphasizes how the arts help a kingdom flourish, and how a second foundation can improve upon the first. This juxtaposition also evokes one choice that nonlinear readers could make: beginning to read with Chaucer, turning to Lydgate, then returning to Chaucer. Chaucer, as a sweet singer, might well fit the role of Amphion, and this would be consonant with Lydgate's respectful treatment of him. Such an interpretation, however, makes no place for Lydgate himself.

Instead, a chronological account offers a stronger parallel for Lydgate's and Chaucer's relationship vis-à-vis Cadmus and Amphion: Chaucer, like Cadmus, was a founder and originator – in Chaucer's case, a founder of the English literary scene. As Cadmus

was credited with introducing the alphabet, so was Chaucer assigned the foundational English literary role.³⁵ Indeed, Lydgate treats Chaucer thus in the *Siege*, acknowledging his fundamental indebtedness even as he simultaneously builds upon and elides Chaucer's work. In this way, it is Lydgate who, Amphion-like, expands on the initial foundation with a newer, successful foundation of his own. The sequencing of the two narratives emphasizes the prominence of the second foundation. The Cadmean narrative, which has the potential to unseat Lydgate's preferred narrative through the authority of greater antiquity, historical precedence, and 'olde auctors', becomes subordinated to the second foundation in a way that mirrors the work and the choice presented by the *Siege* as a whole. Chaucer himself is one such 'expositour' and a 'famous olde man' who may give way to Lydgate even as Cadmus gives way to Amphion.

Notably, even after he introduces the Cadmean narrative, Lydgate continues to insist on the primacy of Amphion's foundational story. In the broader context of nonlinearity as elicited by the relationship between the *Siege* prologue and the *Canterbury Tales*, this approach of Lydgate's invites a closer reading of his own relationship to Chaucer. At the same time, by acknowledging the Cadmean narrative and moving directly from the second discussion of Amphion to Laius, Oedipus' father, Lydgate attempts to close the narrative of Theban foundation so as to prevent his own work from being superseded and replaced. In this way, Lydgate shares something with the writer of *Titus and Vespasian*, who also relies upon performed nonlinearity in order to provoke particular readerly interpretations. Lydgate here provides readers with an example of performed nonlinearity in order to make a point about how they can narrate the story of his and Chaucer's relationship.

Readers who respond to this suggestion that historical chronology does not have to determine the truth of precedence, that the trajectory of history does not have to be everlastingly subject to linear sequence, suggest a medieval pre-history to Espin Aarseth's term for digital media nonlinear readers: 'agents of the text'.³⁶ Lydgate invites his readers not only to reconcile the *Siege* with the *Canterbury Tales*, but also to become his proxies, his agents, in the struggle to develop and assert his own literary reputation. Through his readers, and through their use of nonlinear practice, Lydgate seeks to re-found the Knight's Tale as part of a Theban tradition that begins with himself, whom Chaucer, though the earlier writer, follows in precedence. That Lydgate does so through reorganizing

the foundation narratives, inviting readers to apply a familiar mode of reading, and, by means of that application, agree with Lydgate in shaping his literary reputation, must be acknowledged. The description of Lydgate as a derivative imitator struggling vainly to match or even exceed his literary forefather – still a common perception of the poet even in the wake of recent revisionist scholarship – gains new significance if the *Siege* is read before the *Canterbury Tales*. Lydgate seeks to strategize his way to becoming a literary luminary whose work sheds new light upon familiar texts. Chaucer's greatness supports Lydgate's own exceptional status as a poet. In such a light, Lydgate assumes precedence over Chaucer, and Chaucer's works become interpreted through the lens of Lydgate's didactic morality. Readers engaged in following Lydgate's suggestions to read not simply his text, but history in a nonlinear way become powerful agents for redefinition of his own authority. Nonlinear reading thus relies on readers' agency and interpretive authority, even as that agency and authority are crafted in such a way that they become subject to – Lydgate clearly hopes – the writer's guidance. As with open- and closed-access emendation, nonlinear reading becomes a site for exploring the developing relations between writers who see both themselves and their readers as sources of authority.

Manuscripts and Nonlinearity

Evidence attesting to readers' performance of nonlinear reading can be difficult to identify, as nonlinearity prompts a reading experience primarily experienced ephemerally through readers' intellectual associations among texts and selections from texts. Indeed, as the discussion in the previous chapter of how gender intersected with restrictions placed upon corrective reading has shown, that ephemerality may have provided a degree of its attraction to writers of devotional works. For translators like that of the *Orchard of Syon*, the ephemerality of nonlinear reading provides another way that audiences of women readers could participate with texts and writers, yet leave the work of writing itself in the hands of learned writers, a body predominantly male in its composition.

Yet manuscript evidence can further our understanding of how readers and scribes both understood the nonlinearity of these texts. Such evidence indicates that providing support to nonlinear reading through provision and marking out of textual divisions formed an interest of the scribes copying *Titus and Vespasian*, and

that Lydgate's extensive efforts to reformulate his audience's perception of his reputation and legacy relative to Chaucer achieved only limited, mixed results. Clearly, however, the evidence indicates that audiences responded to the prompt to participate with texts through nonlinear reading in thoughtful ways, though not necessarily with the results the writers tried to elicit.

That readers may have appreciated the nonlinearity of *Titus and Vespasian*, but also found it taxing, perhaps especially for the effort required to determine its connections among the legendary and miracle narratives, is suggested by both manuscripts of *Titus and Vespasian* and *The prose siege of Jerusalem*, a fifteenth-century redaction of *Titus and Vespasian* that excises much of the legendary material surrounding the attack on Jerusalem.³⁷ The life of Christ, with which *Titus and Vespasian* begins, and the death of Judas, with which it ends, are the two most prominent excisions. In this way, the manuscript provides a streamlined narrative with fewer of the episodic juxtapositions that would have made readers work to identify the thematic connections among them. The active work of interpretation required to understand the connections between *Titus and Vespasian's* episodes here finds a response allowing for more passive, less effortful reader engagement.

Taking a different approach, the scribe of one *Titus and Vespasian* manuscript, Morgan Library MS M.898, provides chapter summaries at the beginnings of episodes. These summaries suggest that the scribe anticipated that readers would find the summaries useful and less laborious than identifying the pertinent developments in plot and themes themselves. Furthermore, the use of summaries indicates that readers might, despite how the writer of *Titus and Vespasian* crafted the work to be read in a linear sequence, be interested in accessing only certain portions of the text at certain times. This approach builds on the writer's documentation of his own use of nonlinear reading, while at the same time making it easier for readers to approach the episodic elements of the narrative in their own determination of sequence, rather than that provided by the writer. That is, scribes who imposed textual division on the narrative indicate their anticipation that readers might prefer to access the work nonlinearly, and rework the poem by creating an organizational structure to facilitate nonlinear access.

Such reorganization of the text might take different pathways according to how the scribes, in their role of professional readers, interpreted the text. These attitudes towards the work also seem to

have altered over time. For example, the scribes of British Library MS Add. 10036 and Add. 36523, two of the earliest manuscripts of *Titus and Vespasian*, provide no distinctions between episodes, designing textual layouts that consequently facilitate linear reading in accordance with the writer's organization of the text. Later manuscripts, perhaps responding to fifteenth-century preferences for texts with marked divisions, supply summaries and chapter divisions like those seen in M.898.³⁸ Such mixed responses to the work's nonlinearity attests to how the creation of linear narrative from nonlinear reading experiences works rather experimentally in *Titus and Vespasian*. While some scribes recognized the writer's attempts to represent his nonlinear experience in a linear narrative, others could and did override this by dividing the text in ways that responded to their own perceptions that it should be read nonlinearly, thus facilitating subsequent readers' nonlinear access to various narrative episodes. In other words, perceptions of a text's accessibility to linear or nonlinear reading could vary among audiences, and could be shaped and reshaped not only by writers' efforts and readers' decisions, but also by the decisions of scribes.

In the case of the *Siege of Thebes*, perhaps the most vivid illustration of the success of Lydgate's nonlinear reading strategy can be identified in a manuscript that collects it along with selections from the *Canterbury Tales*: Longleat, Warminster, Marquis of Bath MS 257. This manuscript contains the Knight's Tale, the Clerk's Tale, and the *Siege of Thebes*, copied in a single hand.³⁹ Strikingly, the Knight's Tale and the Clerk's Tale have been stripped of the prologues that position them within the pilgrimage frame of the *Canterbury Tales*. Only the *Siege of Thebes* retains its prologue, and in Longleat 257, the *Siege of Thebes* comes – strikingly and pointedly – first. This manuscript anthology, which dates to 1457–69, gives evidence for reading choices that privilege the *Siege of Thebes*, attending to the chronology of the Theban narratives rather than the pilgrimage frames. The alternative reading pathway that Lydgate made available to readers through the nonlinear relationship he developed structurally between the *Siege* and the *Canterbury Tales* gains material force in this manuscript.⁴⁰ Chaucer has, literally in the arrangement of the texts in this manuscript, become Lydgate's follower, and the Knight's Tale and the Clerk's Tale become incorporated into Lydgate's own poetic creation and aspirations. Lydgate, a skilled and professional reader who elsewhere shows himself interested in accommodating and instructing his readers in the various ways in which they might

read and interpret his works, in the *Siege* deftly develops a tale that capitalizes on a common reading skill of his readers and, in so doing, accommodates those who came to him first, or in preference, as a means by which he can extend his reputation and authority.

Longleat both demonstrates the existence of one reading path that Lydgate made available to his nonlinear readers, and also demonstrates the agency of readers to arrange such readings according to how they interpreted what they read, whether these are readers such as the scribe responsible for the creation of the manuscript, or the patron who commissioned its development and determined its contents. The Longleat manuscript gives their readings material force through textual collection – for collections not only facilitate nonlinear reading but can, in their creation, derive from nonlinear reading as well. The common perception of the *Siege*, one that dominated in the late Middle Ages as now, is that of a work written as a sequel to the *Canterbury Tales*. Alongside this interpretation of the *Siege* emerge others cast into relief by the text's reliance upon performed and elicited nonlinearity. Nonlinearity provides readers with the agency and authority to grant primacy to Lydgate's provision of the foundational Theban narrative that the Knight's Tale then concludes.

When readers approached the *Siege* in this manner, then the relationship between the *Siege* and the *Canterbury Tales* developed by Lydgate suggests less about failure than it does about success. For these readers, the *Siege of Thebes* and Lydgate pave the way for the more frivolous *Canterbury Tales*, pre-emptively casting Chaucer's text within a didactic framework that begins with Lydgate's moral interpretation of the matter of Thebes and ends with the Parson's sermon. In reflecting this reading order, manuscripts of the *Siege* like Longleat 257, and manuscripts of *Titus and Vespasian* that emphasize or obscure the episodic narrative in ways that promote nonlinear or linear reading make visible not only the variety of ways the texts were used by their original readers, but also contribute to our understanding of the writers' goals for shaping their perceptions of their readers, the possibilities of their readers' interpretive strategies, and their own understanding of their authority to make their readers work in these ways.

Assessing the manuscript evidence of nonlinearity further reveals how contingent could be the categorization of scribes. For example, in the context of corrective reading practice, writers' references to their audiences situate scribes as belonging firmly to the category of readers who need to be encouraged to pay attention

to the details of the text and correct it. In the context of nonlinear reading, scribes move between categories of reader and writer even as they resist categorization. That is, in Lydgate's case, scribes once again become implicated among his diffuse conception of a broad reading public. In other cases such as that of the *Orchard of Syon*, which is directed specifically to an audience of nuns, or in that of *Titus and Vespasian* whose scribes impose dramatically distinct modes of organization upon the text, scribes adopt a more interventionist role in shaping reception of the text. In fact, how scribes of *Titus and Vespasian* impose organizational schema upon the text in ways that facilitate readers' nonlinear engagement with the work suggests that these scribes adopted a much more authorial role in guiding and shaping the audiences' reading experiences. Consequently, assessing nonlinear practice provides further ways by which the work and status of scribes may be evaluated.

Conclusion

Studying the use of nonlinearity in the *Orchard of Syon*, the *Siege of Thebes*, and *Titus and Vespasian* enables examination of how a culture grappling with strategies for negotiating the sequence of texts in manuscripts gave rise to works that reflected, anticipated, shaped, and promoted the choices of their writers and readers. The *Orchard* showcases the agency of readers, who are anticipated as able to effect meaningful choices about the text and its relationship to their spiritual state. The *Siege of Thebes* provides a fascinating study of one author's expectations about his vernacular audience's ability to determine relationships between texts and what that ability signifies for his developing reputation as a writer. *Titus and Vespasian* offers a compelling glimpse into how a single writer, reflecting his own nonlinear reading practices, developed a text that models that reading practice in order to enhance the work's devotional interpretations.

The *Siege of Thebes* and *Titus and Vespasian* represent works for which the authority of readers is both crucial and yet also constrained, exemplifying tension between freedom and control that scholarship on contemporary nonlinear media helps distinguish. In these and other works, readers' choices are often presented as conditional, limited to the options authorized by a text. The *Orchard*, for example, focuses on the choices readers could make as they negotiate within the text, yoking those choices to specific goals and attitudes and, additionally, excluding from its attention

how readers might also bring external texts to bear. In Elizabeth Schirmer's observation, this facilitation and restriction of readers' choices creates a tension 'between empowering ... readers and containing and controlling their readerly agency'.⁴¹ Such a tension can be seen in *Titus and Vespasian* as well, which manages readers' authority by juxtaposing lives and events in order to provoke devotional interpretation of the text and consequently enhancing its own authority. Yet, as Lydgate's treatment of nonlinearity in the *Siege of Thebes* vividly demonstrates, such sophisticated reading practices were not restricted to religious texts and audiences alone. Pursuing the secular audience interested in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the *Siege* capitalizes on a growing thirst for participation amongst readers and uses readers' authority to shape a writer's authority. Lydgate relies on elicited nonlinearity to provide readers with a choice about how to relate his text to Chaucer's, then performs a nonlinear reading of history to suggest how that decision could be resolved in a way that heightens his own authority and reputation.

These texts' reliance upon and development of a discourse of participatory reading focused on nonlinear reading practices furthermore recalls John Dagenais's comment that 'Reading, not writing, was the dominant literary mode in the Middle Ages'.⁴² The possibilities of nonlinear reading shape the structural and thematic concerns of all three works. The translator of the *Orchard* frames the dialogues of Catherine of Siena with a metaphor of the reading process designed to elicit a particular mode of interpreting and negotiating among sections of the text that generates affective responses. By turning to nonlinearity, the writer of *Titus and Vespasian* imposes a familiar mode of devotional, affective interpretation upon his readers to elicit their participation through thematic analysis.⁴³ Through such applications, the uses of nonlinearity in the *Orchard* and *Titus and Vespasian* provide evidence for what has been described as a 'steadily growing level of confidence and sophistication in the composition, production, circulation, and consumption' of vernacular religious texts.⁴⁴

As Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* demonstrates, however, reliance upon this sophisticated reading practice for the composition, circulation, and consumption of texts cannot be restricted to the devotional alone. In the *Siege*, Lydgate makes use of nonlinearity by applying it to the construction of his literary reputation, in a manner that also intersects with traditions for assembling manuscript anthologies and miscellanea. In this way, Lydgate also

anticipates the print-era role of editors as collaborators in developing and publicizing texts as he relies on nonlinearity to encourage readers to become his literary agents. Nonlinear reading, for Lydgate, becomes a mode of self-promotion.

While Lydgate's strategy differs from that of the translator of the *Orcherd* and the writer of *Titus and Vespasian*, all of the writers deploy nonlinearity to achieve specific goals for their texts through a tensely negotiated, limited reliance upon readers' agency. Yet, even as Elizabeth Schirmer attributes this tension to the 'textual culture of Syon Abbey' and 'a moment of crisis in Middle English textual culture, sparked by the controversy over the Lollard heresy',⁴⁵ the shared presence of nonlinear practices in *Titus and Vespasian* and the *Siege of Thebes*, works neither associated with Syon Abbey nor exclusively religious in their audiences, points to the broader reach and influence of nonlinearity, even as it also suggests a deeper understanding of the practices and pressures shaping English textual culture. In this light, these three texts can be seen as pointing to late Middle English writers' recognition of the potential vernacular readers possessed for understanding, practising, and becoming skilful with sophisticated reading practices. Furthermore, the reliance these writers placed on their late-medieval readers, particularly in ways that disregard the work of scribes, shows how such readers' authority and agency became framed as crucial to the success of the writers' goals.

In addition, how the translator of the *Orcherd*, Lydgate, and the poet of *Titus and Vespasian* negotiated between granting readers' agency and controlling the extent of that agency, evidences the historical contingency that attends medieval uses of nonlinearity. At the same time, however, medieval uses of nonlinearity provide a bridge for understanding its emergence in media today. As developed here, the subcategories of nonlinearity, performed and elicited, could be applied to forms of digital media in order to distinguish better how nonlinearity today continues to be a powerful mechanism for controlling readers. They can also refine our understanding of the applications, aesthetics, and strategies that applied to medieval uses of nonlinearity. Such aesthetics point to how writers used reading practices not only in the formation of their own writing, but to create connections with other works, which they could then present in their own works in ways that raised or lowered the boundaries between texts. Such efforts reflect the establishment of literary networks, within and between works. At the same time, readers could ignore these boundaries, reorgan-

ize the relations of texts in a network, and even establish their own networks through associations they recognize between the present text and prior reading. Reflecting on the slipperiness of nonlinear practice in this way highlights the queerness of readers through the heterogeneity of their practices, the ease of their resistance to the imposition of organizational norms, and even the way that scribes and writers tensely negotiate or complicate those norms. In such a context, reading evokes a queer potential. The attempt to discredit and condemn nonlinear reading in the 1549 *Book of common prayer* highlights the contentious, dangerous nature of what queer reading can do to the body of the book; through nonlinear practice, the book and reading practice both become perceived as ‘broken’. Yet that potential for disruption also provided medieval writers with ways to mend relations between readers and texts, crafting a practice that facilitated the savoury consumption of texts.

As we attend to the ‘medieval literacy industry’,⁴⁶ the insights of digital media criticism offer a framework useful for reconsidering the medieval pre-history of today’s digital media practices, particularly the function of nonlinear reading in the late Middle Ages. Attending not only to the manuscripts that provide material evidence for medieval reading, but also to the literary works that provide their own evidence for reading practices, and to the broader cultural practices that reflect and influence the same, helps pave the way for a more nuanced, informed understanding of medieval literary culture, the forces that shaped the texts we still read today, and the tools available to writers and readers alike.

Notes

- 1 On the early modern work of collative composition and reading, see Matthew P. Brown, ‘Undisciplined reading’, *Common-Place* 8:1 (2007), n. pag., web, and further contextualized historically in *The pilgrim and the bee: reading rituals and book culture in early New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).
- 2 Landow, *Hypertext 3.0*, 53–5.
- 3 Despite this early rejection of discontinuous reading, Matthew Brown notes that devotional works in early modern England continued to rely upon and advocate nonlinear reading to their audiences (‘The thick style: steady sellers, textual aesthetics, and early modern devotional reading’, *PMLA* 121:1 [2006], 67–86). For a religion that relies upon continued assessment of the New versus Old Testaments, and whose central redemptive narrative is repeated across four Gospels, habitual linear reading provides a continual challenge.

- 4 Scholars of nineteenth-century literature connect these issues particularly to the novel. For example, J. Hills Miller writes that ‘The linearity of the written or printed book is a puissant support of logocentrism. The writer ... sits at a desk and spins out on the page a long thread or filament of ink. Word follows word from the beginning to the end. The manuscript is set for printing in the same way, whether letter by letter, by linotype, or from tape by computer. The reader follows, or is supposed to follow, the text in the same way, reading word by word and line by line from beginning to the end’, in *Ariadne’s thread: story lines* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 5. Miller suggests that, just as writing a novel produces a linear narrative, and the materiality of the work is linear, so too reading follows linearly. Yet, while this may be true for some novels, these are not ontological truths of the codex as a media form, as I discuss here. These qualities are instead influenced by the organization of a particular literary form. Similarly, Jeffrey Knight argues that textual composition is related to the materiality of printing only through the choices made by writers to respond to the material form of printing, in *Bound to read: compilations, collections, and the making of Renaissance literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).
- 5 See Martin Foys, *Virtually Anglo-Saxon: old media, new media, and early medieval studies in the late age of print* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), particularly the chapter on ‘Anselm’s hyper-text’, 38–78.
- 6 Walter of Chatillon, *The Alexandreis*, translated by David Townsend (Toronto: Broadview Editions, 2007), ll. 40–3.
- 7 Vincent Gillespie, ‘Vernacular books of religion’, in *Book production and publishing in Britain 1375–1475*, edited by Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 317–44, at 328.
- 8 Phyllis Hodgson and Gabriel M. Liegey, eds, *The Orchard of Syon*, Early English Text Society original series 258 (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), at 1. Subsequent quotations will be from this edition. In modern English, this passage might be translated as, ‘Therefore, religious sisters, I encourage you to disport yourselves in this spiritual orchard at reasonably set times, and walk about with your mind and reason where you wish, in what alley you like. Specifically, savour there as best you be disposed. You must choose as you like where you will walk among thirty-five alleys – that is to say, thirty-five chapters – one time in one, another time in another’. The *Orchard* has received much scholarly attention in recent decades for its importance in representing women’s devotional and reading practices in the community of nuns at Syon. For discussions of the *Orchard* and its readers, see Denise Despres’s ‘Ecstatic reading and missionary mysticism: *The Orchard of Syon*’, in *Prophets abroad: the reception of continental holy*

- women in late-medieval England, ed. Rosalynn Voaden (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), 141–60; several essays by C. Annette Grise, but specifically, “‘In the blessed vyne[y]erd of oure holy saueour’: female religious readers and textual reception in the *Myroure of oure ladye* and the *Orcherd of Syon*”, in *The medieval mystical tradition: England, Ireland, and Wales*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999), 193–211 and ‘Prayer, meditation, and women readers in late medieval England: teaching and sharing through books’. *Texts and traditions of medieval pastoral care: essays in honour of Bella Millet*, ed. Cate Gunn and Catherine Innes-Parker (Woodbridge, UK: York Medieval Press, 2009), 178–92; Vincent Gillespie, ‘Anonymous devotional writings’, in *A companion to Middle English prose*, ed. A. S. G. Edwards (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 127–49; Elizabeth Schirmer, ‘Reading lessons at Syon Abbey: the *Myroure of oure ladye* and the mandates of vernacular theology’, in *Voices in dialogue: reading women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Linda Olson and Katherine Kerby-Fulton (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 345–76.
- 9 See Appendix B for examples of other instructions on nonlinear reading. For discussions on how nonlinearity is used to promote affective interpretation, see Sarah Noonan, “‘Bycause the redyng shold not turne hem to enoye’: reading, selectivity, and *pietatis affectum* in late medieval England’, *New Medieval Literatures* 15 (2013), 225–54; and, more generally, Mark Amsler, ‘Affective literacy: gestures of reading in the later Middle Ages’, *Essays in medieval studies* 18 (2001), 83–110, and *Affective literacies: writing and multilingualism in the late Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011).
 - 10 From the *Pseudo-Augustinian Soliloquies*, provided in John C. Hirsch, *The revelations of Margery Kempe: paramystical practices in late medieval England* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), 62.
 - 11 For details on medieval approaches to the environment, see Ellen F. Arnold’s *Negotiating the landscape: environment and monastic identity in the medieval Ardennes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).
 - 12 *Riverside Chaucer*, I.3177.
 - 13 Ziming Liu, *Paper to digital: documents in the Information Age* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 2008), 60; Byeong-Young Cho and Lindsay Woodward, ‘New demands of reading in the mobile internet Age’, in *Mobile pedagogy and perspectives on teaching and learning*, ed. Douglas McConatha *et al.* (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2014), 191.
 - 14 See Robert Payne, *The promiscuity of network culture: queer theory and digital media* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Stuart Moulthrop, ‘You say you want a revolution? Hypertext and the laws of media’, *The new media reader* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 691–704, at 699; and Davida Charney, ‘The effect of hypertext on processes of reading

- and writing', in *Literacy and computers: the complications of teaching and learning with technology*, ed. Cynthia L. Selfe and Susan Hilligoss (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1994), 238–63, at 259.
- 15 Martin Lister *et al.*, eds, *Digital media: a critical introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 29.
 - 16 Gillespie, 'Anonymous devotional writings', 127.
 - 17 Aarseth, *Cybertext*, 79, 95.
 - 18 Hodgson and Liegey, eds, *The Orchard of Syon*, 3, 9.
 - 19 Richard H. Rouse and Mary A. Rouse address the issue of *ordinatio* in their seminal works, 'Statim invenire: schools, preachers and new attitudes to the page', in *Renaissance and renewal in the twelfth century*, ed. by Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 191–335 and *Authentic witnesses: approaches to medieval texts and manuscripts* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991). Cf. the equally influential essay by Malcom Parkes, 'The influence of the concepts of *ordinatio* and *compilatio* on the development of the book', in *Scribes, scripts and readers* (London: Hambledon Press, 1991); and Paul Saenger, *Space between words: the origins of silent reading* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997). Saenger connects the rise of silent reading to accommodations for dividing and organizing texts, because such accommodations facilitated individual readers' use of and access to texts.
 - 20 As Jessica Brantley notes, such considerations of page layout and design support nonlinear reading of the page itself, as the eye moves not from first word to last in linear sequence, but from heading to text to gloss and decorative capital (*Reading in the wilderness*, 94). Particular sequences can be encouraged by the relative size of different visual elements on the page, as well as the colours used, but the performance of nonlinearity still remains up to the reader.
 - 21 Maija Birenbaum, 'Affective vengeance in *Titus and Vespasian*', *Chaucer Review* 43:3 (2009), 330–44.
 - 22 On the subject of collative reading, see Brown, 'Undisciplined reading'. Another parallel might be drawn to the works of Marie de France, who refers to her work of composition using the term 'assembler', to assemble, in the prologue to the *Lais*. As such, the text does not require the interpretive effort of assemblage in the way that the *Orchard* does, this labour having been accomplished already by the writer.
 - 23 J. A. Herbert, ed., *Titus and Vespasian or, the destruction of Jerusalem* (London: Roxburghe Club, 1905), lines 7–11. Subsequent quotes are also drawn from this edition.
 - 24 For instance, in her chapter comparing *The Siege of Jerusalem* with *Titus and Vespasian* in *The Siege of Jerusalem in its physical, literary, and historical contexts* (Dublin and Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 2000), Bonnie Millar dismisses *Titus and Vespasian* as incoherent

- because of its narrative additions and divagations (124–5), and even the poem’s editor declares that ‘For the sake of brevity I have frequently alluded to the present metrical composition as a poem, but the justice of Dr. Brandl’s description of it as “void of artistic composition” cannot be gainsaid’ (Herbert, *Titus*, xlv).
- 25 As catalogued by the *Digital index of Middle English verse*, <http://www.dimev.net>. See also Carl F. Bühler, ‘The new Morgan manuscript of *Titus and Vespasian*’. *PMLA* 76:1 (1961), 20–24, at 20.
 - 26 Birenbaum, ‘Affective vengeance’, 340.
 - 27 *Riverside Chaucer*, I.3177. Implicit in this suggestion that readers turn the leaf to avoid the tale is the expectation that – without such prompting – readers will negotiate the work linearly, and certainly the number of spurious links and additional tales added to fifteenth- and sixteenth-century manuscripts and printed texts of the *Canterbury Tales* suggest a desire, not simply for a completed work, but one that could be read linearly, without fragmentation or breaks between beginning and end.
 - 28 Daniel T. Kline, ‘Father Chaucer and the *Siege of Thebes*: literary paternity, aggressive defense, and the prologue to Lydgate’s Oedipal Canterbury Tale’, *The Chaucer Review* 34 (1999), 217–35; and Mary C. Flannery, *John Lydgate and the poetics of fame* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
 - 29 On Lydgate’s strategies for authorization and self-fashioning, see John Meyer-Lee, *Poets and power from Chaucer to Wyatt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); John M. Bowers, *Chaucer and Langland: the antagonizing tradition* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), especially at 18; Thomas Augustine Prendergast, *Chaucer’s dead body: from corpse to corpus* (New York: Routledge, 2004). As Meyer-Lee puts it, Lydgate enters the *Siege of Thebes* ‘to bestow upon it the authority he possesses outside of it. The agon with Chaucer that he states throughout his imitation of the *Canterbury Tales* ... aims not so much to depict himself as an authentic disciple and heir as to transform Chaucer into a flesh-and-blood laureate who retroactively defines the role that Lydgate implicitly claims to occupy’ (39–40). See Meyer-Lee, ‘Lydgate’s laureate pose’, in *John Lydgate: poetry, culture, and Lancastrian England*, ed. Larry Scanlon and James Simpson (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 36–60.
 - 30 “Dysemol daies and fatal houres”: Lydgate’s *Destruction of Thebes* and Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale’, in *The long fifteenth century*, ed. Douglas Gray, Helen Cooper, and Sally Mapstone (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 15–34, at 22.
 - 31 John Bowers ‘*The Tale of Beryn* and *The Siege of Thebes*: alternative ideas of *The Canterbury Tales*’, in *Writing after Chaucer*, 201–25, at 215 and 216.

- 32 Paul Delany, 'Hypertext, hypermedia and literary studies: the state of the art', in *Hypermedia and literary studies*, ed. Paul Delany and George P. Landow (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991 [repr. 1994]), at 12.
- 33 McGrady, *Controlling readers*, at 6.
- 34 Lois Ebin, *John Lydgate* (Boston: Twayne, 1985), at 53; Lee Patterson, 'Making identities in fifteenth-century England: Henry V and John Lydgate', in Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds, eds, *New historical literary study: essays on reproducing texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 69–107, at 75.
- 35 For references to Cadmus as developer of the alphabet, see John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, 4.2401; Godfrey of Viterbo's *Pantheon* 6, col. 157; and Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* 1.3.5–6, which was also adapted by Hugh of St Victor in *Didascalion* 3.2.
- 36 Espin Aarseth, 'Nonlinearity and literary theory', in George Landow, ed., *Hyper/text/theory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 51–86, at 66. Aarseth's work on ergodic literature, within which he includes nonlinear texts, continues to be influential in the field: also see *Cybertext*.
- 37 Such a treatment seems to anticipate the fate of hypertext fiction today, as the taxing effort required to read and assemble narrative has been one of the reasons attributed to the genre's failure to gain wide readership. See, for example, Benjamin Paloff, 'Digital Orpheus: the hypertext poem in time', *Journal of electronic publishing* 14:2 (Fall 2011), <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/3336451.0014.211>; Paul LaFarge, 'Why the book's future never happened', Salon.com (October 4, 2011), [www.salon.com/2011/10/04/return_of_hypertext/singleton/](http://www.salon.com/2011/10/04/return_of_hypertext_singleton/); Stuart Moulthrop, 'For thee: a response to Alice Bell', in the *Electronic book review* (January 21, 2011), www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/networked; and Roy Rosenzweig and Steve Brier, 'Historians and hypertext: is it more than hype?' in *Clio wired: the future of the past in the Digital Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 85–91. In a similar vein, Robert Coover updated his prediction of the 'End of books' in 'Literary hypertext: the passing of the golden age', a keynote address given October 29, 1999 at the Digital Arts and Culture conference (http://nickm.com/vox/golden_age.html). For a discussion of contemporary readers' discouraged responses to hypertext fiction, see James Pope, 'A future for hypertext fiction', in *Convergence: the international journal of research into digital media technologies* 12:4 (2006), 447–65.
- 38 On the preference for layout divisions in late-medieval English manuscripts, see Stephen Partridge, 'Designing the Page', *The production of books in England 1350–1500*, ed. Alexandra Gillespie and Daniel Wakelin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 79–103. Daniel Wakelin addresses how scribes responded to the form

- of a poem in guiding layout and organization in *Scribal correction*, 217–45.
- 39 For a detailed description of this manuscript, see Jordi Sánchez Martí, ‘Longleat House MS 257: a description’, in *Atlantis* 27:1 (June 2005), 79–89. Sánchez Martí offers compelling evidence that narrows the previously determined estimates of the manuscript’s date.
- 40 Longleat 257 may not have been the only manuscript to evidence such a reading pathway. Daniel W. Mosser argues for the placement of *Siege of Thebes* before the *Canterbury Tales* in Austin, University of Texas Library MS 143 (*olim* Cardigan). For a description of this earlier configuration of the manuscript, see his ‘The two scribes of the Cardigan Manuscript and the “evidence” of scribal supervision and shop production’, *Studies in bibliography* 39 (1986), 112–25, at 123.
- 41 Schirmer, ‘Reading lessons at Syon Abbey’, at 347.
- 42 Dagenais, *Ethics of reading*, 24.
- 43 For further assessment of the role of affective reading, see Sarah McNamer, who addresses the role of affective meditation practice in late-medieval spirituality in *Affective meditation and the invention of medieval compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). Jennifer Bryan counters the accepted belief that meditation was predominantly practised by women, arguing that devotional literature in general was not ‘the special province of women readers’, in *Looking inward*, 20. Similarly, see Vincent Gillespie, ‘Lukyng in haly bukes: *lectio* in some late medieval spiritual miscellanies’, *Spätmittelalterliche Geistliche Literature in der Nationalsprache*, Band 2, *Analecta Cartusiana* 106, ed. James Hogg (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1984), 1–27, at 4 and 17.
- 44 Vincent Gillespie, ‘The haunted text: reflections in *A Mirror to Devout People*’, in *The text in the community: essays on medieval works, manuscripts, authors, and readers*, ed. Jill Mann and Maura Nolan (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 129–72, at 131.
- 45 Schirmer, ‘Reading lessons at Syon Abbey’, 347.
- 46 Kerby-Fulton and Despres, *Iconography and the professional reader*, 2.

